



# The Sacred Himalayan Landscape

Unique, Threatened, Irreplaceable

In the Eastern Himalayas, fragrant forests, elusive snow leopards and unique peoples coexist in the lap of the world's highest mountains, in a place we call the Sacred Himalayan Landscape.

Stretching over nine and a half million acres, the Sacred Himalayan Landscape extends from the Langtang National Park in central Nepal through India's Kangchenjunga Complex to the Toorsa Strict Nature Reserve in western Bhutan. Within it lies an enormous variation in elevation – from the subtropical lowlands to the highest peaks of Mount Everest – which creates a complex mosaic of biodiversity.

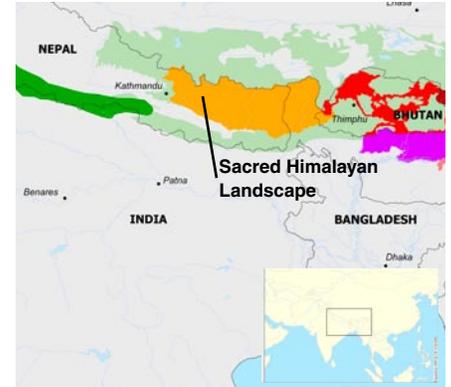
The cultures found in this bountiful landscape are as diverse as the nature. More than 40 languages are spoken in the Sacred Himalayan Landscape, and Buddhist, Hindu and animist beliefs are common to indigenous communities. Nature is held sacred and traditional beliefs in *beyuls* and *ters* – or hidden lands and treasures – reflect a culture that balances people's needs with the well-being of the environment.

Across the three nations of Nepal, India and Bhutan, WWF is engaged in an ambitious conservation effort to protect a rare profusion of flora, fauna and cultures in one of the Earth's most beautiful and fragile places.

## Threats

This paradise is not immune to global threats. Glaciers in the Himalayas are melting faster than ever before due to climate change. The future supply of freshwater to millions of people on the Indian subcontinent is at risk if these natural water towers are compromised. Most of the 5 million people who live in the Sacred Himalayan Landscape live in poverty, forcing them to use nature unsustainably to survive. And while this landscape attracts tourist dollars, it remains low on many national development agendas.

In addition to these threats, the mountains of the Sacred Himalayan Landscape are prone to natural disasters caused by unstable geology, extreme climates and poor land management. Landslides, forest fires and flash floods are common in this region and create an immediate need for conservation to help stabilize nature.



## WWF Vision

To create a Himalayan landscape where the biological and cultural treasures of the world's highest sacred mountains and deepest valleys are safeguarded, while local people's rights over resources are ensured and their livelihoods enhanced and sustained.

## The Landscape at a Glance

**Countries:** Bhutan, India, Nepal

**Area:** 9,642,240 acres

**Fauna:** Snow leopard, takin, musk deer, red panda

**Flora:** Oaks, rhododendrons, Himalayan larch and yarchagumba

**People:** 5 million

**Languages:** 40



### WWF at Work in the Sacred Himalayan Landscape

Since 1999, WWF has worked with the governments of Bhutan, India and Nepal to coordinate ambitious plans that achieve conservation while creating sustainable livelihoods in the Sacred Himalayan Landscape. These efforts focus on

- conserving biodiversity – manage protected areas, improve conservation in buffer zones, establish ecotourism and promote sustainable agriculture
- recognizing cultural rights and managing resources – preserve natural sites of cultural and religious value, recognize the traditional customs of multi-ethnic groups, improve resource governance, and ensure equal access to benefits from natural resources
- conserving water resources – manage water resources in critical river basins following an integrated river basin management approach
- improving livelihoods – enhance livelihoods with conservation efforts, promote rural energy services and reduce vulnerability to natural disasters and impacts of climate change



### For the People: The Kangchenjunga Conservation Area

Within the Sacred Himalayan Landscape in northeastern Nepal, the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area is home to the world's third-highest mountain and a variety of wildlife including the endangered red panda and Himalayan black bear.

WWF has been active in the area since 1998, when we started conservation work that included health services, informal education and sustainable livelihoods projects. WWF also focused on engaging the Nepali government in the equitable sharing of benefits from natural resources and empowering local communities to manage their rich natural heritage.

In September 2006, for the first time in the country's history, Nepal's government turned over conservation of the wildlife and habitats surrounding Kangchenjunga to a coalition of local communities. WWF was instrumental in the decision and will support the community management council for the next five years.

Local management of the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area has eased pressure on forests and decreased wildlife poaching and the illegal harvesting of valuable medicinal plants. The decision also changed local attitudes toward conservation and set a precedent for establishing other community-managed areas within the region. It has created an incredible sense of pride for the local community.

Today the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area is a model for conservation and governance in the Sacred Himalayan Landscape and throughout the world.

In Kangchenjunga, people take care of nature and nature takes care of them.



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