

A large herd of horses, mostly brown and white, is running across a vast, green grassland. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow over the scene. The horses are scattered across the middle ground, moving towards the right. The background shows a flat landscape under a clear sky.

SPOTLIGHT Mongolia

Conservation Highlights

August 2026



Dear friends,

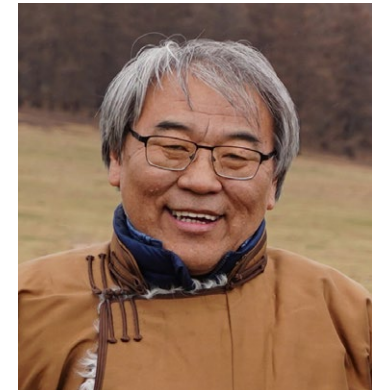
I'm writing to you from Chandmani-Undur, a small community in northern Mongolia near the eastern shores of Lake Khuvsgul. It is mid-summer. *The grasses twinkle like glass and crystal*, as our most famous poet, Dashdorjiin Natsagdorj, wrote of the season's transcendence a century ago. Yellow poppies, gentians, candle larkspur and many other wildflowers dominate the landscape. They'll be gone in a few weeks, soon followed by snow and ice. By January, the daily temperature here struggles to reach -4°F (-20°C).

But not today. Every four years, Chandmani-Undur gathers to celebrate Alan Gua, the legendary matriarch and ancestor of Chinggis Khan. Every Mongolian child knows the parable of Alan Gua's five sons, all prone to conflict and seemingly quite insufferable. To teach them the importance of unity, she gave each son a single arrow and asked him to break it. One by one, the arrows snapped easily. Then Alan Gua bound five arrows together and challenged them to break the bundle, but none could. Her message was simple: *Alone, you are easily broken. Together, you are strong.*

Today, our work in places like Khuvsgul province to protect and sustain nature is strong, because we in turn are bound to the nomadic herding communities to whom I dedicate my 31-year conservation career.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is helping herders overcome mounting threats, whether here in Khuvsgul or indeed throughout the country through Eternal Mongolia, a groundbreaking collaboration forged to help the national government and local communities reach an ambitious goal of 30 percent protection of lands and freshwater by 2030.

Left: Grasses and wildflowers explode in the mid-summer Mongolian sun © TNC/Gala Davaa; Right: Gala Davaa portrait © TNC



Poorly sited mining, unregulated tourism, overfishing and overgrazing by ever-growing livestock herds (sometimes owned by outsiders who live far away) not only mar the landscape, but also threaten a family's ability to access clean water; to feed their own horses, goats and sheep; and to ensure the health and well-being of their children who play and practice archery on the open steppe. Without help, I fear this is a dying way of life.

Nevertheless, I have hope—and more importantly, evidence—that we are succeeding. For over 20 years, TNC has honed a unique ability in Mongolia to marshal science, support policy, secure sustainable funding and help communities achieve their own vision for healthy natural resources.

This document provides just some of TNC's recent progress in Mongolia, such as our work to help reform national freshwater management, and spotlights initiatives here in Khuvsgul to establish local protected areas and sustainable finance programs that help herders keep grasslands sustainable, and livestock alive during cold-weather *dzud* events that occur more frequently due to climate change.

There are few places on Earth where the impact of sustained, collaborative conservation can be seen so vividly as the wildflower fields in Khuvsgul where I stand. Thank you for supporting this mission.

Sincerely,

Gala Davaa

Mongolia Country Director, The Nature Conservancy

Mongolia

Cover: A herd of domestic horses moves across Mongolia's Eastern Steppe © Amartuvshin Jargalsaisaikh; This page: Local coordinator G. Manaljaw and rangeland management specialist S. Sumjidmaa discuss the condition of a peatlands site in southern Khuvsgul province © Dolgor Byambadorj/TNC



Mongolia holds something rare: landscapes that still largely function as they always have. The steppe, the mountain rivers, the peat bogs tucked into high-altitude valleys in the north—these are not just beautiful. They are among the last intact grassland and freshwater systems on Earth, storing carbon, regulating water and sustaining a way of life that has endured for centuries.

