



## Results of the First International Ural River Basin Workshop (NATO-ARW)

Rescue of Sturgeon Species by means of Transboundary Integrated Water Management in the Ural River Basin

Orenburg, 13-16 June 2007

The First Ural River Basin International Workshop “Rescue of Sturgeon Species by means of Transboundary Integrated Water Management in the Ural River Basin” (NATO-ARW) was held in Orenburg on June 13-16 within the Ural Basin Project framework. Organized by Research and Consulting Center DonEco and Central European University the Workshop was co-sponsored by the Security Through Science Programme (NATO-ARW) and the Caspian Environmental Program. The Workshop was conducted under the auspices of Orenburg Regional Government and Parliament with active involvement and assistance by the Russian Federal Agency for Environmental Inspections. The Project’s ultimate goal is the establishment of a Ural Sturgeon Park to facilitate conservation and restoration of the sturgeon population in the Caspian Sea, rehabilitation of the Ural River ecosystem, and sustainable development of the Ural Basin.

The workshop was attended by more than 60 experts, researchers and practitioners from Governmental Environmental Agencies, NGO and business representatives from both basin countries (Russia and Kazakhstan), and representatives from relevant international organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the Secretariat of Wetland Convention (RAMSAR), the International Association on Danube Research, and many others covering the whole spectrum of Ural Basin management stakeholders.

Drawing on recommendations of previous workshops and on the results and materials of other conferences and meetings dedicated to the problems of the Caspian Sea,

Workshop participants EMPHASIZE that:

- 1) The Ural Basin Ecosystem has world wide importance as it is uniquely positioned for conservation of the sturgeon species and has strong historical traditions in the rational use of living aquatic resources.
- 2) Being the only free-flowing river in the Caspian Basin, the Ural has the only available natural spawning grounds and undisturbed migration routes of sturgeon species. The Ural is the only river in the Caspian Sea catchment where sturgeon species can reproduce in the wild, which undoubtedly makes it the only remaining opportunity for the conservation of sturgeon species in the Caspian Basin and for successful restoration programs worldwide;
- 3) Sturgeon species can be considered a perfect natural bioindicator of the river basin’s health. Their conservation will serve the Region’s sustainable economic and social development;
- 4) Despite the unquestionable importance of the Ural’s ecosystem and its crucial role in conserving the sturgeon population of the Caspian Sea, there have been limited practical steps undertaken and no transboundary cooperation developed to date. More urgent and



radical measures are needed for the sustainable protection of the Ural River ecosystem and reinstatement of the rational use of natural resources;

- 5) The Ural-Caspian Basin conservation challenge requires an interdisciplinary holistic approach. The joint efforts of stakeholders and experts from different fields (lawyers, bio scientists, economists, politicians, members of local business community and many others) are extremely important for securing successful environmental protection programs;
- 6) Ecosystem and biological resources preservation depends upon efficient cooperation by both basin countries, Russia and Kazakhstan, and active involvement of international institutions;
- 7) The existing legislative base including, but not limited to, National Constitutions, International Conventions, ratified by both countries, national laws and a number of bilateral agreements creates an adequate legal framework for this kind of cooperation;
- 8) Both national and international experience of transboundary river basins management and biodiversity conservation should be incorporated in the planning of environmental protection activities in the Ural River Basin;

CONSIDERING the above and taking into account the following:

- Water streams and migratory species are national/federal property;
- Transboundary integrated water management and preservation of sturgeon species are priority issues on the international environmental agenda;
- Sturgeon species play an important role in the river ecosystem and river affiliated communities;

Workshop participants URGE the Presidents, Governments and Parliaments of Russia and Kazakhstan as well as international organizations to undertake the following steps:

1. Recognize the Ural River Basin as an ecosystem of worldwide importance, guarantee its maximum protection and the preservation of its natural ecosystem regimes and proclaim the Ural Basin a model territory and pilot project in transboundary integrated water management and biodiversity conservation;
2. Make the creation of an International Ural Sturgeon Park and sustainable development of the Ural River Basin one of the priority issues in regional cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan;
3. Establish a Joint Russia-Kazakhstan Ural Basin Interparliamentary Commission to be responsible for restoration and sustainable usage of the biological and natural resources of the Ural River Basin;
4. Proceed with bilateral negotiations on the international legal status of the Ural Sturgeon Park initiated by the Research and Consulting Center DonECO in 2003;
5. Prepare and ratify a Ural Basin Convention dedicated to the preservation of Ural River biodiversity and community-based management and community rights for natural resources;
6. Draft, implement and enforce national laws on protection and sustainable usage of Ural Basin renewable resources in Russia and Kazakhstan, drawing on a basin approach to sustainable development and using the sturgeon as an indicator species;



