



**MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT,
GREEN DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM
OF MONGOLIA**

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Date 2015.08.12
Ref. 02/4992

KAREN V. NOYCE, PRESIDENT
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR
BEAR RESEARCH AND MANAGEMENT
15542 COUNTY ROAD
WARBA, MINNESOTA 55793, USA

Re: Strategies for recovery of the Critically Endangered
population of Mazaalai in Mongolia

Dear President Karen Noyce,

Thank you for your letter detailing your professional organization's scientific assessment of the most effective practices to help bring back the Mazaalai from the brink of extinction. The Ministry of Environment, Green Development and Tourism (the Ministry) is responsible for the conservation of all species of Mongolian wildlife and is dedicated to using the best established science in doing so. Therefore, we welcome your input into means of improving the numbers and population health of the Critically Endangered Mazaalai, which is our goal, and as you say, is a goal shared by your organization.

We are strongly committed to the principle of avoiding actions that would pose a serious risk to wild Mazaalai. Research conducted by the Gobi Bear Project, with members of Ministry staff, Great Gobi Strictly Protected Area (GGSPA) rangers, and scientists from the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, in collaboration with international experts, agree with much of the findings you present in your letter.

Specifically, we agree that the key to recovery of Mazaalai is to improve the carrying capacity of their habitat, and that a captive breeding approach would submit the wild population to a higher degree of risk than is acceptable. We know that there are no indications that inbreeding has occurred and that at least 12 offspring were born and survived during the 1999-2012 period. This is a reasonable level, given the food resources now available to Gobi bears. Field observations by Gobi Bear Project personnel, GGSPA rangers and camera trap pictures continue to document cub production by Mazaalai. We also agree that a captive breeding program would not serve population recovery because it would require taking wild females that keep the population in balance. This increases the risk of leading the wild Mazaalai population to extinction, rather than allowing it to recover to its former numbers.

We intend to focus our conservation efforts on increasing the carrying capacity of the GGSPA to benefit the Mazaalai population. GGSPA ranger examination of camera trap pictures in 2014 tentatively identified up to 36 individuals in the population. Further

scientific estimates using DNA fingerprinting are needed to confirm this estimate. However, our present research indicates that the present population is at least stable and not declining under environmental conditions that now exist. We will work for improving the bears' habitat to the greatest extent available to us, including rehabilitating springs and maintaining the security of springs for the benefit of Mazaalai, wild camels and other rare and vulnerable species in the GGSPA. We will continue to encourage improvement in supplemental feed for the bears until their carrying capacity is improved. In addition, we will actively explore the potential of increasing natural foods near springs.

We thank the International Association for Bear Research and Management for its interest in Mazaalai conservation and look forward continued collaboration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Khurelsukh Magvansuren', written over a light-colored rectangular background.

KHURELSUKH Magvansuren
Vice Minister