



Report on the National Dialogue on OECMs in Lao PDR

Holiday Inn, Vientiane,

Lao PDR

12 June 2025



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Recommended citation

Parr, J.W.K. (2025). Report on the National Dialogue on OECMs in Lao PDR. Vientiane, Lao PDR.

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Designed and produced in 2025 by the IUCN Lao Country Office, Vientiane, Lao PDR.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The National Dialogue on OECMs in Lao PDR owes its origin, planning and implementation to the Department of Forestry (DoF), in collaboration with IUCN, WWF Laos, and GIZ. We specifically thank Dr. Thoumthone Vongvisouk, Deputy Director-General of the Department of Forestry and Mr. Thevarack Phonekeo, Deputy Director-General of the Department of Environment, for opening the event. Further thanks are extended to Mr. Paxa Nyordsavanh from the Department of Heritage and Dr. Soukvilay Vilavong from the Environmental Policy Division, Department of Environment for ensuring strong agency support. Thanks to Lee Xiong and Peter Brakels from IUCN, Lao Country Programme for ensuring an impressive turnout of officials from many agencies.

The National Dialogue on OECMs in Lao PDR and this report were facilitated and implemented by the IUCN Lao Office with funding from the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), co-funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) and implemented under the Framework of the NBSAP Accelerator Partnership.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
DoE	Department of Environment
DoF	Department of Forestry
DH	Department of Heritage
DWR	Department of Water Resources
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
IBA	Important Bird Area
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
MoNRE	Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NPA	National Protected Area
NTFP	Non-Timber Forest Product
NUOL	National University of Laos
OECD	Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures
PAMD	Protected Area Management Division
RECOFTC	Regional Community Forestry Training Centre
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UTF	Urban Trees and Forest
WCPA	World Commission on Protected Areas
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (K-M GBF) Target 3, adopted at the 15th Conference of the Parties (CoP15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in December 2022, sets an ambitious global goal to conserve at least 30% of the planet's land and sea areas by 2030. In the context of Lao PDR, however, this global 30% target must be considered alongside the country's longstanding national objective of achieving 70% forest cover—highlighting the need for integrated approaches that align global ambitions with national priorities.

Lao PDR endorsed the K-M GBF and is now formulating a programme of work to meet Target 3 at the national level. While the designation of additional terrestrial and freshwater protected areas will be essential to contributing towards Target 3, the KM-GBF also identifies conservation opportunities outside of protected areas, such as the recognition of existing forest and grasslands, wetlands and karst (limestone) that are effectively managed to conserve biodiversity, referred to as “Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs).” There are opportunities to identify such areas on both state and privately managed lands and freshwater areas employing management schemes that conserve biodiversity, even where biodiversity conservation is not a primary management goal. Lao PDR is poised to be an active regional member in the designation of new protected areas and the identification and recognition of OECMs, incorporating targets into its NBSAP, in the leadup to 2030.

Interviewing stakeholders and collating legislation

In preparation for convening of a national workshop on OECMs in Lao PDR, two preliminary activities were undertaken more or less in parallel with one another. The first activity involved interviewing stakeholders who had knowledge of the natural resources and biodiversity found outside the national protected area system, which might have OECM potential. These included stakeholders who had knowledge on the status of locally managed ecosystems, namely village forest, karsts and caves and wetlands. Other stakeholders comprised individuals who managed private concessions of various types, notably private tourism concession and hydropower offset concessions. Finally, stakeholders were interviewed who managed, or supported the management of, potential OECMs in urban and peri-urban localities.

Convening a National Dialogue on OECMs

On 12 June 2025, IUCN and GIZ¹ hosted a national dialogue on OECMs with 67

¹ The GIZ project “Protection and Sustainable Use of Forest Ecosystems and Biodiversity (ProFEB)” on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), co-funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) and implemented under the Framework of the NBSAP Accelerator Partnership.

representatives from different government agencies involved in the management of ecosystems within Lao PDR, bilateral donors, national and international NGOs, IGOs, embassies, CSOs, academia and the private sector. The objectives of the National Dialogue were:

- To build an understanding of the OECM concept and its relevance for conservation in Lao PDR.
- Identify potential OECM areas based on diverse ecosystems and conservation contributions.
- Highlight the ecological, social and economic benefits of OECMs.
- Assess the opportunities and challenges for OECM promotion in Lao PDR.
- Identify the steps forward for developing a programme of work on OECMs within the country

The origins and evolution of the concept of OECMs was presented to provide the background to the Global Biodiversity Framework and highlight the need for identifying and recognizing OECMs in Lao PDR, both in forested lands as well as in freshwater wetlands.

Some case studies were presented to initiate discussion around the identification and recognition of potential OECMs in Lao PDR. These case studies could be segregated into three categories. The first category focused on locally managed ecosystems. These cases studies comprised (i) the management of village forests in Phieng District, Sayabouri and Xam Tai District, Houaphan province; (ii) the limited understanding of locally managed karst ecosystems within the country, and (iii) the management of a freshwater wetland, namely the Xe Champhone Ramsar site in Savannakhet province. Privately managed concessions also constituted some potential OECMs. Case studies were presented for Phou Pha Marn ecotourism concession in Khammouane province and Nam Ngiep hydropower biodiversity Offset site in Bolikhamxay province. Finally, two potential OECMs were presented promoting urban education sites comprising the Faculty of Forestry Science campus and the Nong Kham Sen wetland in Hadsaiphong district.

The perspectives from different agencies involved in the management of protected areas in the country were presented. This included presentations from the Department of Forestry, the Department of Water Resources, the National University of Laos and the Department of Environment. Each government Department was guided by their respective mandates prescribed through Ministerial Decisions.

Three break-out groups were established to discuss (i) what types of land uses and waters appear to be supporting biodiversity, that could be potentially recognised as OECMs in Lao PDR; (ii) what agencies, public or private, govern the identified category; (iii) what data sets (natural resources and resource use (i.e. wetland inventories) are available to inform site recognition; (iv) who are the key stakeholders related to these categories; and (v) what are the opportunities and challenges envisaged.

Based on the presentations and working group sessions, a set of recommendations were short-listed. Some priority recommendations are listed below.

Proposed priority recommendations:

(i) Establish a national working group to guide the development and implementation of a national programme on OECMs

A small national working group of OECM expertise should be established to lead the development of OECMs in Lao PDR. This national working group needs an active secretariat. Membership of the working group should comprise (i) representatives from the five main government natural resource management line agencies, namely DoF, DWR, DoH, NUOL and DoE; (ii) representatives from the Non-Government Organizations (IUCN, RECOFTC, WCS, WWF and CSO) as well as Independent national and international experts from academia and the conservation community, with recognized expertise in the management of protected areas and OECMs. IUCN/WWF should co-chair this working group.

(ii) Department of Environment: potential OECMs in the NBSAP

The Department of Environment should be encouraged to incorporate potential OECMs within the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), as well as the national action plans. This would strengthen the mainstreaming of OECMs within the government agenda on biodiversity conservation.

(iii) Develop some criteria and guidelines to support the identification of potential OECMs within Lao PDR

Given that each country will designate its OECMs based on tenure, rights, and relevant legislation, there is a need to develop clear criteria and guidelines for recognizing potential OECMs in Lao PDR - drawing on the experiences and best practices of other countries in the region. This will help in identifying the different OECMs within the three ecosystems in the country, namely terrestrial, freshwater and karst ecosystems, the private concessions as well as the urban nature conservation sites.

(iv) Identify five potential model case studies representing the different types of potential OECMs

Some potential OECMs may be readily identifiable within the different ecosystem categories. Tentative OECM sites may comprise:

- A district model of village conservation forest management located close to Vientiane (perhaps Sangthong district).
- A model buffer zone, promoting poverty alleviation, NTFP management, climate change mitigation, wildlife trade mitigation and one health. Capacity building components for rural development NGOs and tourism components for overseas tourists (tentative case study).
- Nong Kham Sen as a model community managed wetland, with nature education potential.

- Phou Pha Marn, or another tourism site, as a model private sector ecotourism concession.
- The Faculty of Forestry campus, NUOL, as a model peri-urban OECM and learning centre for OECM excellence.

It may therefore be possible to obtain approval from the land management authorities to begin the process towards registering some of these sites as OECMs.

(v) Prepare model profiles and fact sheets on the five potential OECM case studies

It may be useful to develop standardized model profiles of different types of OECMs to circulate among concerned government agencies and other key audiences to mobilize interest and understanding of OECMs and their benefits.

(vi) Establish a Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting (MER) Framework for OECMs

Each theme-based sub-working group (on Village Forest, karst and wetlands; private sector concessions; and urban conservation areas) will develop and implement a comprehensive Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting (MER) framework for all potential, proposed and designated OECMs. This system will integrate remote sensing technologies, district-level and community-based reporting mechanisms, and periodic field verifications to ensure accuracy, transparency, and alignment with national and international reporting obligations. The MER process will support adaptive management and contribute to national biodiversity reporting under the KM-GBF.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Target 3 of the Post 2020 Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), adopted in December 2022 at the 15th Conference of the Parties (CoP) of the Convention on Biodiversity Diversity (CBD) in Montreal, Canada, established the ambitious goal of placing at least 30% of the planet under effective conservation by 2030.

Lao PDR endorsed the Framework and is now formulating a program to meet Target 3. Success will require contributions from many government agencies, including the Department of Forestry (DoF), the Department of Water Resources (DWR), the Department of Heritage (DoH), the National University of Laos (NUOL) and the Department of Environment (DoE).

While designation of additional protected areas, both on land and in freshwater environs, will be essential to achieving Target 3, the Framework also identifies conservation opportunities outside of protected areas, such as the recognition of existing land and water management schemes that protect biodiversity, termed “Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs).” There may also be opportunities on private sector lands and waters employing management schemes that conserve biodiversity, even where biodiversity conservation is not a primary management goal.

As an important regional participant in biodiversity conservation, Lao PDR is poised to be an important player in both protected area designation and OECM development in the leadup to 2030. Time is of the essence, as the process of moving from the current 18% terrestrial meeting the target to 30% is a substantial task. It is essential that the Government of Lao PDR and the private sector move ahead promptly in framing the agenda for the next six years and beyond.