TNC has worked in Mongolia for over 20 years. Our program focuses on three interconnected priorities:



Protecting landscapes and freshwater

Through conservation science, community engagement and government partnership, we support new and existing protected areas—from the forests and wetlands of Khuvsgul in the north to the grasslands and river systems of the south.



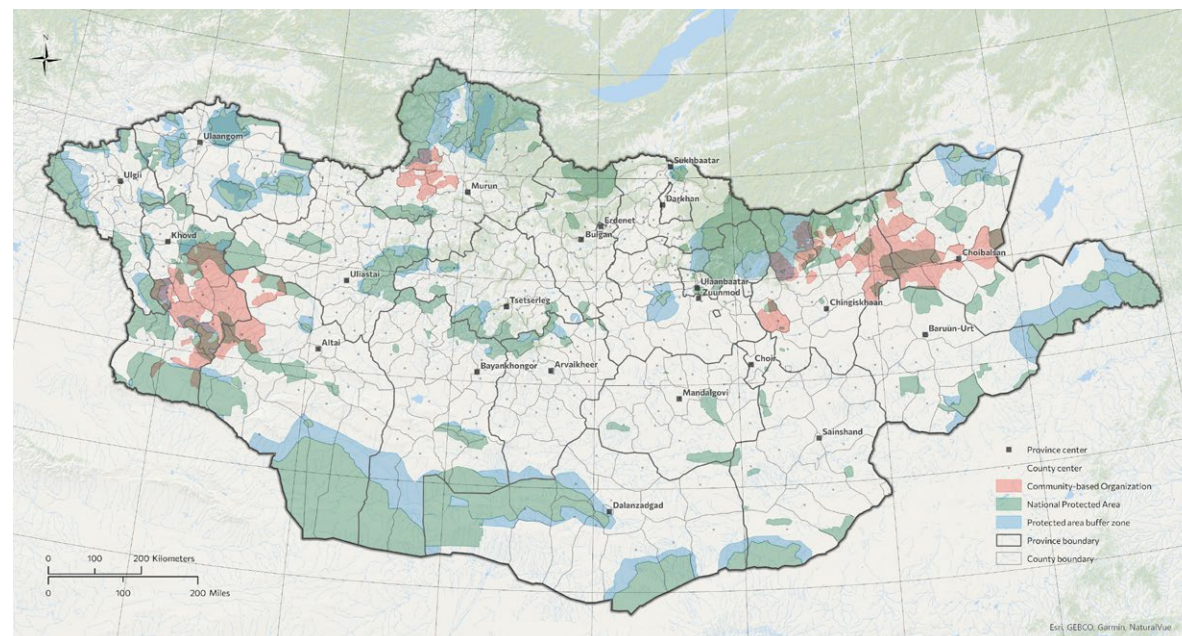
Investing in permanent protection

The Eternal Mongolia initiative is building the institutions, policies and funding mechanisms that will sustain Mongolia's natural heritage long after any single grant or project ends. At its center is the Mongolian Nature's Legacy Foundation—an independent Mongolian institution that manages conservation finance for the long term.



Working for and alongside communities

Mongolia's herder communities are the stewards of its land. Our work strengthens that relationship—connecting traditional knowledge with science, and creating economic opportunities that make conservation a practical and attractive choice.



In the north, a new peatland protection project is piloting restoration methods and building the research base needed to conserve some of the country's most carbon-rich and biodiverse landscapes. Much of this work is being carried out in Khuvsgul province, one of Mongolia's most ecologically significant regions.



Eternal Mongolia

Investing in national protected areas

Mongolia's protected areas are vast—and they are at a turning point. Covering a significant portion of the country, these landscapes safeguard snow leopards, saiga antelope and migratory birds, as well as some of the most intact ecosystems left anywhere on Earth. They protect watersheds that supply water to millions of people. And they anchor the livelihoods of herders whose connection to the land spans generations.

