

APPEAL FROM DAURSKY BIOSPHERE RESERVE, RUSSIA

Upon learning in May 2009 that construction was already halfway complete on a canal designed to divert a significant portion of the Hailaer-Argun River to Dalai Lake, researchers from Daursky Biosphere Reserve (part of the Dauria International Protected Area) sent an urgent call for support to the international conservation community. Scientists believe that diversion of this much water poses several major threats to the project site, downstream transboundary wetland areas, the Dalai Lake ecosystem, and biodiversity throughout the Daurian ecoregion. Also at stake are important multilateral conservation efforts between stakeholders Russia, China, and Mongolia. Since 2007 international conservation experts and organizations have done much to postpone construction and reveal the misguided misleading ecological assumptions used to justify the project. These activists are now in great need of assistance from experienced international organizations that can help establish agreements and standards to prevent the loss of these unique international wetlands and stave off an ecological disaster.

Canal construction for diversion of environmentally significant quantities of water from the Hailaer-Argun River to Dalai Lake was already half-way through in May 2009. This 24 kilometer waterway will transfer more than 30% of Argun river flow (1,05 cubic km) and 8 kilometers from Hailaer to old dry channels leading to Dalai have been already completed by May 2009. Project is reinforced by 5-10 large reservoirs upstream in various stages of completion that will help to “optimize the flows” and completely deprive river of natural floods that sustain floodplain wetlands. Real reason for the project is to ensure and justify water supply to new mining and processing industries such as copper mine of China Gold corporation north-west of Dalai Lake, which illegal water diversion activities were stopped through Ramsar Convention mechanisms in 2008. It is also supported by Manzhouli city government, irrigation interests, fish farms, and tourist facilities in Dalai Lake area. The last but not the least it gives local authorities false sense of water security, since water, previously wasted into international watercourse will be stored within national boundaries.

We believe the water diversion poses several major threats to the project site, downstream transboundary wetland areas, natural Dalai Lake ecosystem, globally important biodiversity of the whole Daurian eco-region and international conservation co-operation in the area.

Current justification of the project sets forth misleading objective of “saving drying Dalai lake and wetlands” by means of stabilizing its water level, while not taking into account major role in natural drought cycles that support and shape current regional biodiversity patterns. If implemented, it will not only eliminate globally important transboundary floodplain wetlands along Argun River and drastically alter natural ecosystem of Dalai Lake, but also disrupt natural population dynamics of many endangered wetland birds throughout Daurian ecoregion and waterbird migration along major Asian flyway. The canal dissects habitat of the last small group of Mongolian Gazelle preserved east of Dalai Lake.

Project will also create and encouraging precedent for further unsound engineering interventions into natural water cycle of the region, and may pave way for 3-4 more water transfers from international watercourses (Onon, Kerulen, Uldz) in adjacent Mongolia and Khalkh River in China, which are currently under planning.

Without any exaggeration we need to state that Hailer-Dalai canal triggers expansion of zones of environmental disaster, now primarily confined in to North China to large areas of Central Asia and Amur River Basin. This is a threatening example of uncoordinated use of scarce transboundary resources and scheming maladaptation measures that exacerbate coping with climate change consequences.

Please read the attached background document which provides a more detailed description of the project, area and related concerns.

Since 2007 international conservation experts and organizations were instrumental in postponing this projects and disclosing false ecological assumptions underlying it. Unfortunately after inclusion of Dalai Lake site into Resolution 13 of Ramasr COP10 we got a false sense of security, not knowing that construction was already unfolding in November 2008.

We ask that you use Your capacity standing as experts in nature conservation and environmental protection, as well as your extensive network of contacts, to stop this project. Detailed Russian-Chinese and trilateral Russian –Chinese-Mongolian consultations and joint planning for the wise management of scarce water resources of Daurian ecoregion, assisted by experienced international organizations, are very much needed to set agreements and standards preventing degradation of globally important international wetlands and prevent ecological disaster.

We must stress the urgent need for immediate action, because project completion requires only several months. Due to a lack of transparency in the process, the degree to which the project proposal was duly approved by all necessary Chinese authorities is unknown to us.

Many thanks. Your attention to this matter is much appreciated.

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