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7. Create an International Protected Area along the Ural River floodplain within the boundaries drawn by a 100-year flood, as defined by the concept of sustainable basin development under the auspices of the United Nations;
8. In cooperation with the United Nations develop and put into practice international technical standards and regulations for the environmental management of transboundary territories and water basins;
9. Encourage and facilitate the application of an interdisciplinary holistic approach to planning and management of environment-related activities;
10. Set up a joint transboundary Russia-Kazakhstan system of water quality monitoring in the river Ural using modern methods and technologies, including, but not limited to, remote sensing, satellite imagery, and biomonitoring;
11. Prohibit disposal of any untreated, heated and contaminated waters, sewage and waste waters with pollutant concentration higher than the maximum concentration limit for fish ponds to water streams of the Ural River Basin;
12. Monitor new industrial and agricultural projects in the basin and enforce the implementation of independent environmental impact assessment with mandatory consideration of impact on the river ecosystem and conservation of aquatic biodiversity;
13. Incorporate into the national legislation of the basin countries the strictest international environmental standards, principles and processes and the strictest rules for monitoring of those standards;
14. Ban fishing of sturgeon and other migratory species in the Ural-Caspian Basin until the level of recruitment from natural reproduction of these species is restored to a level within the limits recommended by the expert group of the Ural Basin Project;
15. Revise national and regional Red Lists to include sturgeon species of Caspian and Ural basins which are endangered according to the IUCN Red List;
16. Intensify measures to combat poaching and illegal fishing by introduction of severe punishments, better transboundary cooperation of fishery inspections of Russia and Kazakhstan and active involvement of local communities;
17. Strive against an unreasonably high “scientific” catch by banning any kind of sturgeon fishing, including fishing for scientific and artificial propagation purposes. Some permits, the use of which have to be closely and carefully monitored, can be given to particular institutions upon specific request for justified scientific, commercial and restocking purposes;
18. Improve methods used in assessment of sturgeon stock in the Caspian Basin by following international standards and applying worldwide recognized techniques;
19. Develop and equip dams and hydrological constructions with state-of-the-art (i.e. contactless) counting devices to monitor migrating specimens;
20. Base sturgeon re-stocking activities (i.e. establish new sturgeon hatcheries, release fingerlings) not in the mouth of the Ural river but further upstream near the spawning places close to the city of Uralsk and on the river Ilek;
21. Restore sturgeon migration routes in the regulated rivers of the Caspian Sea basin to ensure the natural restoration and sustainable usage of sturgeon by improving existing fish passes



- through dams, or equipping those dams without fish passes, using state-of-the-art fish passage designs, preferably nature-like design options where possible;
22. Secure regular flooding of river floodplains during the spawning periods;
  23. Encourage fundamental and applied research on management issues of transboundary areas to secure sustainable development in the basin;
  24. Review the education system, in particular state and business management to include in syllabi discussions of transboundary environmental management and nature protection and to introduce to institutions and schools of the Ural Basin experimental training courses for officers of environmental agencies and state services;
  25. Assist in and facilitate regular Ural Basin Workshops to provide scientific grounding, public participation, stakeholder involvement and public support for the activities of the Ural Basin Project and the Ural Basin Interparliamentary Commission;
  26. Seek cooperation and synergies with the FAO TCP/INT/3101 "Capacity building for the recovery and management of the sturgeon fisheries of the Caspian Sea".

## Workshop Participants APPROVE

- Working Group activities regarding the development and implementation of the Ural Basin Project chaired by Dr Vladimir Lagutov and including the representatives from Russia, Kazakhstan and international organizations;
- Inclusion of the experts who participated in the First Ural Basin Workshop in the Advisory Board of the Ural Basin Project.

To deliver the strategic goals outlined above and to ensure further development of the Ural Basin Project the workshop participants RECOMMEND the UBP Working Group to undertake the following steps within the framework of the Ural Basin Project:

1. Inform the governments of Russia and Kazakhstan, regional and local authorities and relevant international organizations about the Project's activities;
2. Publish the results and materials presented at the First International Ural Basin Workshop;
3. Include representatives of the cities of Uralsk and Atyrau(Guriev), both basin countries and representatives from all Caspian countries in the Project Working Group;
4. Approach relevant national and international institutions with an initiative on drafting and carrying out a feasibility study for the Ural Sturgeon Park proposal within the framework of the Ural Basin Project;
5. Propose using the case of the Ural River Basin to develop and test universal environmental basin legislation, originating from the concept of sustainable basin development.
6. Explore the existing legal framework in national and international legislation to support the creation of an International Sturgeon Park;



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7. Summarize the current situation with water bioresources in the Ural River Basin in a position paper to be used as a background paper for fundraising and negotiations with international and national institutions on possible cooperation;
8. Identify stakeholders in transboundary integrated water management and biodiversity conservation in the Ural river, establish working relationships and encourage them to participate in the Ural Basin Project;
9. Carry out a preliminary analysis of the factors influencing the sturgeon population through its life cycle;
10. In accordance with the identified factors establish and develop a network of specialists and practitioners in sturgeon and water-related issues of the Ural basin using *inter alia* the Project website;
11. Develop a Ural basin GIS database for these factors;
12. Draft amendments to the Red Lists of Russia and Kazakhstan as well as regional Red Lists to include IUCN Red List endangered sturgeon species and push for adoption of these amendments;
13. Conduct feasibility studies and draft proposals on i) restoration and rehabilitation of the regulated rivers of the Caspian Basin such as the Volga, Terek, Kura-Araks, etc., ii) practical steps for using sturgeon species for bioindication;
14. Promote and popularize the idea of the priority of natural reproduction of sturgeons over artificial propagation and facilitate its adoption by national and international environmental institutions and agencies;
15. Encourage stakeholders and workshop participants to participate in development and information provision of the Ural Basin Project website (<http://uralbas.ru>);
16. Design and support an independent information campaign on the importance of Ural River habitats preservation and on Project activities in basin countries and within international environmental communities;
17. Prepare and hold a Second Ural Basin Workshop in Kazakhstan within the framework of the Ural Basin Project;
18. Intensify the consultations with international institutions to explore the possibilities of cooperation and financial support for the Ural Basin Project.

Participants of the First Ural Basin Workshop would like to express their gratitude to the initiators and Working Group of the Ural Basin Project for the preparation and organization of the Workshop; the NATO Security through Science Programme, the Caspian Environmental Program and Central European University for their financial support; the Research and Consultative Center DonECO and the Orenburg Regional Branch of the Russian Federal Agency for Environmental Inspections for technical assistance and active support in the organization of the Workshop; the Orenburg regional authorities for enabling the workshop to take place in Orenburg.