DoF, GIZ, IUCN and WWF hosted a national OECM workshop for government officials, national and international NGOs, academics and the private sector, as a first step to building a collective knowledge on OECMs. The event will lead to the development of an action plan and tangible commitments by both the public and private sector to achieve 30 by 30, partially through the identification and recognition of OECMs.

It is envisioned that the workshop will serve to set the stage for the formation of a permanent working group/secretariat to oversee the initiative.

Objectives

- To share knowledge and perspectives on OECMs to meet the 30x30 goal of the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) at the national and regional levels.
- To seek opportunities and collaboration between government agencies in Lao PDR, the private sector, and international agencies.

1.2 OECMs – Origins and Evolution of the Concept

Main message: An opportunity to demonstrate global leadership on conservation beyond protected areas

1.2.1 Origins and evolution

The Aichi Biodiversity Targets – 2010 stated:

- (i) By 2020 ... conserve at least 17% of terrestrial and inland water areas and 10% of coastal and marine areas ... through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, ... and integrated into the wider landscape and seascape.
- (ii) Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures.
- (iii) Sites that deliver the conservation of biodiversity outside of protected areas.

1.2.2 The Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework is a historic global deal to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030.

- (i) It contains four global goals and 23 global targets covering all three objectives of the CBD.
- (ii) Government committed to significantly scale-up conservation action and reduce the footprint of consumption by 2030.
- (iii) Target 3 calls for the conservation of 30% of the terrestrial, inland water and of coastal and marine areas by 2030, through protected areas and “other effective area-based conservation measures”.

Global Biodiversity Framework: Target 3 (2022)

Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least **30%** of terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are **effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures**, recognizing indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories.

1.2.3 Protected areas and OECMs

Protected areas

- Protected areas should have a primary conservation objective.
- Their core function is to promote the in-situ conservation of biodiversity.

Other effective area-based conservation measures

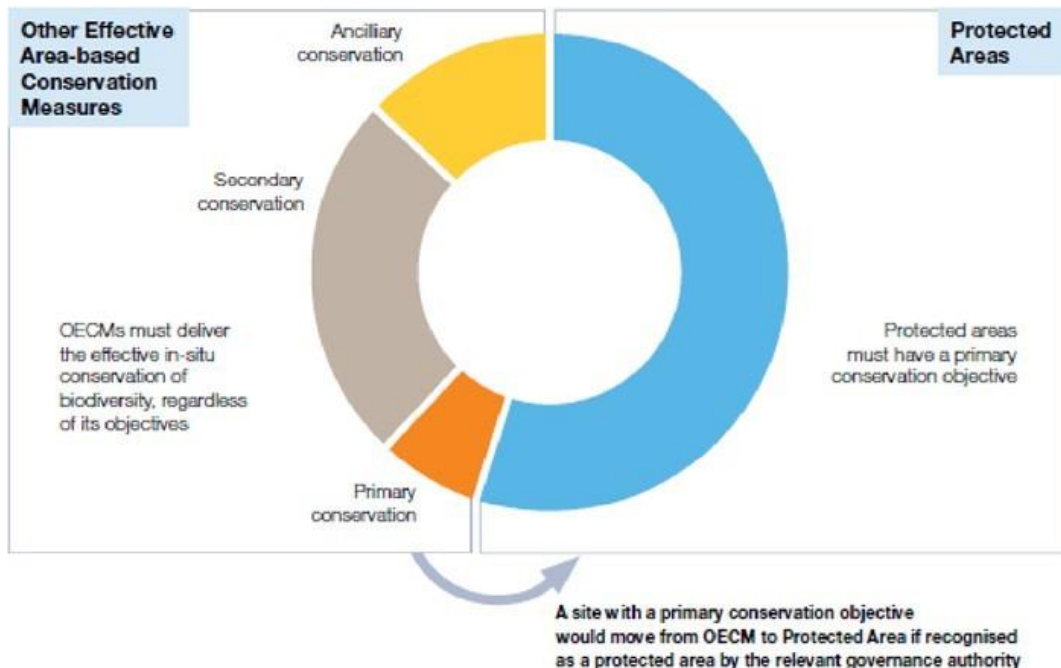
- OECMs should deliver effective in-situ conservation of biodiversity, regardless of their primary management objectives.

Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures or OECMs means

“a geographically defined area other than a Protected Area¹, which is governed and managed² in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in-situ conservation of biodiversity³, with associated ecosystem functions and services⁴ and, where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socioeconomic, and other locally relevant values⁵”.

1,2,3, 4 and 5 are the five criteria for an area to be classified as an OECM.

Figure 1: Diagram showing the difference in objectives between protected areas and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures.



Source: IUCN-WCPA Task Force on OECMs, 2019

Table 1. The elements of the OECM definition.

Element	Definition
A geographically defined area	A spatially delineated area with agreed and demarcated boundaries, which can include land, inland waters, marine and coastal areas, or any combination of these. In exceptional circumstances, boundaries may be defined by physical features that move over time, such as riverbanks, the high- water mark or extent of sea ice. ¹
other than a Protected Area	The CBD defines a protected area as “a geographically defined area which is designated or regulated and managed to achieve specific conservation objectives.” Areas that are already designated as protected areas or lie within protected areas should not also be recognized or reported as OECMs. ²
which is governed and managed	‘Governed’ means that the area is under the authority of a specified entity, or an agreed combination of entities. ¹ ‘Managed’ means that actions are taken that have the effect of controlling threats to the natural values of the site, and of maintaining or enhancing those values. Note that ‘managed’ can include a decision to leave the area untouched. ³
in ways that achieve positive ... outcomes	Positive conservation outcomes: governance and management should result in the biodiversity of the site being maintained or enhanced. Environmentally damaging activities should be prevented or controlled. Biodiversity is always protected in situ, or as part of a whole-ecosystem approach to conservation. ¹
... sustained long-term outcomes	The positive outcomes are expected to continue for the long term. Governance and management should have the intent of continuing the practices that result in conservation of the important biodiversity values on a sustained basis. The practices may clearly express an intention of permanence and contain safeguards that make reversal or modification difficult. If permanence is not a stated intent, there should be a rationale that supports an expectation that conservation will continue indefinitely. Management that only results in short-term or temporary conservation outcomes does not constitute an OECM. Similarly, areas or practices that are clearly intended to be temporary in nature, or for which there is no evident commitment to the long term, do not constitute an OECM. ¹
for the in situ	The CBD defines in situ conservation as “the conservation of ecosystems and natural habitats and the maintenance and recovery of viable populations of species in their natural surroundings and, in the case of domesticated or cultivated species, in the surroundings where they have developed their distinctive properties.” ²
conservation of	Conservation means the maintenance of ecosystems and natural and semi-natural habitats and of viable populations of species in their natural surroundings. ²
Biodiversity	The CBD defines biodiversity as “the variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.” ²
with associated ecosystem functions and services	Ecosystem functions and services are closely associated with biodiversity conservation. OECMs can protect ecosystem services, but management of these services should not interfere with the conservation of important biodiversity values of the site. Ecosystem services can include provisioning services such as the provision of food and water; regulating services such as regulation of floods, drought, land degradation, and disease; supporting services such as soil formation and nutrient cycling; and cultural services such as the delivery of recreational, spiritual, religious and other non- material benefits. ¹
and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values	Cultural and spiritual values include recreational, religious, aesthetic, historical and social values related to tangible and intangible benefits that nature and natural features have for people, with a particular focus on those that contribute to conservation outcomes (e.g. traditional management practices on which key species or whole ecosystems have become reliant, or the societal support for conservation of landscapes for their quality in artistic expression or beauty) and intangible heritage, including cultural and spiritual practices. ⁵

¹ Jonas et al., 2023. ² CBD, 1992. ³ Borriini-Feyerabend et al., 2013. ⁴ Dudley, 2008. ⁵ Verschuuren et al., 2021.

1.3 The IUCN Site-level Tool for Identifying OECMs (2023)

Other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) are sites outside protected areas that deliver effective and long-term *in situ* conservation of biodiversity. Biodiversity conservation may be the primary objective of the site, a secondary objective of a site that is managed for other purposes, or it may be an unintended consequence of the way the site is managed. OECMs may be governed and managed by governments, private entities or Indigenous peoples and local communities, or a combination of these.

The IUCN Site level Tool for Identifying OECMs guides an assessor through three steps to apply eight criteria which determine if a site qualifies as an OECM as set out under the Convention on Biological Diversity. For sites which do not currently meet all the criteria, the tool serves to highlight areas where further information or improvements in governance and management are required.

The assessment tool consists of three steps:

Step 1: Screening uses basic information on a site to determine whether it is a *potential OECM*.

Step 2: Consent confirms that the governing authority, Indigenous peoples and local communities, and (as appropriate) other rights-holders have agreed to proceeding with the full assessment. Once these entities have given their approval for the process, the site is considered a *candidate OECM*.

Step 3: Full assessment uses the defined criteria to confirm that the site meets the definition of an OECM. The full assessment contains six criteria, with a guiding question for each. The response to each guiding question can be ‘yes’, ‘uncertain/partial’, or ‘no’.

- A site with a **‘yes’ response to every criterion** is a *confirmed OECM*, subject to any stakeholder consent and approval by the governing authority.
- A site with a combination of **‘yes’ and ‘uncertain/partial’ responses, or with all ‘uncertain/partial’ responses**, remains a *candidate OECM*, until further information or other changes allow it to be confirmed as an OECM.
- A site with **one or more ‘no’ responses** is not *currently an OECM*, but might be re-assessed in the future if information suggests that the situation has changed.

OECMs are integral to national commitments under Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and contribute to many other targets. They can be reported to the World Database on OECMs, held by UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre. Identification and reporting of an OECM is voluntary, and should be done by, or with the consent of, the governing authority, any Indigenous peoples and local communities whose self-identified territory overlaps with the site, and, where relevant, other rightsholders and stakeholders.

1.4 Stakeholder engagement process

Potential OECM stakeholders were identified who were deemed to manage potential OECMs or had knowledge about natural resource management.

