

Session 2

Mr. Eugene Simonov, Coordinator, Rivers without Boundaries International Coalition
Protection of ecosystems and wetlands in the transboundary Amur / Argun river basin

Points for panel discussion.

1. How does the cooperation on **Protection of ecosystems and** water quality work in your basin/region? How did it start? (**Please note change which is in line with the topic**)

1) Ecosystems and biota

- Russia, China and Mongolia established joint Dauria International Protected Area(DIPA) to safeguard globally important wetlands as early as 1994. While Russian and Mongolian protected wetlands had common border in Ulz River Basin, Chinese part on Dalai\Hulun Lake until today unfortunately has not yet been extended towards transboundary Argun River wetlands and stands apart.
- Two years later Sino-Russian transboundary nature reserve was established at Khanka Lake by separate agreement
- In last decade Sino-Russian cooperative arrangements were established for 3 more pairs wetland nature reserves along transboundary Amur River .
- Finally in 2011 a Strategy for Sino-Russian transboundary protected areas network was signed that stresses joint protection of wetland ecosystems along the border.
- Agreement on use and protection of aquatic species in Amur and Ussury was signed between Russian and Chinese fisheries agencies in the mid-1990-s and theoretically complements protected areas arrangements. However so far it failed to curb overfishing and even does not extend to Khanka lake where this problem is most acute.
- Main shortcoming in implementation of abovementioned agreements– lack of authority in wetland management agencies to ensure protection of water quality and hydrological regime, which is essential for ecosystem conservation.

2) Russian-Mongolian work on water quality started in beginning of 1990s and was initially focused on Selenga River flowing into Baikal. Sino-Mongolian work also started in that period when “Agreement on protection and use of transboundary waters” was signed . Mining impact on rivers –focus of this discussion.

Sino-Russian work on joint monitoring of water quality was spurred by a huge toxic spill from Chinese chemical plant in Songhua River in 2005 and a number of agreements, including “Agreement on protection and use of “transboundary waters” was signed after that. Periodical joint monitoring of water quality was established on each large transboundary watercourse and lake. China implemented huge clean-up removing polluting industries and upgrading water treatment plants, while Russia has not been so active in improving water quality.

Attempts to establish more comprehensive monitoring and protection cooperation on transboundary waterbodies so far failed, which is exemplified by an interprovincial agreement “On monitoring and protection of Argun-Erguna River” which was signed but never implemented.

2. What lessons did you learn in the process of the cooperation?

- Interagency barriers – major obstacle to protection of transboundary aquatic ecosystems
- Joint monitoring does not necessarily lead to agreed results on pollution levels. Besides it should be complemented with strengthening independent national monitoring programs which happens in China but not in Russia.
- Bilateral mechanisms cannot alone do the job and normally lack clear implementable mutual obligations. Lack of regional and global conventions with strong implementation mechanisms.
- Effects of natural hydrological cycles often are confused for improvements achieved by pollution prevention or damage caused by “climate change”.

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- Public participation and information dissemination is critically important and difficult in transboundary setting. Part of it is comparison of situation in different transboundary basin and dialogue between stakeholder from different basins.

3. Which challenges remain for the protection of ecosystems and water quality and how do you plan to address them?

- Monitoring and protection measures should relate both to ecosystems/biota and hydrochemistry\hydrology
- Freshwater ecosystem conservation should be supported by jointly agreed standards and mechanisms, cannot be done by protected areas alone.
- Climate change adaptation could be important subject of cooperation, but so far became a scarecrow spurring unsustainable unilateral measures. No existing cooperation process addresses this issue comprehensively
- Assessment of cumulative impacts of water infrastructure
- Environmental flows norms – completely missing from existing agreements and this already threatens Argun, Herlen and Halkh rivers.
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I will also show three slides with maps:

- 1) Amur River Basin and cooperation on freshwater\wetland ecosystem conservation
- 2) Information system for Comparison of different transboundary basins
- 3) Water infrastructure development and environmental flow norms