



Gift to the Earth



China: Sichuan and Gansu Provinces join efforts to preserve the giant panda and its habitat in the Minshan Landscape

SUMMARY

The 2004 Panda Survey concluded that 1,600 giant pandas survive in the wild. The pandas are scattered in 20 isolated populations in six major landscapes in southwestern China in the upper Yangtze River basin. Almost half these pandas are found in the Minshan landscape, shared by Sichuan and Gansu provinces.

In a major development, the provincial governments of Sichuan and Gansu have each committed to establish new protected areas (PAs), linking corridors and co-managed areas to ensure all the pandas in Minshan are both protected and reconnected to ensure their long term health and survival. This represents the designation of almost 1.6 million hectares of panda habitat. Both provincial governments have also committed to establish PAs for other wildlife totaling an additional 900,000 hectares by 2010.

WWF, the global conservation organization, recognizes these commitments by the two provincial governments as a Gift to the Earth – symbolizing a globally significant conservation achievement and inspiring environmental leadership.

As China's economy continues its rapid development, it is more important than ever to conserve the forest home of the giant panda – not just to safeguard this well-loved species, but also to maintain the subsistence fisheries and water resources essential for the livelihoods and subsistence needs of the nearly 40 per cent of China's people who share the Yangtze River basin with the giant panda.



The pledges to create new protected areas and corridors in the Minshan Landscape will preserve the integrity of the animal's habitat and link isolated populations. © WWF-Canon / John MacKINNON



WWF considers the giant panda as a 'flagship' species – a charismatic animal representative of the biologically rich temperate forest it inhabits which also mobilizes support for conservation of the larger landscape and its inhabitants. By conserving the giant panda and its habitat, many other species will also be conserved – including the water resources essential for the future of hundreds of millions of people. © WWF-Canon / Michel GUNTHER

BACKGROUND

The Minshan lies at the heart of the forests of the upper Yangtze, the most biologically diverse temperate forest area on the planet, identified by WWF as a high priority for conservation. In addition to the golden monkey and takin, Minshan is also home to a number of distinctive species, such as the Sichuan wood owl and snowy-cheeked laughingthrush. Most famously, the impenetrable bamboo forests are the realm of the giant panda.

The Min Mountains are located in southwestern China in the upper reaches of the Min River, the major tributary of the Yangtze that gives the mountains their name. The Minshan region lies in the northern part of Sichuan province and southern part of Gansu, and is known for rich cultural diversity, and dense, wet forests that are the last stronghold of the giant panda. The Minshan is also home to 4.6 million people, many below the poverty line, who depend on the forests for survival.

Threats to the rich biodiversity and vital ecological functions of Minshan, posed by unsustainable development such as dam construction and mining, are building a growing appreciation in China for conservation and careful resource management.

Protecting, restoring and sustainably managing the Minshan forests for pandas and people is one of WWF's top priorities in China.

Sichuan Province

Currently, 37 giant panda nature reserves covering an area of 2 million hectares exist in Sichuan Province. More than half of these reserves are in Minshan. The Sichuan Provincial Government has committed to improve the management of 778,800 hectares of giant panda habitat, continue the logging ban until 2010 of 840,000 hectares of natural forest, and designate 851,800 hectares of forests in Minshan by 2010 to protect the giant panda.

Overall, in addition to the 115 existing PAs covering 7.45 million hectares, Sichuan Provincial Government will establish a further 8-10 new PAs totaling 0.35 million hectares by 2010, taking total PA coverage to 7.8 million hectares – 16 percent of the province.