Step 1: these stakeholders were provided the Guidelines on OECMs as well as the Site-level Tool for Identifying OECMs in Lao (or English language)

Step 2: One-on-one interviews were conducted with government agencies believed to managing OECMs, as well as NGO representatives who likewise were thought to be managing OECMs. These interviews were conducted between 19th March 2025 and 4th April 2025 in Vientiane. Data comprised relevant natural resource legislation, which is described in Chapter 3 of this report. Other datasets comprised project reports, management plans and other miscellaneous data collected from the interviews. Datasets were also collected by email.

Step 3: The OECM specialist then prepared an outline of each case study, which was then recirculated to the respective stakeholder to verify and expand as relevant. In this way, a total of nine case studies were collated. These case studies were subsequently categorized into three OECM types;

- Potential locally managed OECMs in different ecosystems
- Private sector engagement with potential OECMs within the country.
- Potential urban and peri-urban OECMs within the country.

1.5 Financial constraints to the OECM agenda

One of the key issues from the stakeholder interviews was the heavy dependence on project funding or private sector support for developing and sustaining the management of OECMs within the country. This critical factor was influential in determining the proposed careful approach towards designating OECMs in Lao PDR, its complimentary status to the management of the protected area system as well as a general focus on capacity building both of OECM managers and society as a whole.

2 Analysis of legislation for protected and conserved areas to assist identify potential OECMs

The legislation relating to protected areas and conserved areas, as well as OECMs, is extremely diverse, reflecting the diverse types of potential OECMs to be found in the country. Some of the most significant legislation are briefly described below.

2.1 Resolution of the Party Central Committee on Organizational Restructuring (2025)

On 12th March 2025, the Lao People's Revolutionary Party issued a Resolution of the Party Central Committee on Organizational Restructuring.

The organizational restructuring will follow the guiding principles of the Party as outlined below:

1. Organizational mechanisms at both central and local levels must be streamlined, reducing the number of ministries, organizations, provincial and district departments, and civil servants. Appropriate policies must be implemented to rationalize and realign personnel within each ministry, organization, and local unit to ensure standards and conditions that strengthen political tasks, effectiveness, transparency, and employee productivity.
2. Following the merging of ministries, organizations, and local departments into new ministries and departments, research must be conducted to select and appropriately reassign Party members and employees carefully. Some individuals will continue their original roles, while others will shift positions or objectives, retire, or receive severance pay according to regulation.

Based on some principles, the Central Committee decided on organizational restructuring, which included:

- Merge the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, renaming it the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment.

In relation to the designation of OECMs within Lao PDR, it is too early to say, or predict, the impacts of this organizational restructuring upon this programme of work.

2.2 The Land Law (2019)

The Land Law No.70/NA dated 21 June 2019 is one of the most prominent pieces of legislation guiding the allocation of land within the country, and hence determining ownership rights on potential OECMs in the country. This law sets out the regulations and measures on the management and monitoring of land-related work to ensure the protection, development, and proper use of land. It also is aimed at improving people's livelihoods, and contributing to national socio-economic development. It is aimed towards sustainability with added value to the land, as well as to protect the environment.

Under Article 13 of this law, the local Land Allocation Plan determines the local land zones and land categories that comprises the plans for land allocation and use of natural resources at the provincial, district and village levels.

Article 31 of this Law describes the sectoral management of the respective land category. The Article states that the Government tasks the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment to centrally manage all categories of lands by delegating the responsibilities to the following sectors for the management of respective land use categories:

1. Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry manages the use of agricultural land and forest land including water area land located within the area of these land categories;
2. Ministry of Industry and Commerce manages the use of industrial land and industrial estates including water area land located within the area of these land categories;
3. Ministry of Energy and Mines manages the use of industrial land in the energy and mining areas, including water area land located within the area of these land categories;
4. Ministry of Planning and Investment manages the use of industrial land in Special Economic Zones including water area land located in the area of these land categories;
5. Ministry of Public Works and Transport manages the use of construction lands and communication lands including water area land located within the area of these land categories;
6. Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism manages the use of cultural lands including water area land located within the area of these land categories;
7. Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Public Security manage the use of national defense and security lands including water area land located within the area of these land categories.

This law provides the big-picture legal framework for the role of each respective Ministry regarding their management responsibilities for the different land categories, and the ecosystems therein, found within Lao PDR. This law therefore has a profound impact upon defining which Ministries, and which Departments manage the different land areas both inside and outside the national protected area system, and OECMs.

2.3 Government Policy on 70% forest cover

In 1987, HE Mr. Khammoune Boupha (Vice-Minister of MAF at the time) specified that the forestland in Lao PDR should cover 70% of the country to the Government of Laos and Party Central Committee Conference of 19-31/1/1987). His presentation to this meeting is reported in a small booklet “Compilation of Instructions, Forestry Work, 1986-1989”.

In 1989, HE Mr. Ingong Mahavong, then Minister of Agriculture, said that “half a century ago forests covered 70% of Laos” in a very detailed presentation to the 1st National Forestry Conference. He then proposed that “these forest areas should be restored” and that large areas be ‘set aside’ as forestlands. Later in the same conference, HE Kaysone Phomvihane, reiterated this target figure, and the policy to restore forest cover to 70 per cent.

The 70% forest cover target has subsequently been incorporated in all subsequent forestry related legal documents and strategies. Under the Forestry Law (2019), Article 10 on the Forest Strategic Plan states that the: Forest strategic plan is the fundamental policy concerning management, preservation, development and utilization of forest and forestland towards green and sustainable direction in order for increase of forest cover rate to reach 70% of the total land area.

In relation to the Global Biodiversity Framework: Target 3 (2022), which aims to ensure that by 2030 “at least 30% of terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas” are effectively conserved and managed, it is assumed that some forest areas (within the 70% national target) may be better managed through being designated as other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs).

2.4 The Forestry Law (2019)

The Law on Forestry is the main legal instrument guiding the designation of the forestry estate in the country. This law prescribes the classification of the forests in Lao PDR into three categories (Section III) based upon the purpose of management, protection, development and utilization. These forests comprise:

- Conservation Forests (Article 16);
- Protection Forests (Article 15); and
- Production Forests (Article 17).

The Conservation Forests embrace the national protected area system of the country. The conservation forests consist of national, provincial, district and village conservation forests. Each of three forest categories have a Decree to further describe the measures relating to their management. These three Decrees are briefly outlined below.

2.4.1 Decree on Protected Areas (2023)

The Decree No. 219/GOV on Protected Areas (Conservation Forests) prescribes the principles, regulations and measures relating to the management, protection, development and utilization of the protected areas and protected area land within the country. The purpose of the decree is to preserve the beauty of natural landscapes, the forest ecosystem services and the variety of biodiversity. It also promotes improving the livelihoods of the peoples of various ethnics, contributing to the national socio-economic development.

Article 10 prescribes the six categories of protected areas. These six categories comprise:

- A strict nature reserve;
- A national park;
- A natural monument;
- A wild fauna and flora species conservation area;
- A historical and cultural protected area; and
- A protected area for sustainable natural resources use management.

The national protected areas system

Protected area coverage in Lao PDR as prescribed through the Decree on Protected Areas 2023 as on 1st January 2025. Table 1 below shows the coverage of Lao PDR's geographic area based upon the number of national-level reserves designated in the different protected area categories.

Table 1: Statistics of the protected areas at the national level within Lao PDR.

Protected area (IUCN category)	Number	Area (ha)	Coverage of Lao PDR's Geographic Area (per cent)
National Parks (II)	8	1,923,160	
Species and Habitat Conservation Area (IV)	1	130,745	
National Protected Areas (VI)	17	2,332,616	
TOTAL	26	4,386,521	18.52

This Decree describes the national protected area system, comprising the national parks, species and habitat management areas, and the national protected areas and have been registered on the The World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) as protected area. These areas are therefore ineligible for OECM designation consideration. The provincial, district and village protected areas haven't been reported upon yet, and are could therefore still be designated as an OECM.

Article 30 of this decree prescribes the "buffer zone" which is a protected area zone which may be located inside or around the outer boundaries of the protected area. The Government allocates this zone to the people for use. The protection of the buffer zone shall be conducted in accordance with Article 29 of this decree. Buffer zones – being outside the direct management jurisdiction of the protected area agency, have OECM designation potential.

3.4.2 Decree on Protection Forests (2024)

This Decree defines the principles, procedures, and measures regarding the management, protection, development and sustainable use of Protection Forests. These protection forests have been designated to enrich biodiversity values, reduce the risks resulting from climate change, and improve the living standards of the people. They should promote eco-tourism and contribute to the national socio-economic development in an eco-friendly and sustainable manner.

This Decree describes the national protection forests, which are not considered part of the national protected area system. As such, all national, provincial, district and village protection forests – or portions of them - are therefore eligible for OECM designation consideration. One

notable example is Phou Louang - Phou Khao Nok National Protection Forest in Boualapha District, Khammouane which is situated in the buffer zone of Hin Nam No UNESCO World Heritage Site.

3.4.3 Decree on Production Forests (2024)

This Decree defines the principles, procedures, and measures regarding the management, protection, development and sustainable use of Production Forests. These production forests have been designated to supply timber and non-timber forest products, trees planting and forests rehabilitation. They have also been designated to contribute towards the protection of the environment.

This Decree describes the national production forests, which are not considered part of the national protected area system. As such, all national production forests – or portions of them - are therefore eligible for OECM designation consideration.

3.4.4 MAF Instruction No.4143/MAF on village forest management planning (2024)

Under this MAF Instruction No. 4143/MAF on village forest management planning dated 3 October 2023 the government has decided that forest protection is the responsibility of the Lao villagers and has created a nationwide forest management system from the central to the local level to implement village-level forest management. The system is set up to sustainably manage and protect all forests by the villages. The villages are not yet strong enough to take responsibility for the management, protection, and development of the forests.

This instruction provides guidance on the participation of communities in the management of OECMs in village forest and karst ecosystems.

