

Saving Beijing’s water, people and nature

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The Miyun Reservoir in China, which has a significant forest cover, provides the main source of drinking water for the 17 million residents of Beijing - a city that faces a serious water crisis. But today, the watershed is unhealthy and fails to address the needs of those who depend on it. IUCN aims to restore it and improve local people’s lives by, paradoxically, lifting the logging ban in the area.

Although it may at first sound contradictory, allowing local people to harvest certain wood and tree products can not only improve their livelihoods and earning capacity but it can also bring better care for the forest, boosting the biodiversity and functioning of the natural systems that supply up to 70% of Beijing’s drinking water.

“When we started working here, much of the original forest had disappeared and conifers and other tree species had been planted as part of reforestation activities,” says **Li Jia, IUCN’s Forest Programme Officer**. “To protect the new forests, strict controls on land and forest use were imposed, including a logging quota system that bans almost all logging in natural forest.”

But this approach does not take into account the interdependence between local livelihoods and forests, and ignores local communities’ role in forest management. As a result, the Miyun forests have not been actively managed, and many of the trees are now in poor condition. Around three quarters are classified as unhealthy, with limited capacity for soil, water and biodiversity conservation.

And it is not just the forest that has been suffering. Because of the strict logging quota system and regulation of people’s access to forests, local communities have also become more and more disadvantaged.

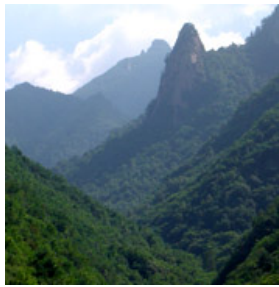
“Few income and employment opportunities have been available, as selling timber is not allowed and the introduction of polluting industries is strictly banned”, says **Li Jia**. “While some protective measures are well-intended and necessary, it is also true that this has been constraining to the local livelihoods. Currently, it is only possible to carry out limited collection of fuel wood and non-timber forest products.”

It was against this backdrop that IUCN’s Livelihoods and Landscapes Strategy (LLS) was initiated in the Miyun watershed in 2007. The aim was to restore the Miyun watershed landscape by lifting the 30-year old logging ban in the watershed area, improve forest management practices, enhance the livelihoods of local residents, particularly poor households, and make sure that Beijing’s dwindling water supply is protected.

“It was clear that the strict logging ban needed to be replaced with a new forest development and management strategy,” says **Stephen Kelleher, deputy head of IUCN’s Forest Conservation Programme**. “This needed to allow for better forest biodiversity and watershed services, but also to ensure improved income and livelihood security for the surrounding human population. The project introduced a new set of forest management tools which represent a shift from a strictly

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Miyun County, Beijing China
Photo: Andrew Ingles



Miyun, China
Photo: A. Ingles



protective approach, to one which is based on sustainable use and active management by local communities.”

Although the changes that the project aims to achieve in the Miyun landscape and livelihoods are long term in nature, it is possible to discern some very positive signs already. Different ways to manage and use the forest are now being recognized, which harmonize the technical information from government foresters with local knowledge and interests. The structure and quality of the natural forest has been improved and a permit for harvesting timber has been secured – the first such quota issued in more than 20 years. Support has also been given to develop the market potential of forest goods and services, with the aim of increasing and diversifying local income and setting in place local structures that will be sustainable over the long-term.

Recently Nokia and IUCN China have also joined forces to improve local knowledge of watershed management in the Miyun area. Working with the Sino-German Financial Cooperation Project for Watershed Management on Forest Land as part of IUCN’s Landscapes and Livelihoods Initiative, China’s State Forestry Administration, the Beijing Forestry Society and the Beijing Parks and Forestry Department are working to improve rural livelihoods, promote sustainable forest management, protect critical watersheds and generate appropriate changes in policy.

For more information, please contact:

Daniel Shaw, Communications Officer, Forest Conservation Programme: daniel.shaw@iucn.org