Yet protection on paper is not the same as protection in practice. Many protected areas operate with limited resources, outdated management plans and little ability to plan beyond the next project cycle. Climate change, unregulated tourism and development are steadily intensifying the pressure.

The Protected Area Accelerator Program

Launched this year, the Protected Area Accelerator Program is a direct response to this challenge—and one of the most significant milestones under the **Eternal Mongolia–Project Finance for Permanence (PFP)*** administered by Mongolian Nature's Legacy Foundation, an independent conservation trust fund.

Rather than funding short-term interventions, the Accelerator invests in the management systems that allow protected areas to function well over time. Protected area teams work through a structured process: assessing current conditions, engaging local communities and developing realistic, practical management plans reflecting on-the-ground realities.

Those that demonstrate readiness move into a multi-year implementation phase. During this stage, they receive dedicated support to carry out priority actions—from improved wildlife monitoring to community partnerships and the development of sustainable income sources such as visitor fees and nature-based tourism.

Between 2026 and 2029, up to 11 protected area administrations will be supported, with grants ranging from MNT 500 million to MNT 3 billion (US\$139,000–\$834,000) depending on need and scope.

Managed by Mongolians, for Mongolia

Mongolian Nature's Legacy Foundation is the independent institution established under Eternal Mongolia—in partnership with the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change and TNC. Independent technical review and regular monitoring ensure accountability and learning throughout. The goal is not just better-managed parks. It is a model that can be replicated: proof that permanent, locally led conservation is achievable in Mongolia, and that the institutions to sustain it are now in place.

Left: Tsambagarav Mountain towers over the landscape of western Mongolia in the Altai Mountains © Erdenebulgan

“

Mongolian Nature's Legacy Foundation is more than a fund. It's a long-term solution to protect what makes Mongolia unique. With the right support, we can ensure that conservation is not reliant on short-term projects but embedded in systems that last. This is our opportunity to secure nature, livelihoods and resilience at scale.

Boldoo M.

Chairman, Board of Directors
Mongolian Nature's Legacy Foundation

* Eternal Mongolia is a 15-year, US\$198 million Project Finance for Permanence (PFP) initiative advanced by Enduring Earth, a global collaborative initiative launched in 2020 by TNC, The Pew Charitable Trusts, the World Wildlife Fund and ZOMALAB. For more information, visit enduringearth.org.



Top: The mountains of Tsagaan Shuvuut National Park rise above Uureg Lake in western Mongolia © Batsukh; Inset: The Eg River winds through northern Mongolia © Erdenebulgan

Water's Future in Mongolia

In Khuvsgul, a movement to redefine how freshwater is managed

Located in Khuvsgul province, the Delgermurun River basin is an essential freshwater ecosystem for Mongolia and beyond, as it feeds Lake Baikal (which holds about one-fifth of the world's unfrozen surface freshwater) and the Yenisei, Selenge and Amur rivers. A key focus of TNC's Mongolia program, the region is highly vulnerable to climate change and faces shortages in available clean water, affecting migratory species and herding communities alike.

Here, we've worked to advance what's known as an Integrated Water Resources Management plan for the Delgermurun—a critical step that provides a structured approach to managing and protecting water resources. Such plans are integral to a national policy framework (the Law of Water of Mongolia) designed to balance the nation's limited water supplies across industry, urbanization and traditional herding cultures in 29 local river basin authorities.

In November 2025, TNC secured the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change's endorsement of our proposed plan to preserve freshwater ecosystems and support multi-stakeholder engagement in Delgermurun basin management. From November to January, seven *soums* (local community districts) began implementing the plan with our support.

Additionally, TNC recently developed a new method for delineating and mapping riparian protection zones in Khuvsgul. Following a series of national consultations, the government approved our method in November 2025 as the new National Methodological Model. "This represents a significant improvement upon the previous method, which often resulted in delineation errors when mapping riparian protection zones," says Bayanjargal Yunden, TNC Mongolia's Conservation Director. "As a result, the riparian map of Khuvsgul now serves as a model document for other river basins."