3.5 Law on Water and Water Resources (2017)

The Law No. 23/NA on Water and Water Resources determines the principles, regulations and measures regarding the management, administration, protection, development and use of water and water resources. The law promotes the restoration and rehabilitation of adversely affected areas with the aims to meet the needs of the people for their livelihoods, agricultural and industrial production and services. It ensures the protection of the environment, society and nature. This law is implemented by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE).

Management of reserved water resource areas: Under Article 29 of this law, the sectors of natural resources and environment are in charge of management of the water and water resources in collaboration with the relevant sectors and local administrations by determination of regulations or fixation of boundary markers.

Reservoirs: Under Article 23 on reservoir management, the natural resources and

environment sectors in collaboration with other relevant sectors and local administrations are in charge of the management of the natural water reservoirs through the survey, inventory and issuance of management measures for the abundance of water reservoirs.

Wetlands: Under Article 34, wetlands comprise the land located beneath the water or in surrounding water sources, mainly areas of swamps, lakes, ponds, flooded grass fields, spring water land, riverbank land, land emerged in the middle of watercourses, newly emerged land, impounded water or natural or artificial flowing water of permanent or temporary characters.

3.5.1 Decree on Wetlands (2023)

The Decree No.350/Gov on Wetlands dated 13 November 2023 defines the regulations and measures relating to the management, monitoring and inspection of wetland activities. It aims to ensure the sustainable management, protection, development and use of wetlands.

Under Article 42 of this Decree on wetland management and inspection, the Decree stipulates that the Natural Resources and Environment sector, the wetland management sectors shall be directly responsible for the management and inspection of wetland activities and shall take the lead in coordinating with relevant sectors, agencies and local administrations in implementation.

The vast majority of wetlands are situated outside of the protected area system (and the Decree on Protected Areas), and are therefore eligible for potential OECM designation. One notable exception is Beung Kiat Ngong Ramsar Site which is located inside Xe Pian National Park.

3.6 Law on National Heritage (2021)

The Law No.11 on National Heritage dated 16 November 2021 determines the measures for the administration, protection, and conservation of national heritage. It also prescribes the duties of the government, social organisations and individuals to preserve the value of the cultural, historical and natural heritage. National heritage are things that occur naturally that have high value in terms of culture, history and nature, and are precious treasures.

Under Article 25 of this Law, world-class national heritage comprises heritage of outstanding value in the world in terms of culture, history and nature. This includes the old town of Luang Prabang, Wat Phu in Champasak, and the Plain of Jars in Xieng Khouang province.

3 Potential locally managed OECMs in different ecosystems

Large areas of natural habitats are found outside of the national protected area system. These habitats are managed by the villagers themselves, in collaboration/consultation with the concerned district authorities. The level of structured management of these natural habitats between the villagers and the districts varies according to the types of ecosystems involved, as well as from site to site. Some of the best case studies are supported by medium- as well as long-term project support.

During the stakeholder consultations, three ecosystems were identified with high potential OECMs within the country. These comprised karst limestone, wetlands and forests. Case studies of these three ecosystems are described below:

3.1 Potential locally managed OECMs in forest ecosystems

3.1.1 Case study: Village forest management in Xam Tai district, Houaphan province in the buffer zone of Nam Xam National Protected Area

- Xam Tai district is situated in southeast Houaphan province bordering Vietnam.
- The district overlaps Nam Xam National Protected Area
- The district covers 237,800 ha.
- 55,747 ha is found within the NPA.
- The district comprises 27 villages.
- Six villages are situated inside Nam Xam National Protected Area (and outside the potential OECM; 10 villages situated outside the NPA with use of agricultural land and other resources inside the protected area and 11 villages are situated outside the NPA with the village boundary abutting the protected area boundary.
- A total of 15 villages are Taideng; four are Lao Loum, while eight villages have mixed ethnicity, with combinations of Hmong, Lao Loum, Khmu and Taideng.
- Shifting cultivation is seriously impacting habitat quality; hunting for subsistence and trade by logging employees; and Vietnamese poachers and traders are reported to enter the area, and there was a thriving wildlife border wildlife market only 8km from the NPA.
- During focus group discussions convened with men and women groups participant reported that more than 20 species of NTFPs are collected for food (vegetables, bamboos, fish, rattans, mushrooms, small wildlife, birds, rats, and insects), and more than 12 species are collected for selling (rattans, Fan Palms (possibly *Licuala* spp.), bamboo, broom grass, mushrooms, wild cardamom, wild fruits, roots etc.) species list of NTFPs.
- In addition, NTFPs include bamboo for processing chopsticks, bamboo shoots, mushroom of more than 10 types for market, cardamom, broom grass, rattan shoots, wild fruit, and fish.

- Xam Tai showed as opportunities to market access, as seen about 90% of NTFPs trade to Vietnam and 10% to the Chinese.
- The district is a target for a One District-One Product model.

Data based upon discussions provided by Vanhthong Thorkhoualoua, Houaphanh province coordinator, GIZ, and the Nam Xam National Protected Area Fact Sheet (2018) and the Nam Xam National Protected Area Management Plan.

3.1.2 Case study: Village forest management in Phieng district, Sayabouri province

- The Village Forestry Management Project (VFMP) is designed as a development project of Lao Government supported by Federal Government of Germany through the provision of technical and financial assistance. VFMP is financed through the KfW part of the Germany Development Cooperation Program in Lao PDR with an overall budget of 7,76 Million Euro; 7 Million EUR are provided by the Germany Government through KfW and while 0,76 Million EUR are contributions by the GOL.
- Covers the period June 2019 – May 2025.
- Operating in 35 villages in Phieng District.
- Has the objective as follows: *“The conditions of forest ecosystems and the livelihoods of the population in the project areas are improved by the sustainable management of the forests in the villages”*.
- Protection and management of all forest categories within the administrative boundaries of the target villages.
- The villagers are given the task of protecting and managing all forest areas (not only forest areas with the classification of village use forest).
- The Government staff guide/support the villages to manage the forest areas as well as monitor results.
- Villages have responsibility for the protection and management of the forests.
- Government staff guide and support villagers as well as monitor results of work.
- Villages are different (ethnic group/culture, forest resources, access to markets, available human resources, education level, etc.) – so what and how to do is tailor-made to the interests of villages and the local preconditions.
- There is no fixed approach on how to do, ideas are tried and over time, how to work will develop based on progress and success.
 - i. Management of high value natural forest areas in Production Forest Areas.
 - ii. Management of teak plantations.
 - iii. Protection and management of protection and conservation forest areas within villages.
 - iv. Management of forest areas of all forest categories where NTFPs thrive or could thrive.
 - v. Management of riparian forest areas.
 - vi. Establishment and management of agro-forestry and agro-pisciculture systems.
 - vii. Public-private-village partnerships in wood and/or NTFPs for the market.

viii. Livelihood improvements through water harvesting linked to the protection of watersheds.

- Villagers with interest are assigned tasks through contracts with DAFO.
- Among contracts - Patrolling, firebreak constructions and maintenance.
- Payments according to fulfilled tasks specified in the contracts have so far been distributed in cash by DAFO staff.

3.1.3 Some considerations when selecting potential village forest management OECMs at district level

The two case studies on village forest management described in section 3.1.1 and section 3.1.2 above were selected based upon existing ongoing project efforts. Both case studies represent natural resource management models at the district administrative level. This administrative level for village forest management was selected for several reasons:

- ❖ The village forests found with a single district constitute a sizable area of floral biodiversity, as well as understand the village forest management issues at the village level.
- ❖ Under the Law on Local Administration (2015), Article 30 prescribes the status and roles of a district authority to manage economic and socio-cultural affairs; to develop human resources; to protect, preserve and utilize natural resources; and to implement village development plan.
- ❖ Under MAF Instruction No. 4143/MAF (2022), a co-ordination mechanism is prescribed in Section 4 “between the relevant sectors of the public sector, development partners, business sector and the villagers to strengthen the village authorities and the villagers to manage and protect the forest, plants and restore the forest”.
- ❖ Under Prime Ministerial Order No.16/PM (2012) the districts are supposed to be the “overall strengthening units”, while the villages are built to be “development units”.
- ❖ Under the Law No.54 on Cooperatives (2024), villages can form cooperatives to sell forest products and handicrafts. Under Article 9, the Agriculture and Forestry Union is a collective economic organization involved in agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing, processing, and agricultural and forestry services. Under Article 12, the Handicraft and Cooking Cooperative is a collective economic organization engaged in manufacturing, machining, pottery, cooking, and other related activities. These can link to the One District-One Product model.

Moreover, the effective development of locally managed village forest management OECMs may necessitate the development of best practice district models. The identification of priority districts for project interventions may require a rigorous screening process to prioritize which districts and which villages to work in first, in the strategic role-out of VFM agenda. The criteria for district selection may include:

- ❖ Potential of selected district to contain capacity building elements within the province/region including ease of access
- ❖ Interest/motivation of target villagers and districts to participate in OECM development
- ❖ Percentage of forest cover within the district
- ❖ NTFP values within the district

3.2 Potential locally managed OECMs in karst limestone ecosystems

3.2.1 Case study: Overview of potential OECMs designations in karst limestone ecosystems

- Karst (limestone) covers approximately 30,000 km² (13 per cent) of the land area of Lao PDR, according to recent estimates.
- Karst is represented within the national protected area system within Hin Nam No National Park and Phou Hin Poun National Park, as well as much smaller areas in a number of other national protected areas. This totals only about 4,200 km² which is 14 per cent of this karst habitat.
- Outside of these national-level reserves, the representation of karst within the provincial conservation areas and district conservation areas is currently unknown.
- The distribution of karst within the country can be broadly segregated into the (i) Khammouane/Bolikhamxay Provinces region; (v) the Vang Vieng-Kasi region and (iii) the northern provinces.
- These blocks of karsts are anticipated to protect important assemblages of unique biodiversity.
- These karsts often have associated caves of both cultural and tourism value.
- The individual karst outcrops are located within the village lands of adjacent villages.
- Management of the karst is deemed to be undertaken by adjacent villages, based upon village land use plans
- Threats to these ecosystems include limestone quarrying, selective hunting of serow, Kha nyau, langurs, bats and cave swiftlets, harvesting of high value NTFPs and bird nests, and degradation of caves.

