



MEDIA RELEASE

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UNESCO declares Indawgyi lake basin as Biosphere Reserve

Sustaining biodiversity and cultural values of Indawgyi Lake and its surrounding landscape, the Biosphere Reserve will become a model region for integrating biodiversity conservation and sustainable development

14th June 2017 – Myanmar has a special reason to celebrate as Indawgyi Lake joins the global network of UNESCO Biosphere Reserves. Indawgyi becomes Myanmar's second Biosphere Reserve following the designation of Inle Lake. However, unlike Inle Lake, the Indawgyi region in Kachin state is less developed and still features an intact landscape.

The designation of Indawgyi Lake as a Biosphere Reserve highlights the Myanmar Government's commitment to conserve this special area, which supports the livelihood of some 50,000 people and is also home to a great diversity of mammals, water birds, fish and reptiles.

According to Dr. U Nyi Nyi Kyaw, the Director General of the Forest Department, "the Biosphere Reserve designation does not only recognize Indawgyi's globally outstanding biodiversity but also highlights the government's commitment to collaborative management and to integration of conservation and sustainable development for the benefit of local communities".

Indawgyi Lake is a wetland surrounded by rice fields and a forested watershed. Unless agriculture and forests are managed sustainably, the lake ecosystem will suffer from run-off caused by erosion triggered by agricultural encroachment or unsustainable logging in the watershed. If farmers use excessive amounts of fertilizers and pesticides the lake becomes polluted and collapses.

A Biosphere Reserve addresses these challenges through a zonation approach. Core conservation zones, buffer zones, and sustainable development zones have been designated in full consultation with local people and all other relevant stakeholders.

Strictly protected core zone only focus on the most critical parts of the ecosystem. For example fish breeding areas in the lake have been identified by local fishermen in collaboration with scientists to be protected as no-take zones, so that the fish stock of the lake can replenish to sustain local fisheries and the livelihood of local fishing communities. Likewise, intact remaining primary forests have been zoned as core zones to sustain

endangered animals, such as Eastern Hoolock Gibbon, Shortridge Langur, Asiatic Black Bear, Hog Deer, and Gaur.

Buffer Zones have been designated to support sustainable natural resource management, such as community forestry, collection of non-timber forest products, fisheries, extensive grazing of seasonable flooded grasslands and eco-tourism, all benefitting sustainable livelihoods of the local Red Shan and Kachin communities.

The Development Zone encompasses the agricultural plain and the villages surrounding the lake. In this zone all relevant government departments support sustainable development to safeguard the overall environmental integrity of the Indawgyi lake basin. Fauna & Flora International (FFI) and the Forest Department have been collaborating with other relevant government agencies to support organic farming, waste management, and responsible tourism.

“The Indawgyi Biosphere Reserve will become a model region for integrating biodiversity conservation and sustainable development and a centre for science and education for sustainable development in Myanmar”, says Frank Momberg, FFI Myanmar Program Director.

Fauna & Flora International would like to acknowledge the contribution of the 11 local village tracts and civil society partners (BANCA, Friends of Wildlife, Indawgyi Conservation and Development Association, Inn Chit Thu, Shan Cultural Association, and Mohnyin University).

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Deutsche Welle published a short film about development challenges and conservation at Indawgyi Lake: <http://dw.com/p/1HRWF> (6:52min). The film is funded through the International Climate Initiative of the German Environment Ministry. A Summary of the Indawgyi Biosphere Reserve is attached.