2030 Ambitions

By 2030, TNC aims to secure effective protection of **40,000 km (nearly 25,000 miles) of river systems and 1 million hectares (nearly 2.5 million acres) of floodplains** in Khuvsgul province.



Voices from the River

Ishdorj, Tsagaan-Uur soum

Ishdorj is a community advocate from Tsagaan-Uur soum in Khuvsgul province, interviewed in June 2026.

TNC: Where is home for you?

Ishdorj: My home is Tsagaan-Uur soum in Khuvsgul province, in northern Mongolia. This is a place where rivers, lakes and pastures are not separate from people's lives. They are part of how families live, how animals are raised and how communities understand the land around them.

Above: Ishdorj portrait © TNC; Right: A herder tends to his flock next as the Delgermurun River winds below the Mandal Mountains © Batsukh

What do older generations remember about the river?

We remember a river that was abundant—crystal clear, full of fish, with green pastures along its banks. That memory matters because it tells us what this place once gave so generously. It also reminds us that rivers are living systems. When they are healthy, everything around them feels more secure.

What have you seen change in your lifetime?

In my lifetime, the river here has changed dramatically. Many birds and other species that were once common in our rivers and lakes have now disappeared. For people who know these places well, that kind of loss is not abstract. You notice when the water changes. You notice when the birds no longer return. You notice when the landscape feels less alive than it did before.

How does freshwater loss affect herder and farming families?

When the water fails, herders and farmers face direct risks to their livelihoods. Drought and harsh winters—*dzuds*—can mean pastures and hayfields produce less, leaving animals without enough fodder. As grazing and

hay yields decline, households can experience a sharp drop in income and food security. In that way, water scarcity becomes economic and social vulnerability for rural families.

What has changed for the better through this conservation work?

TNC's involvement has brought changes that would not have happened otherwise. You have supported the creation of management plans for Local Protected Areas and the development of a new eco-center. You have also drawn international attention to local freshwater risks and biodiversity challenges. In short, you have provided resources and expertise that strengthened conservation efforts in our region.

What do you want our readers to understand?

I want them to understand that freshwater conservation is about people as much as it is about nature. When rivers are healthy, families have more security. Animals have pasture and water. Birds and fish have the habitat they need. When communities have plans, knowledge and support, they can protect what matters most. Thank you for helping make that possible.





Conservation's North Star

Co-establishing new Local Protected Areas in two northern Mongolia watersheds

Khuvsgul province's rivers begin high in Mongolia's north and carry life outward: to herder families, grasslands, fish, birds and downstream ecosystems. Over the past year, that shared dependence became the foundation for new local protection.

In the Eg-Uur River basin, **TNC helped secure 299,487 hectares of new Local Protected Areas**, or LPAs—a major step for headwaters, tributaries, freshwater habitats and the communities who depend on them. In the neighboring Delgermurun River basin, that progress recently **grew by another 63,278 hectares of LPAs** in Zuun Nuur-Havtsgait, accompanied by an approved community-led 10-year management plan to safeguard freshwater habitat and prevent water pollution and other threats.

What this means in the Eg-Uur Basin:

The Eg-Uur designations protect river headwaters, tributaries and key biodiversity habitats, including places important for the Asian great bustard and Siberian taimen. These protections also demonstrate how local governments and communities



Left: Boshloi Rock towers above the Delgermurun River in Khuvsgul province © Erdenebulgan; Above: A Siberian taimen © Tumuruu

can define conservation boundaries, monitor use and connect freshwater protection with livelihoods. "The attitudes of local representatives toward preserving the natural environment and maintaining its original state have shifted positively," Khanddorj T., Governor of Tsagaan-Uur soum, says of TNC's partnership.

What this means in the Delgermurun Basin: The new Delgermurun LPAs extend protection into an adjacent river system where conservation can be led locally from the start. The 10-year management plan was developed through a participatory process and clearly identifies how communities will help prevent water pollution and other primary threats.