Data based upon discussions provided by Dr. Terry Bolger, international cave and karst expert.

3.3 Potential locally managed OECMs in wetland ecosystems

3.3.1 Case study: A Ramsar site – Xe Champhone wetlands, Savannakhet province

- The Xe Champhone wetlands covers about 33,000 ha (ICEM, 2012) with a quarter of this area, 12,400 ha (XCP RIS, 2009), protected within the officially designated area of the current Ramsar Site.
- The wetlands complex overlaps three districts, namely Champhone, Songkhone and Xonboully districts. However, the current Ramsar Site lies within Champhone District only (FAO, 2016).
- The site protects the largest known population of the critically endangered Siamese crocodile *Crocodylus siamensis* in mainland Southeast Asia (Bezuijen et al. 2013; Platt et al. 2024).

- 16 communities utilize the natural resources within this current Ramsar Site with a total population of over 19,600 persons (Scott et al. 2018).
- Most villages surrounding the site obtain the vast majority of their food resources from the wetlands (CAWA VA, 2017).
- In 2010, the Xe Champhone wetlands were declared as the first Ramsar wetland site in Lao PDR.
- The wetland management plan conforms with the National Land Allocation Master Plan, Local Land Allocation Plan, the Sector Land Use Plan, the Water and Water Resources Management Strategy, the Catchment Management Plan and the Socio-Economic Development Plan
- Threats include conversion of habitats through agricultural encroachment, hunting and illegal fishing.

Data is based upon the Xe Champhone Ramsar Wetland Management Plan (2022) as well as discussions with the Department of Water Resources and Robert van Zalinge (Wildlife Conservation Society).

4 Private sector engagement with potential OECMs within the country

Private sector concessions that overlap areas of natural ecosystems constitute primary candidates for OECM designation. Some case studies are outlined below which are representative of the different types of private sector concessions established in Lao PDR.

4.1 Tourism sector engagement on potential OECMs

4.1.1 Case study: Phou Pha Marn, Khammouane province

- Phou Pha Marn is a tourism concession in karst limestone in Khounkham District, Khammouane province, covering 7,600 ha for a 35 year period.
- It is located in the western periphery of Phou Hin Poun National Park.
- The tourism concession involves a network of zip lines, spider net and canopy walks.
- There are also two cave activities, trekking in Nam Sanam Protected Forest, as well as canyoning activities at Nam Sanam Waterfall.
- The tourism destiny is deemed one of the highest profile natural tourism attractions in the country.
- In 2023, the tourism site attracted c. 68,000 visitors. In 2024, the site attracted c. 89,000 visitors.
- The site protects populations of karst range-restricted species. Notable species include the endemic Lao Leaf monkey *Trachypithecus laotum* (endangered) as well as notable populations of the endemic Bare-faced Bulbul *Nok hualon* and Sooty Babbler *Stachyris herberti*.
- It protects newly described taxa, including a new agamid lizard *Laodracon carsticola* (Sittivong et al. 2023) and several karst range restricted species of flora. This includes two new species of pteridophytes, *Drynaria deuansavanhii* (Polypodiaceae) and *Hemionitis khammouanensis* (Pteridaceae).
- The four villages surrounding the Phou Pha Marn concession area obtain the vast majority of their natural resources outside the concession area.
- There is a ranger program for two days each week.
- There is a conservation fund using two per cent of revenue,
- Threats include hunting of the leaf monkeys.

Data is based upon discussions with Inthy Deuansavanh, the Manager of Green Discovery and the Phou Pha Marn tourism concession.

Note this potential OECM may get incorporated within the proposed Phou Hin Poun National Park, in which case it will lose its eligibility as an OECM.

4.2 Hydropower sector engagement on potential OECMs

4.2.1 Case study: Nam Chouane-Nam Xang biodiversity offset, Bolikhamxay province

- The 290 MW Nam Ngiep 1 Hydropower Project (NNP1) is under development on the lower Nam Ngiep Basin, being developed by the Nam Ngiep 1 Power Company (NNP1PC), a joint venture formed in 2013 between the project investors Kansai Electric power Company of Japan, Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand and Lao Holding State Enterprise. The Project is supported by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Japan Bank for International Cooperation through loans.
- The Offset Site is described in the Biodiversity Mitigation and Offset Framework (BIMOF), which outlines the company's obligations and commitments, the No Net Loss calculations, and the strategies for mitigating and offsetting the residual impacts on biodiversity.
- The Nam Chouane-Nam Xang (NC-NX) was selected as the offset site for the residual impacts from the NNP1 Hydropower Project.
- The NC-NX is located within the Nam Mouane-Nam Gnouang National Protection Forest along the Lao-Vietnamese border adjacent to Pu Mat National Park.
- It lies within Viengthong and Xaychomphone Districts in Bolikhamxay Province.
- The site has a total area of ca. 79,000 ha.
- The forest is very healthy, dominated by semi-evergreen trees, while supporting an apparently unique suite of coniferous trees.
- The site provides non-timber forest products (NTFPs) to six communities around its border.
- It protects several nationally and globally significant bird and mammal populations.
- Several endangered fish species inhabit the Nam Chouane and Nam Gnouang river system along with new species.
- The site is supervised by a Biodiversity Offset Management Committee.
- The site is managed by a Biodiversity Offset Management Unit.
- The company has prepared a Biodiversity Offset Management Plan (BOMP), which spans the entire concession period of 27 years (2019-2046), with a focus on implementation for the first 10 years.
- The four top ranked threats comprise: (i) illegal commercial hunting – snaring, (ii) illegal hunting non-snaring, (iii) illegal land conversion and (iv) illegal logging.

Data is based upon the Biodiversity Offset Management Plan and discussions with Fuevue Cherthai and Khamstone Xaysomphou, the Environment Manager of the Nam Ngiep 1 Hydropower Company.

Note this potential OECM may get incorporated within the proposed Nam Chat – Nam Pan National Park, in which case it will lose its eligibility as an OECM.

5 Potential urban and peri-urban OECMs within the country

5.1 The need to establish a network of urban nature education OECMs

Remnant biodiversity values: Vientiane is located within the Mekong River flood plains, which constitutes prime agricultural land and has been largely converted to rice paddy. Topographically, Vientiane is segregated from the nearest terrestrial forested protected areas like Phou Khao Khouay National Park and Phou Phanang NPA. Terrestrial land prices within urban areas are astronomical, and terrestrial public land areas within Vientiane usually serve multi-purposes recreational parks, most often associated with fitness, games and other activities involving concentrations of people. Many urban parks are modified gardens, characterized by large open grass spaces, flower beds, and exotic, easy to manage tree species. However, some government lands support forest fragments while wetlands persist more within the suburban and peri-urban areas, as semi-modified natural habitats.

Environmental education values: These terrestrial forest areas and urban wetlands are an incredibly important resource for wildlife, the public and educators. These semi-natural ecosystems can be used to teach young people about many different topics including the water cycle, food chains, food webs, the importance of habitats, human impacts, climate change and how to get involved in conservation activities. The close proximity of these urban forests and urban wetlands to the large population centre increases the opportunities for a larger number of students, teachers, monks and other members of civil society to become involved in activities, while reducing travel time and costs for the participants.

OECM policy engagement values: A network of urban OECMs is also accessible to policy makers, and their relatives. Thus, policy-makers can be exposed to biodiversity conservation values and environmental education, and this may assist to strengthen government commitment both to the OECM agenda, but also the broader national park agenda. A network of reserves also provides an effective platform to inform Vientiane citizens about the efforts being made to conserve biodiversity at local, national, and international levels.

During the stakeholder consultations, several peri-urban sites were identified as high potential OECMs within the country. These comprised the Faculty of Forestry Science campus, the Nong Kham Sen wetlands and “La Forêt”. Case studies for these three peri-urban reserves are described below:

5.1.1 Case study: Faculty of Forestry Science campus, National University of Laos

- The Faculty of Forestry Science campus is part of the National University of Laos campus in Xaythany district which encompasses a total area of 46 ha.
- An estimated 10 ha of semi-natural forest are maintained within the university campus.
- The Faculty has an active Environmental Society called “Natural Resources and Environmental Promotion Unit or NREP)
- There is no active management of the site.

- Threats include hunting of small mammals.

5.1.2 Case study: Nong Kham Sen wetlands nature education centre, Vientiane prefecture

- Nong Kham Sen wetland is a seasonally inundated wetland situated within the Vientiane Plains, covering 69 ha.
- It is located just under 20 km south-south-east of the Presidential Palace.
- The wetland has exceptionally high cultural value to the citizens of Vientiane, being one of the most prominent localities for the *naga* (dragon) that protects the capital. Wat Nong Kam Sen, located in Ban Sithan Tai, overlooks the wetland.
- It has no clear designation within the formal protected area system of Lao PDR,
- The wetland falls under the management jurisdiction of Hadsaiphong District Administration, Vientiane Prefecture.
- An indication of its biological diversity is that 177 bird species have been recorded in the wetland itself, as well as in the three spirit forests and surrounding agricultural land.
- Six communities utilize the wetland resources.
- The boundary was demarcated by the Provincial Office of Natural Resources and Environment (PONRE) in 2008 which has supported maintenance of the wetland. The boundary of the wetland was re-demarcated in February 2023.
- WWF have prepared a draft management plan, which supports the restoration through embankment dyke construction, tree planting and zoning, and, together with the National University of Laos, co-designing an Educational Learning Centre
- The site has unique potential for promoting freshwater conservation, cultural conservation, education for environmental sustainability as well as sustainable livelihoods.
- The main threat is land speculation, particularly of the grazing land in the centre of the wetland. Two of the three spiritual forests have been cleared. Other threats include drainage of the wetland, overgrazing, mist netting, snaring and hunting.
- The wetland has been tentatively identified as an urban wetland ASEAN Heritage Park (ACB, 2022).

Data is based upon the draft Nong Kham Sen wetland management plan and discussions with Achousanh Rasphone from WWF.

