

MIKE SHARROCKS CONSULTANCY

Tourism Feasibility • Development Planning • Urban Design • Urban Regeneration • Environmental Appraisal

China

SANJIANG PLAIN WETLAND PROTECTION PROJECT

For the Asian Development Bank, 2004

Mike Sharrocks was appointed to undertake ecotourism work on the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Sanjiang Plain Wetland Protection Project as part of a large multidisciplinary team of international and Chinese consultants. The study was led by IRG Ltd., in association with the Center for Chinese Agricultural Policy (Chinese Academy of Sciences), and was undertaken for the Heilongjiang Development Planning Commission with ADB Technical Assistance funding.

The Sanjiang Plain is the largest of China's wetland areas and is located in the eastern part of Heilongjiang Province along the Russian Far East border. The area accommodates a variety of globally significant wildlife, including storks and cranes and endangered fish species. Development pressures have begun to present a threat to the wetlands' environment through a decline in water quality and supply, damage to forestry resources and the consequent reduction in water retention capability. This has also resulted in negative impacts on the quality of local inhabitants' livelihoods.



The project outlined a strategy to protect the biodiversity of the Sanjiang Plain through conservation and environmental improvement measures. This was intended to retain the cohesiveness of the wetlands and also to enhance economic opportunities for local people. Activities were detailed that would be eligible for Global Environment Facility (GEF) funding as well as for loan financing from the ADB.



Ecotourism would provide an important contribution towards the overall project objectives. The market for ecotourism and for the area's primary attractions of forests, wetlands and nature reserves was reviewed within the context of worldwide trends and competing regional destinations. Domestic tourists accounted for the vast bulk of visitor numbers to the wetlands area. The primary and secondary attractions within Sanjiang Plain were assessed together with proposals for their improvement and access considerations.

An ecotourism strategy was prepared for the area that identified the key products, such as forestry attractions, fruit cultivation and apiculture centres, medicinal herb and fungi cultivation areas, bird-watching, fishing, trekking and camping, ethnic minority villages and river cruising. A community-based tourism approach was set out as a means of assisting poverty alleviation, and of promoting wildlife conservation and sustainable development. Possible community-based tourism villages were identified in the targeted nature reserve areas.

Recommendations were also made for the environmental planning of tourism attractions and ancillary facilities. These included outline planning and design guidelines, environmental impact assessment considerations, visitor carrying capacities, environmental monitoring and quality control principles, visitor safety requirements, environmental awareness programmes, capacity building and training requirements. A proposed project outline for GEF funding was set out that included the required inputs and project outputs, potential beneficiaries, project timescale, implementing agencies and estimated costs.

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