Together, these designations show what lasting conservation looks like in Mongolia: not protection imposed from afar, but decisions made with local people, for places that sustain their water, animals, traditions and future.



Herding Families **Leading** the Way

Above: Galbadrakh Tserens is a herder in Khuvsgul province
© Matthieu Paley

Expanding the power and reach of community-based organizations

Across Mongolia's vast grasslands, herder communities are proving that conservation works best when local people lead. For more than a decade, TNC has supported herders to form **community-based organizations (CBOs)**, giving them a stronger voice in managing shared pastures and natural resources while improving their livelihoods. Under this model, TNC leverages a 2012 environmental protection law amendment, enabling herders to gain formal recognition of communal pasturelands and resource management rights. **As of 2026, 345 CBOs covering nearly 11.1 million hectares have been established.**

The CBO model helps communities work together to address overgrazing, restore traditional grazing

practices and strengthen stewardship of some of the world's last intact temperate grasslands. To support these local groups, TNC has also helped establish eight larger associations that coordinate activities across broader landscapes, facilitate peer learning and strengthen collective decision-making.

Recognizing that healthy ecosystems depend on healthy communities, TNC has paired conservation efforts with programs that create new economic opportunities. Community members have launched pilot ecotourism camps, explored small-scale sustainable businesses and participated in training that helps families diversify income while reducing pressure on grasslands.



A key part of this work is the introduction of **Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs)** in selected regions. The VSLA model gives community members access to basic financial services, encourages entrepreneurship and strengthens social cohesion. By helping families save, invest and generate income outside traditional livestock production, VSLAs reduce economic vulnerability while supporting more sustainable land management practices. Since 2023, TNC and partners have helped establish VSLAs across more than 100 CBOs in 10 *soums*. Together, these efforts demonstrate how conservation and community well-being can advance hand in hand.



Looking Forward

Mongolia's conservation story is at an inflection point. The foundations laid over years of patient work—the institutions, the science, the community relationships—are now ready to carry more weight. The year ahead is one of delivery.

In the coming months, Mongolia will formally launch a national Policy Roadmap on Reducing the Vulnerability of Livestock Production to Climate Change—a milestone under the Eternal Mongolia initiative and a signal that Mongolia is ready to move from commitment to action.

The roadmap addresses one of the most pressing realities facing the country: climate change is intensifying droughts, accelerating pasture degradation and increasing risks for herder communities who have few alternatives when the land fails them. The roadmap provides a practical, policy-level framework to reduce that vulnerability—aligning rangeland management, adaptive livelihoods and climate resilience into a single national direction.

Its launch at UNCCD COP17 in August 2026—the UN's premier global forum on desertification and land degradation—positions Mongolia as a country with credible answers, not just ambitious targets.

Sustainable finance for protected areas

Alongside the policy roadmap, work is advancing to develop the financing mechanisms that protected areas need for long-term sustainability. Studies currently underway are exploring protected area entrance fees, natural resource use fees and a conservation and tourism levy—mechanisms that could provide predictable, reinvestable funding.

Top: Livestock herds move across the grassland landscape of Zavkhan province in northwestern Mongolia © Matthieu Paley; Inset: Urantsetseg has been a herder for over 30 years © Asher Svidensky



Join Us

Mongolia shows what becomes possible when conservation is built for the long term. The challenges are significant: climate change is intensifying droughts and harsh winters, pressures on grasslands and freshwater systems are growing, and many protected areas still lack the resources needed to achieve their full potential.

Yet the opportunities are equally real: communities protecting critical watersheds, herders shaping sustainable land management, new locally designated protected areas safeguarding freshwater systems and national institutions being built to sustain conservation for generations.

Your support can help TNC and our partners build on this momentum: strengthening protected area management, protecting rivers and freshwater, expanding community-led conservation and advancing the sustainable financing systems that will ensure Mongolia's breathtaking landscapes endure long into the future.

For more information,
please contact:

Tom Brzostowski

Director of Development, Asia Pacific
The Nature Conservancy
thomas.brzostowski@tnc.org

Herder on horseback, Mongolia © Matthieu Paley