5.1.3 Case study: La Forêt, Vientiane Prefecture

- La Forêt is situated in Xaithany District, Vientiane Prefecture, 32 km from the Vientiane capital.
- It is a 33 ha tourism concession on the northern banks of the Nam Ngum river.
- The site protects some of the most notable remnant lowland forest in the Vientiane Plains.
- The forest has spiritual value to the villagers of Ban Na Phark.

- La Forêt offers nature immersion with treetop canopy walks, a treehouse cafe at 21 meters, forest camping, ziplining, and rope courses.
- Corporate events blend adventure and relaxation.
- Activities promote well-being in nature.

6 Lao government agency perspectives on the potential of OECMs within the country

6.1 Department of Forestry perspectives on potential forest and karst OECMs

The organization and functionality of the Department of Forestry is prescribed in the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry Decision No. 1505/MAF, dated 22 April 2022. Within the Department, two divisions have notable mandates for the potential management of forest and karst OECMs, namely the Village Forest Management Division and the Protection Forest Management Division.

Under Article 14, the Village Forests Management Division is mandated to support and promote sustainable and participatory village forest management linked people's livelihood improvement by strengthening capacity related to forest patrolling and protection, as well as combating forest fire and diseases. It plays a central role to support and promote the development of utilization plans of village forests and forest land, Participatory Village Forest Management Plans, including the preparation of Village Forest Management and Protection Contracts. It also compiles data on the management and development of village forests, e.g. village forest management plan and plans for utilizing forests and forest land linking to the other concerned parties.

Under Article 9, the Protection Forest Management Division supports and monitors the implementation of management plans for protection forests, including the management plans for village forests located in the protection forests. It collaborates with concerned parties to conduct surveys and identify the Totally Protected Zones (TPZ), and the Controlled Use Zones (CUZ) which will be used for preparing plans for sustainable allocation, management, protection, development and utilization. It plays a central role to search for potential areas to be proposed for upgrading them as eco-tourism sites, and promote tourism activities

Under Article 10, the Protected Area (Conservation Forest) Management Division has management responsibilities for the national protected area system, which are not eligible to be considered for OECM designation. However, this Division is also responsible for identifying the buffer zones. The Division prepares plans for their management, protection, development and utilization in a sustainable manner. It plays a central role to implement the sustainable management plans of protected areas linked to people's livelihood improvement. Buffer zones have potential to be recognized as OECMs including Provincial, district and villages PA's that have not been reported to WDPA.

During an interview conducted with Phavanar Sombanpheng, Head of the Village Forest

Management Division, on 25 April 2025, further information was gleaned on the management of village forests.

- A Village Forest Management Working Group has been established and meets every six months. This might be a convenient body under which to house the OECD agenda on village forest management.
- MAF Instruction No. 4143/MAF prescribes five steps, these being:
follows:
 - (i) Step 1: Review and Identify of Forest and Forest Land Categories
 - (ii) Step 2: Delineation and Demarcation of Each Forest Category
 - (iii) Step 3: Development and approval of Village Forest Management Plan
 - (iv) Step 4: Implementation
 - (v) Step 5: Monitoring of plan implementation
- Village forest management at district level do not have any profiles or fact sheets which may be a useful means to summarize district-level village forest management data.
- Districts are supposed to prepare quarterly reports on village forest management issues.

6.2 Department of Water Resources on potential wetland OECDs

The legal mandate of the Department of Water Resources, including its organization and functionality, is prescribed in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Decision No. 386/MONRE, dated 17 February 2022. The agency leads on water and water resources management activities nationwide. This includes managing wetlands, mudflats and reservoirs. The mandate also includes assessing water quantity, quality and water resources in watersheds. Within the Department, only a single Division has a notable mandate for the management of wetlands, namely the Division of River Basin Management and Development.

Under Article 8, the duties of the Division of Watershed Planning and Development include the development of water and water resources management strategies; develop and implement integrated watershed management plans; and survey, inventory, plan and implement wetlands and marshlands in coordination with relevant parties. It serves as the focal point for the implementation of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. It also proposes the establishment of a watershed management coordination committees.

During a meeting convened with Oudomsack Philavong, the Director-General of the Department of Water Resources, Pinthong Saleumxay, Thutsakone, Soukphaphone Soudthalavong and An Doungkhimphad on 27 March 2025, the Department representatives stated:

- It has recognized 1,700 wetlands within the country.
- Currently, there are two wetlands designated as Ramsar sites, namely Beung Kiat Ngong wetlands (2,360 ha) in Champassak province (Meynell *et al.*, 2014) and Xe Champhone wetlands in Savannakhet province. Both wetlands were designated on 16th June 2010.
- These are two of the best examples of wetland management in the country. The

management systems of both wetlands are described in the respective management plans.

6.3 Department of Heritage on potential cultural OECM sites

The organization and functionality of the Department of Heritage is prescribed in the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism Decision No. 678/MOICT, dated 21 December 2021. This agreement defines the organization and activities of the Department of Heritage to contribute to the sustainable management of the national heritage. Within the Department, three divisions have notable mandates for the management of cultural heritage sites, namely the World Heritage Management Division, the Intangible Heritage Management Division and the Heritage Site Management Division.

Under Article 8, the duties of the World Heritage Site Management Division are as follows: research the measures to supervise and manage World Heritage management activities nationwide and consult with provincial and city departments of information, culture and tourism, World Heritage Offices and relevant parties to prevent and address impacts on World Heritage areas.

Under Article 9, the duties of the Division of Intangible Cultural Heritage Management include: research the measures for the inspection and management of intangible cultural heritage management activities nationwide; propose technical comments on intangible cultural heritage management; promote individuals, communities and relevant parties to protect intangible cultural heritage; and inspect and advise on proposed project plans, procedures for registering intangible cultural heritage nationwide.

Under Article 10, the duties of the Division of Historic Sites and Monuments include: propose technical standards on heritage work; provide technical opinions to request approval for projects to restore and protect heritage sites, historical sites, and natural scenic sites, and monitor and inspect the implementation of the project; collect evidence and coordinate with relevant authorities to take measures against violators and inspect, and advise for the restoration of heritage sites, historical sites and natural scenic sites.

During a meeting convened with Paxa Nyordsavanh, the Head of the World Heritage Site Management Division on 28 April 2025, Paxa stated:

- The Department of Heritage manages three cultural World Heritage Sites, namely the Plain of Jars, Vat Phou and Luang Prabang.
- The Plain of Jars encompasses grassland and wetlands of unknown biodiversity values.
- Vat Phou protects 4,000 ha of forest.
- Luang Prabang and Vat Phou both encompass stretches of the Mekong River within the designations.
- There are 15 cultural sites listed under provincial designations.

6.4 National University of Laos perspectives on nature education OECMs

The National University of Laos has a draft Decision prescribing its legal mandate.

During a meeting convened with Dr. Sithong Thongmanivong, Dr. Phetlasy Souladeth and Dr. Thananh Khotpathoom from the Faculty of Forestry Science, National University of Laos on 27 April 2025, they stated:

- They had a preliminary interest to develop the Faculty of Forestry campus as an OECM.
- They could expand community engagement through participatory research with local villages, environmental education, and strengthening the NUOL Nature/Environment Society's role.
- The central portion of the site was threatened to be converted to a market in 2024.
- They might explore partnerships with (Green Discovery), and Nong Kham Sen Nature Education Centre (WWF Laos) to create a more comprehensive urban conservation network.
- They have a role in promoting Huay Yang as a botanical gardens.
- They have a concession for a training centre in Sangthong District.

6.5 Department of Environment: OECMs in the NBSAP

The legal mandate of the Department of Environment, including its organization and functionality, is prescribed in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Decision No. 6100/MONRE, dated 13 December 2021. The Department of Environment leads in supervising the macro-management and protection of the environment.

Under Article 8, the Environmental Policy Department has overall responsibility for monitoring, promoting the implementation and dissemination of policies, strategies, laws, regulations (including international conventions and protocols to which the Lao PDR is a party) on environmental protection work, and public participation. This includes leading the preparation of the National Biodiversity and Strategy Action Plan.

During a meeting convened with Dr. Soukvilay Vilavong, the Head of the Environmental Policies Division, within the Department of Environment on 28 March 2025, he stated:

- The Department of Environment would be keen to include the OECM agenda within the NBSAP.
- Nong Kham Sen wetlands is an excellent potential OECM model, with local community participation.
- It would be good to promote model OECMs close to Vientiane which are accessible and visible to policy makers as opposed to sites in remote locations.

7 Some background challenges towards promoting OECMs within the country

7.1 International guidance on OECM criteria

Under Decision 14/8, Annex III provides Scientific and Technical Advice on Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures. Under Annex 3, the guidelines were “applicable across all ecosystems currently or potentially important for biodiversity, and should be applied in a flexible way and on a case-by-case basis”.

The Site-level tool for identifying other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) provides a narrower set of criteria. The Criteria in the Site level tool are described as follows:

Does available information suggest that the site supports at least one of the following important biodiversity values?

- (a) Rare, threatened or endangered species and ecosystems
- (b) Natural ecosystems that are under-represented in protected area networks
- (c) High level of ecological integrity or intactness
- (d) Significant populations/extent of endemic or range-restricted species or ecosystems
- (e) Important species aggregations, such as spawning, breeding or feeding areas
- (f) Importance for ecological connectivity, as part of a network of sites in a larger area.

OECM criteria require additional clarity. Additional clarity was requested by stakeholders on the criteria to understand whether some potential OECM sites areas that are currently biodiversity poor could be subsequently enriched.

- Buffer zones which could be designated as OECMs following enrichment planting
- Urban forest patches which have high educational value

7.2 Limited understanding on what OECMs are

Grey boundaries between criteria for designating new protected areas and OECMs. It is unclear whether some prospective OECMs should be incorporated within the protected area system or designated as OECMs outside of the protected area system. Some areas appear to be both inside and outside (overlapping PA system), and therefore presently are ‘grey areas’.

Unclear benefits of designating OECMs: Some stakeholders were uncertain of the benefits of designating OECMs, particularly if the overwhelming majority of potential sites already exist and are protected. The benefits needed to be clearly espoused to potential audiences and stakeholders to gain acceptance.

