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AFGHANISTAN

SUCCESS STORY

Afghanistan's First National Park

USAID helps establish first National Park in Afghanistan



Photo: WCS

Breathtaking views such as this one await Afghan and international tourists who will soon be able to visit the Band-e-Amir National Park in Bamyan.

USAID programs are helping Afghans to improve natural resource management, preserve biodiversity, and ensure sustainable development.

Afghan and international tourists have long been denied the stunning aspect of the six cobalt-blue Band-e-Amir lakes in central Bamyan province. The lakes are supported by natural travertine dams, created by calcium deposits over a period of millions of years. They stretch across the valley in long graceful arcs, and merge into a strikingly beautiful landscape of stone, desert and water. The vistas rival those of national parks anywhere in the world.

USAID, through its implementing partner the Wildlife Conservation Society, has been working since 2006 to develop the institutions and foster the consensus that ultimately resulted in the Earth Day declaration of National Park status for Band-e-Amir by the Director General of Afghanistan's National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA).

Afghanistan's Environment Law requires a strong component of local management of protected areas. To fulfill that mandate, WCS initially educated the residents in the 13 villages located within the territory of the park about the economic opportunities that national park status would provide. Villagers were then recruited as members of the Band-e-Amir Protected Area Committee (BAPAC). BAPAC and WCS jointly prepared a Management Plan for the park, and WCS assisted local officials to successfully navigate the national park proposal through the Afghanistan central government's many bureaucratic layers.

WCS is now training rangers to protect the flora and fauna in the park, and also educating the provincial and national government officials who must manage and oversee park operations and ensure sustainability. WCS continues to help the government develop laws and policies on protected areas, protected species, and community-based natural resource management.

In anticipation of national park status, local entrepreneurs had already begun building small shops, restaurants, and hotels to serve tourists. USAID-funded partners provided guidance to help them place these structures away from the most ecologically sensitive areas. Now that the park has achieved official status and protection, the local people will have the opportunity to protect, preserve and profit from this beautiful landscape.

