



世界自然基金會
香港分會

WWF-Hong Kong

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By E-mail ONLY

Dear Mr. Wu,

Re: Study Recommendations for South Lantau Eco-recreation Corridor

Southern Lantau contains natural resources such as lowland streams, freshwater and tidal wetlands, beaches, sand flats, rocky shores and inshore marine ecosystem. They perform many ecological functions as well as provide many services to humans, and have high recreational values. Recently, the Development Bureau proposed to turn Pui O, Cheung Sha, Shek Pik and Shui Hau into an 'Eco-recreation corridor', aiming to attract thousands of tourists to visit the areas, raise public awareness of environmental conservation, and boost the local economy. WWF is, however, concerned about the potential environmental and ecological impacts that could be generated by the proposed eco-recreational activities and their supporting facilities with following comments and recommendations.

Conserving the ecosystem integrity

Whilst one of the planning principles in the study aims is to "Protect natural ecological resources", the document appears to be focused on recreational development and lacks any conservation measures to protect natural resources, seascapes/landscapes and habitats from the increased tourism activities and infrastructure.

together possible™

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From the paper submitted to the LegCo Panel of Development, it is estimated that there will be an addition of about 4 000 to 6 000 visitors per day during holidays upon completion of the construction of the proposed facilities. Nonetheless, the government has yet to reveal the threshold of visitor number at which the environment and ecology will not sustain significant damage. In the interest of conserving the ecological integrity, studies must be carried out to establish a conservation strategy with action plans of each proposed site such as establishing conservation targets, stress analysis in association with tourism-related impacts, mitigation plans, and particularly evaluation processes to determine if recreational activities are compatible for the respective areas, setting the limits of acceptable change for recreational uses should be determined etc., and a long-term monitoring system to maintain a balance between ecosystem protection and recreational use.

Protect the natural Landscapes, habitats and ecological resources

Any eco-recreational activities and supporting facilities including but not limited to the proposed walkways, camping grounds, adventure facilities and pier must be balanced with following principles, in order to protect high-quality landscape, natural assets and ecological attributes while provide enjoyment for visitors that would foster a harmonious co-existence of humans and nature. These activities and facilities:

- should not negatively impact any ecosystems and their services, degrade the biodiversity and scenic beauty,
- should not exceed the environmental capacity and ecological carrying capacity of South Lantau,
- should not encroach on sites of conservation value and/or ecological importance that provide natural and undisturbed habitats for flora and fauna with clear rules and regulations in place,
- should be located at existing paved/developed areas with statutory developable lands so as to reduce any potential negative impacts to ecologically-sensitive areas as far as practicable, and
- should avoid or mitigate any impacts posed by unavoidable development in which fewer development alternatives exist.

Incorporate eco-recreational spaces and natural environment/ ecological resources

With private sector investors invited to introduce market creativity and resources, related profit-oriented activities and facilities would inevitably pose impacts the natural environment and ecological resources in the areas. The government should conduct a study to investigate the mutual reciprocity of different recreational spaces and their function/services with the natural environment quality as well as ecological carrying capacity of the proposed areas. The study should provide an optimisation strategy for coupling the nature of the activities, the number and location of the facilities which have to be positively related to the natural environment quality and the carrying capacity of the ecological environment earlier than the operation of the corridor. Clear rules and regulations must be in place to avoid incompatible activities and supporting facilities at ecologically sensitive areas and their vicinities

Optimisation of the Government's role in monitoring and regulation

The government should participate in the planning and development of the recreational programmes and supporting facilities, its subsequent management and operation to ensure the safety of the tourists, effectively use the eco-recreational activities as a tool for sustainable development and the conservation of natural resources. Rigorous monitoring and control supported by regulatory mechanisms must be in place to minimise impacts to the ecologically-sensitive areas.

Optimisation of the Government's role to develop best practices and address tourism risks

The government has to develop best practice policy guidance for the site managers and find ways to encourage best practices such as self-regulation schemes (e.g. codes of conduct, accreditation schemes) in place for best practise environmental management in the South Lantau. At the demand side, the government should promote environmentally responsible behaviour as an environmental conservation mechanism that helps limit or avoid damage to the ecological environment/natural resources, and or nuisance to local residents. The education centre in Shui Hau and the visitor centre in Lower Cheung Sha would be ideal venues for this purpose. environmentally responsible behaviour can also promote at related public transport and logistic network.

Toward sustainable management by zoning and regulation

To ensure all the supporting facilities are well regulated with minimal impact to the ecological resources and compatible with the environment of each proposed sites, the zoning system implemented at the Setonaikai National Park is a good example for the Eco recreational corridor to refer to. In the system, the Park contains the special protection zone, the marine park zone, special zones and the ordinary zone according to natural grades of ecosystems and scenic beauty, degree of human impact to the natural environment, and also of importance for visitors use with various degree of regulation. For example, the special protection zone provides the highest protection status and according to bureaucratic guidelines is considered an area where scenic beauty needs to be maintained and the erection of structures is prohibited. Though the context of zoning system introduced in the Setonaikai National Park which is a protected area with over 900 000 hectares including the sea area, its concept can be fine- tuned and apply to the Eco recreational corridor in South Lantau.

Managing Human-Wildlife Conflicts particularly with Water Buffalo

Increased visitor volume may result in escalated conflict between visitors and the free-ranging bovids, especially Water Buffalo. On the other hand, increased land demand for recreational facilities will likely encroach into natural habitats currently used by the bovids. Affected buffalo herds may shift their home ranges to other areas, including residential areas, intensifying the conflicts between the villagers and residents. We recommend the Government to conduct research to study the human-buffalo conflict with the aim to provide feasible solutions, e.g. the feasibility of establishing water buffalo park in the area to reduce conflicts, as well as an educational tool to increase public awareness on human-wildlife conflict and avoidance measures, promoting positive attitudes and actions towards wildlife.

Release of tourism planning and layout design as early as possible

WWF views the proposal as a broad-brush conceptual framework aiming to drive ecotourism in South Lantau. Indeed, a clear tourism plan with well-defined objectives and layout design of supporting facilities should be released to environmental groups for consultation at an early stage. With opinion received from the experts at the project planning and design stages, this would reduce the risk of putting biodiversity conservation at a lower priority that can help resolve many potential environmental and ecological

problems early on, eventually eco-tourism and biodiversity conservation can coexist in a more compatible manner. Eventually, natural assets can be safeguarded proactively so that tourists can enjoy instead of damaging them.

We would be grateful if our comments and recommendations can be considered by the office.

Yours faithfully,

Tobi Lau

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