Poor understanding of OECMs and their benefits: The OECM concept is relatively new to Lao PDR. There may be limited understanding of these types of land-based conservation measures. This may be true for government staff from the key conservation agencies. It will be much prominent among government agencies and stakeholders who currently manage

potential OECMs. Some government agencies may be unwilling to designate areas as OECMs as it places constraints on their ongoing activities.

7.3 Strategic selection of OECM models

Strategic selection of village forest management OECM models. Village forest management development is being promoted under large landscape projects and the KfW VFM initiative in northern Laos (two districts), among others. It is unclear what are the selection criteria for (project) selection on developing VFM models, and whether this is required. Firstly, it is unclear whether VFM is being promoted provincial level, district level, village cluster level (*taseng*) or village level. There is currently no known model development approach linked to provincial town centres, and capacity development, for rolling out the VFM model in a strategic programme.

Strategic selection of buffer zone OECM models. Buffer zones are being selected tied to their respective protected areas. But they are not being selected based on their stand-alone merits of developing model buffer zones. This oversight is prohibiting the capacity building, and subsequent involvement, of rural development NGOs. The rural development NGOs represent one of the most substantial, sustainable funding streams into the strengthening of the national protected area system.

Strategic phasing of the selection of urban nature education OECMs. At the moment, a few high profile urban nature education OECMs have been identified, which are located on the periphery of the capital, Vientiane. These urban nature education OECMs are being developed in isolation. There is no urban OECM network. There is no EE network, of practicing environmental educators, superimposed on the OECM land packages. Finally, there is no proactive identification of potential green spaces within the Vientiane capital or within the provincial centres.

7.4 Concerns about the OECM management bodies

The land management bodies for some OECMs are unclear. If the management authority is difficult to define, then this may have knock-on implications on enforcement, and the long-term integrity of proposed sites.

Demarcation concerns: In some terrestrial sites and some wetland sites, the boundaries of OECMs will be costly to demarcate and could therefore be unclear to other individuals.

7.5 Limited protection of community-managed freshwater wetlands

Community rights to manage natural resources: There is an Instruction on village forest management but not an instruction related to the protection of freshwater wetlands by local communities.

7.6 Long-term OECM integrity concerns

Some potential OECMs are situated within time-bound concessions. Some OECMs are situated in concessions, whose validity will expire in the future. What happens to the OECMs thereafter?

Attention needs to be given to monitor the OECMs. OECMs may lose the integrity or lose their biodiversity values.

8 Outcomes of the National Dialogue convened on 12 June 2025

8.1 Overview of the National Dialogue on OECMs

The national dialogue on ECCMs was convened at the Holiday Inn on 12 June 2025. A total of 67 participants attended the workshop representing government, CSOs, local and international NGOs, embassies, academia, and private sector. There was strong inter-agency representation.

The Objectives of the National Dialogue

The workshop objectives were outlined by M.K.S. Pasha, the IUCN Asia Regional Co-ordinator on Protected, Conserved and Heritage Areas, as follows:

- To build an understanding of the OECM concept and its relevance for conservation in Lao PDR.
- To share knowledge and perspectives on OECMs
- To identify potential OECM areas based on diverse ecosystems and conservation contributions.
- To highlight the ecological, social, and economic benefits of OECMs.
- To assess the opportunities and challenges for OECM promotion in Lao PDR.
- To seek opportunities for collaboration between various State and non-State actors in advancing area-based conservation using OECM as pathways towards Target-3
- To capture the progress in Lao PDR on Target 3 (30x30) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (K-M GBF)
- To discuss next steps on OECMs for Lao PDR

Keynote speeches were provided by Dr. Thoumthone Vongvisouk, Deputy Director-General of the Department of Forestry and Mr. Thevarack Phonekeo, Deputy Director-General of the Department of Environment, and Convention on Biodiversity Focal Point. Supporting remarks were provided by Ms. Carolin Frisch, Project Coordinator for the GIZ “GBF implementation” in Lao PDR and Dr. Madhu Rao, Chair of the World Commission on Protected Areas (online).

Two introductory presentations were made. M.K.S. Pasha, IUCN Asia and Dr. Olivier Chassot, IUCN Asia provided an overview of OECMs implementation and lessons learned from the Asia region. John Parr, an OECM specialist, IUCN provided an overview of the OECM stakeholder engagement process in Laos, including a legal analysis.

9.2 Presentation of potential OECM Case Studies

A sample of the case studies described in Chapters 4-6 above were presented, broken down into three categories

(i) Locally managed potential OECMs (Terrestrial and Freshwater)

- Village Conservation Forest in Phieng District, Sayabouri Province presented by Khamphet Sengchan Oudom, ACTA/Forestry Consultant
- Potential Limestone Karst OECMs in Lao PDR presented by Dr. Terry Bolger
- Overview of wetlands in Lao PDR presented by Singthong Phanthamala, Head of the River Basin Management and Development Division, Department of Water and Water Resources

(ii) Private concessions as potential OECMs

- Phu Pha Marn Tourism Concession, Khammouane Province presented by Philaprachith Prachittham, Group Human Resources Manager, Inthira Group.
- Nam Chouane-Nam Xang biodiversity offset, Bolikhamxay Province presented by Fuevue Cherthai, Biodiversity Coordinator, Nam Ngiep 1.

(iii) Potential urban and peri-urban OECMs

- University campuses, Huay Yang botanical gardens, training centres (Sangthong) and school forests (Hiem district, Houaphan province) presented by Dr. Thananh Khotpathoom, Faculty of Forestry Sciences, National University of Laos.
- Nong Kham Sen wetlands presented by Chris Hallam, Regional Wildlife Lead for Asia Pacific, WWF.

9.3 Government agency perspectives on OECMs

Government agency perspectives on OECMS were provided by two leading government agencies, namely the Department of Forestry and the Department of Environment. Presentations comprised:

Department of Forestry

- Overview of PA and conserved areas (incl. provincial, district, village) presented by Dr. Teaunchay Phongkhamphanh, Deputy Head of the Protected Area Management Division.

Department of Environment

- Potential of OECMs and its integration into the NBSAP (2026-2020) presented by Dr. Soukvilay Vilavong, Deputy Head of the Environmental Policies Division.

9.4 Break-out groups to discuss OECM opportunities, benefits and challenges in Lao PDR

The participants in the national dialogue were divided into three groups of stakeholders, according to their area of expertise or OECM interests. The following break-out sub-working groups were established:

Group 1: Forest and Karst

Group 2: Wetlands and urban OECMS

Group 3: Private sector OECMs

9.4.1 Overall objectives of convening the breakout sessions

The overall objectives of convening the breakout sessions were as follows:

- Facilitate group discussions to identify sector-specific opportunities, constraints, gaps, and solutions for OECM identification and promotion.
- Capture diverse perspectives from government agencies, non-state actors, CSOs, private sector, academia, and development partners.
- Generate preliminary recommendations to feed into the national roadmap for advancing OECMs in Lao PDR.

9.4.2 Potential OECM Sites

Concrete examples of sites were listed that may qualify as OECMs under each thematic focus.

Group 1: Forest and Karst OECMs

Potential OECM Site	Location	Key Governance Actors	Status (existing/proposed)
Forested district in Bolikhamxay Province	Bolikhamxay Province	District, DAFO & communities	Proposed
Dong Khanthung KBA	Mounlapamok District, Champasak	District, DAFO & communities	Proposed
Karst	Boualapha District, Khammouane	District, DAFO & communities	Proposed
Vang Vieng, Kasi karst	Vang Vieng District, Vientiane Province	District, DAFO & communities	Proposed

Group 2: Wetlands and Urban OECMs

Potential OECM Site	Location	Key Governance Actors	Status (existing/proposed)
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Nong Kham Sen	Hadsaiphong, Vientiane Prefecture	WWF, District and six communities	Under development
Nong Thaleuth	Vientiane Prefecture	District and communities	Proposed
Nong Sinin	Phonhong, Vientiane Province	MONRE, PONRE, DONRE & community	Proposed
Nong Farkdeang	Viengkham district, Luang Prabang Province	MONRE, PONRE, DONRE & community	Proposed
Nong Khouay	Viengkham district, Luang Prabang Province	MONRE, PONRE, DONRE & community	Proposed
That Louang marsh	Vientiane Prefecture	Public wetland/marsh	Proposed

Group 3: Private Sector and Public Management Sector OECMs

Potential OECM Site	Location	Key Governance Actors	Status (existing/proposed)
Wealth café (40 ha)	Sangthong District, Vientiane Prefecture	Tourism	Buffer zone of Phou Phanang NPA. Private concession.
Nam Kat Yor La Pa resort	Xai District, Oudomxay Province	Tourism	Provincial PA – tourism concession
Xieng Lue Waterfall resort	Boualapha District, Khammouane Province	Tourism	Nat Protection forest (Phou Louang Phou Khao Nok) – Tourism concession
Phou Khoung King (3,700 ha)	Dakchueng District, Sekong Province	Monsoon Wind Power	Nat Protection forest. Biodiversity offset site.
Kaeng Nyui Waterfall	Vang Vieng District, Vientiane Province	Tourism	Protection Forest area. Tourism concession
Khoun Kong Leng resort	Hinboun District, Khammouane Province	Tourism	Partly inside and partly outside of PHP NPA – Tourism concession.

9.4.3 Key opportunities for OECM development

Key opportunities were identified by the three breakout groups as follows:

Group 1: Forest and karst OECMs.

1. Tenure security/recognition of right holders
2. Livelihoods improvements
3. Increased protection of range-restricted and endangered species
4. Eco-tourism opportunities, particularly in karst habitats

Group 2: Wetlands and Urban OECMs.

1. Review the village land use planning, and demarcate wetlands with boundary posts
2. Increase income streams to neighbouring communities
3. Promote recreation in public parks
4. Improve wastewater collection system, and wastewater treatment
5. Improved protection and breeding of aquatic animals and birds
6. Become an eco-tourism attraction

7. Serve as a model for the development of other sites

Group 3: Private Sector and Public Management Sector OECMs

1. Incentives / benefits needs to be clear to motivate the private sector. What kind or recognition / certification is possible?
2. Technical support from the nature conservation sector / provide capacity building, toolkits etc.
3. Financial mechanisms/ support. Receive donor attention.

