

Project Update: April 2015

The project team would like to sincerely thank the foundation for supporting the project. Field work covered 14 sub-catchments in the Spiti Valley. The team interacted with local people, migratory herders, immigrants (labourers), local contractors, people associated with tourism and locally based government officials to gather information on distribution and relative levels of natural resource use. Livestock grazing (resident and migratory) appears to be the most widespread form of natural resource use in the Spiti Valley. Resident livestock grazing appears to be on a decline (or completely stopped) in the villages located along the main river valley, owing to increasing access to modern amenities and other employment options (mainly construction and tourism sector). The villages located along the relatively higher parts of the valley appears to be still heavily dependent on livestock grazing, but at a relatively reduced level than earlier, owing to increasing emphasis on cash crop (green pea) cultivation. The higher villages are experiencing heavy livestock losses due to depredation by free-ranging dogs. Free-ranging dogs were also observed to chase and attack groups of wild-ungulates (blue sheep and ibex) in the area. Migratory livestock grazing is increasingly penetrating the Spiti Valley from adjacent Lahaul area. The herders with thousands of sheep-goat are accessing unused pastures after striking a pact with village administration, putting intense grazing pressure on the low-productivity pastures. Migratory livestock grazing appears to be the most important emerging threat to the rangelands and wild-prey of snow leopard in the Spiti Valley.

The project is on schedule, and we are currently preparing education and workshop materials. The outreach activities will be carried out in Spiti during June, 2015. A semi-scientific article on grazing has been drafted by the lead researcher that is currently in review with Saevus, the premier natural history magazine in India. We hope to submit a complete report along with details of expenses to the foundation during July-August, 2015.