Gansu Province

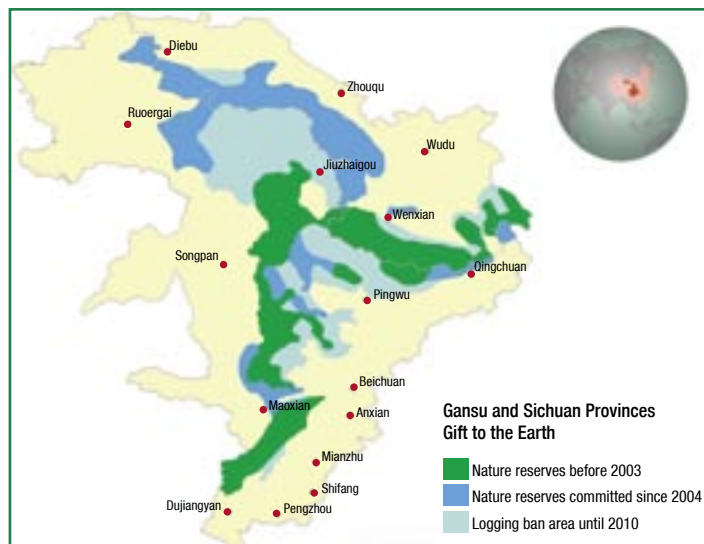
Gansu Province is located upstream of the Yellow River, Yangtze River and another four inland rivers, namely the Shiyang River, the Hei River, the Shule River and the Ha'erteng River. Over the last three years, the Gansu Province has been working to prevent land degradation by converting farmland to forest, and implementing a logging ban. Over three years, 430,500 hectares of area have been converted to forest or grassland, 100,000 hectares of public forest were established, and 704,000 hectares of areas suffering water and soil erosion threats have been stabilised.

Currently, six panda PAs cover 617,600 hectares, and three further PAs are planned to take total PA coverage to 740,600 hectares. In addition, a logging ban across 430,000 hectares will be maintained, and 740,600 hectares of forest designated for panda conservation.

Overall, in addition to the 48 existing PAs covering 9.54 million ha, Gansu Provincial Government will add a further six PAs totaling 660,000 hectares taking total PA to 10.2 million hectares representing 23 percent of the province.

These actions also reflect the two provincial governments' commitments to conserve Minshan's rich natural biodiversity.

The achievements and commitments of the two provinces are crucial to the conservation of the giant panda and its habitat, which will also play a critical role in ensuring the long term conservation of this region. These achievements and future commitments also demonstrate major progress in implementing one of China's six major national forest protection programmes – the "Wildlife Conservation and Nature Reserve Development" programme.



The material and geographical designations do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of WWF concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or area, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.



WWF scientist inspecting regenerating bamboo (*Fargesia denudata*) in a corridor. © WWF-Canon / Donald G. REID

RELEVANCE FOR WWF'S TARGETS

The actions recognized in this Gift to the Earth contributes to WWF's Global Species Programme target to conserve flagship species such as the giant panda but also other terrestrial species (e.g. wild yak, golden monkey, golden eagle, saiga antelope, Argali sheep). It also helps conserve forest and freshwater ecosystems vital for the conservation of the Yangtze river basin ecoregion – an area of high biodiversity and unique ecological and evolutionary processes.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contacts:

Dr Chunquan Zhu

Head of Conservation Operations, WWF-China: chqzhu@wwfchina.org

Ling Lin

Head of Chengdu Regional Office, WWF-China: lling@wwfchina.org

Jing Hui

Communication Manager, WWF-China: hjing@wwfchina.org

Websites:

WWF China: www.wwfchina.org/english.cn

WWF Global Species Programme: www.panda.org/species

The **Gift to the Earth** is WWF's recognition of a globally significant conservation achievement, which addresses WWF's conservation priorities in globally significant natural areas by:

- Advancing conservation of biodiversity, especially forest, freshwater and marine ecosystems, or enhancing the prospects for survival of threatened species.
- Addressing global threats posed by climate change, toxic chemicals and unsustainable use of resources such as timber, freshwater and fisheries.

Contacts:

Rob Soutter, +41 22 364 9290, rsoutter@wwfint.org

Stéfane Mauris, +41 22 364 9289, smauris@wwfint.org

www.panda.org/gtte