9.4.4 Key challenges to OECM development

Key challenges were identified by the three break-out groups as follows:

Group 1: Forest and karst OECMs

1. Financial constraints
2. Capacity constraints
3. Law enforcement weaknesses
4. Benefits/incentives to local stakeholders
5. Competing conservation priorities

Group 2: Wetlands and Urban OECMs

1. Threats include urban & agricultural expansion & water pollution
2. Lack of a database on biodiversity and technical management
3. No strong regulations or relevant legislation
4. Vulnerable to hunting and outdated village land use plans.

Group 3: Private Sector and Public Management Sector OECMs

1. Lack of awareness/ capacity in nature conservation
2. Conflict with Local communities (traditional lands)
3. Nature based tourism costs more money, often less profitable. Due to economic pressures some companies might (partly) switch to more mass tourism over time. Less focus on the environmental / nature impacts. Local companies have less capacity (or understanding) of the concept of nature-based tourism.
4. Lack of support / collaboration with other government departments (environment, forestry, protection, law enforcement etc.).
5. Overlapping concessions. Lack of coordination between ministries. e.g. limestone quarries approved in tourism concessions, wind-power concession approved overlapping a biodiversity offset site (Nam Ngiep 1) etc.

9.4.5 Proposed next steps / recommendations

The practical next steps or actions were listed by the three break-out groups to advance OECM recognition and reporting.

Group 1: Forest and karst OECMs

1. Building on from opportunities on forest and karst ecosystems
2. Develop a model district on village forest management which demonstrates district support to village forest management. Establish a village forest management training centre with the district.
3. Review and utilize UN REDD Social Forestry Database

Group 2: Wetlands and Urban OECMs

1. Secure funds for wetland management expert and implementation
2. Update the land use planning around that area and clearly demarcate conservation areas
3. Install sign board and update the relevant legislations/regulations
4. Capacity building for local authority/community & experience exchange with other model sites internal and external

Group 3: Private Sector and Public Management Sector OECMs

1. Consultation meetings at sub national level (province/ district/ village), including trainings/ capacity building
2. Need clarity on the main focal point to lead on the OECM agenda (IUCN / WWF)
3. Implementation of pilots (show casing)
4. Improving coordination/ communication between national, provincial & district level.

9 A roadmap for establishing OECMs within the country

9.1 Establish a national working group to guide the development and implementation of a national programme on OECMs

A small national working group of OECM expertise should be established to lead the development of OECMs in Lao PDR. This national working group needs an active secretariat. Membership of the working group should comprise (i) representatives from the five main government natural resource management line agencies, namely DoF, DWR, DH, NUOL and DoE; (ii) representatives from the Non-Government Organizations (IUCN, RECOFTC, WCS and WWF) as well as independent national and international experts from academia and the conservation community, with recognized expertise in the management of protected areas and OECMs. IUCN/WWF should co-chair this working group.

9.2 Establish theme based sub-working groups on different OECMs

Existing theme-based working groups/sub-working groups should be strengthened or new sub-working groups established - on:

- Village forest, karst and wetland OECMs
- Private sector concessions OECMs
- Urban conservation areas OECMs supported by an environmental education network

Each sub-working group should be coordinated by the relevant government Department or agency responsible for managing the natural resource management. Other agencies or institutions would be invited to join these for a based upon legal mandates or expertise in specific fields.

9.3 Department of Environment: potential OECMs in the NBSAP

The Department of Environment should be encouraged to incorporate potential OECMs within the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) as well as the national action plans. This would strengthen the mainstreaming of OECMs within the government agenda on biodiversity conservation.

9.4 Develop some criteria and guidelines to support the identification of potential OECMs within Lao PDR

Given that each country will designate its OECMs based on tenure, rights, and relevant legislation, there is a need to develop clear criteria and guidelines for recognizing potential OECMs in Lao PDR—drawing on the experiences and best practices of other countries in the region. This will help in identifying the different OECMs within the three ecosystems in the country, namely terrestrial, freshwater and karst ecosystems, the private concessions as well as the urban nature conservation sites.

9.5 Identify five potential model case studies representing the different types of potential OECMs

Some potential OECMs may be readily identifiable within the different ecosystem categories. Tentative OECM sites may comprise:

- a district model of village forest management located close to Vientiane.
- A model buffer zone, promoting poverty alleviation, NTFP management, climate change mitigation, wildlife trade mitigation, and one health. Capacity building components for rural development NGOs and tourism components for overseas tourists. (tentative case study).
- Nong Kham Sen wetland as a model community-managed wetland, with nature education potential.
- Phou Pha Marn as a model private sector tourism concession promoting karst ecosystems and associated biodiversity.
- The Faculty of Forestry campus, NUOL, as a model peri-urban OECM and learning centre for OECM excellence.

It may therefore be possible to obtain approval from the land management authorities to begin the process towards registering some of these sites as OECMs.

9.6 Prepare model profiles and fact sheets on the five potential OECM case studies

It may be useful to develop standardized model profiles of different types of OECMs to circulate among concerned government agencies and other key audiences to mobilize interest and understanding of OECMs and their benefits. These may provide descriptions of the management bodies, as well as monitoring and evaluation modalities. These profiles or fact sheets could then be placed on the government agency OECM database.

9.7 Site visits

Some of the emerging OECMs might benefit from conducting site visits to good models within Laos, or elsewhere within the region. Depending upon initial feedback, further study tours could be organized between the concerned agencies managing community forests, and community wetlands.

9.8 Promote multi-stakeholder orientation study tours for targeted audiences

Some key land management agencies of potential OECMs have extremely limited exposure and/or working experience relating to biodiversity conservation management. Notable land management agencies comprise the private concessions. It would therefore be invaluable to organize tailor-made orientation study tours for these agencies to sensitize them to OECMs concepts. These study tours could be utilized to introduce these agencies to potential collaborating partners, to build working partnerships. Through this approach, low cost visioning of the objectives of developing OECMs on their lands would be secured.

9.9 Establish a Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting (MER) Framework for OECMs

Each theme-based sub-working group will develop and implement a comprehensive Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting (MER) framework for all potential, proposed and designated OECMs. This system will integrate remote sensing technologies, district-level and community-based reporting mechanisms, and periodic field verifications to ensure accuracy, transparency, and alignment with national and international reporting obligations. Ensure gender and social inclusion in all stages of OECM identification, governance, and monitoring. The MER process will support adaptive management and contribute to national biodiversity reporting under the K-M GBF.

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Appendix 1: Annex III of Decision 14/8

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL ADVICE ON OTHER EFFECTIVE AREA-BASED CONSERVATION MEASURES

The guiding principles and common characteristics and criteria for identification of other effective area-based conservation measures are applicable across all ecosystems currently or potentially important for biodiversity, and should be applied in a flexible way and on a case-by-case basis.

A. GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND COMMON CHARACTERISTICS

- (a) Other effective area-based conservation measures have a significant biodiversity value, or have objectives to achieve this, which is the basis for their consideration to achieve Target 11 of Strategic Goal C of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020;
- (b) Other effective area-based conservation measures have an important role in the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, complementary to protected areas and contributing to the coherence and connectivity of protected area networks, as well as in mainstreaming biodiversity into other uses in land and sea, and across sectors. Other effective area-based conservation measures should, therefore, strengthen the existing protected area networks, as appropriate;
- (c) Other effective area-based conservation measures reflect an opportunity to provide *in situ* conservation of biodiversity over the long-term in marine, terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems. They may allow for sustainable human activities while offering a clear benefit to biodiversity conservation. By recognizing an area, there is an incentive for sustaining existing biodiversity values and improving biodiversity conservation outcomes;
- (d) Other effective area-based conservation measures deliver biodiversity outcomes of comparable importance to and complementary with those of protected areas; this includes their contribution to representativeness, the coverage of areas important for biodiversity and associated ecosystem functions and services, connectivity and integration in wider landscapes and seascapes, as well as management effectiveness and equity requirements;
- (e) Other effective area-based conservation measures, with relevant scientific and technical information and knowledge, have the potential to demonstrate positive biodiversity outcomes by successfully conserving *in situ* species, habitat and ecosystems and associated ecosystem functions and services and by preventing, reducing or eliminating existing, or potential threats, and increasing resilience. Management of other effective area-based conservation measures is consistent with the ecosystem approach and the precautionary approach, providing the ability to adapt to achieve biodiversity outcomes, including long-term outcomes, inter alia, the ability to manage a new threat;
- (f) Other effective area-based conservation measures can help deliver greater representativeness and connectivity in protected area systems and thus may help

address larger and pervasive threats to the components of biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, and enhance resilience, including with regard to climate change;

- (g) Recognition of other effective area-based conservation measures should follow appropriate consultation with relevant governance authorities, land owners and rights owners, stakeholders and the public;
- (h) Recognition of other effective area-based conservation measures should be supported by measures to enhance the governance capacity of their legitimate authorities and secure their positive and sustained outcomes for biodiversity, including, inter alia, policy frameworks and regulations to prevent and respond to threats;
- (i) Recognition of other effective area-based conservation measures in areas within the territories of indigenous peoples and local communities should be on the basis of self-identification and with their free, prior and informed consent, as appropriate, and consistent with national policies, regulations and circumstances, and applicable international obligations;
- (j) Areas conserved for cultural and spiritual values, and governance and management that respect and are informed by cultural and spiritual values, often result in positive biodiversity outcomes;
- (k) Other effective area-based conservation measures recognize, promote and make visible the roles of different governance systems and actors in biodiversity conservation; Incentives to ensure effectiveness can include a range of social and ecological benefits, including empowerment of indigenous peoples and local communities;
- (l) The best available scientific information, and indigenous and local knowledge, should be used in line with international obligations and frameworks, such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and instruments, decisions and guidelines of the Convention on Biological Diversity, for recognizing other effective area-based conservation measures, delimiting their location and size, informing management approaches and measuring performance;
- (m) It is important that other effective area-based conservation measures be documented in a transparent manner to provide for a relevant evaluation of the effectiveness, functionality and relevance in the context of Target 11.