



ITG International Takhi Group  
Freunde des Wildpferdes

December 2024

## Letter of Concern

***The International Takhi Group (ITG) strongly opposes the opening of the Naran Sevstei Border Port - a conservation threat to the Great Gobi A Strictly Protected Area in Mongolia and its unique flora and fauna.***

### **Global value of Great Gobi A SPA**

The Great Gobi Strictly Protected Area was designated in 1975, a milestone and model for the establishment of large, protected areas worldwide. The part A of the Great Gobi SPA stretches of 4.6 million hectare and is the largest unpopulated area in Mongolia. The size, the remoteness and low human footprint of this ecosystem allows for undisturbed natural dynamics and habitat for species with extraordinary value, such as the Gobi bear and the Wild Bactrian camel.

### **Consequences of opening Naran Sevstei border crossing**

It is proposed that the Naran Sevstei Border Port is opening as early as the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2025. The port is located at the border between Mongolia and China inside the Great Gobi A SPA. It is planned to connect the port via a road to wider Mongolia along the Western side of the border – 220 km of road within the strictly protected area.

The port has already been open in 1992/93 demonstrating its disturbance potential through vehicle traffic impacting the local endangered species populations. Today, the impact will most likely be aggravated as development of a modern export port will require paved roads, service infrastructure, and massively increased border crossing facilities. The border post will attract people leading to increased traffic and the development of shortcuts through the Great Gobi A SPA.

### **Consequences for the wildlife population**

The Great Gobi A SPA is located in an extreme and harsh desert environment which requires fauna and flora to develop specific adaptations for survival. Any disturbance, displacement, or human induced mortality is costly for wildlife populations living in such an extreme habitat.

The Great Gobi A SPA is home to the **Gobi bear** – a unique bear species which cannot be found anywhere else in the world. The highly endangered Gobi bear (only around 30 animals are left) could easily be pushed to extinction if its habitat gets restricted further.

The Great Gobi A SPA is also home to one of only three remaining population of **wild camels** worldwide. The wild camel habitat includes border areas and the species is highly sensitive to disturbances caused by human impact.

The Great Gobi A SPA is a **Transboundary hotspot** as five mammal species listed under the Convention of Migratory Species (CMS) are living in the strictly protected area: **wild camel, khulan, goitered gazelle, Argali sheep, snow leopard, Pallas cat, and Eurasian lynx**. A busy mining road will fragment the connectivity for migratory species among protected areas within Mongolia nationally and between Mongolia and China internationally.



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**The ITG** supports the reintroduction of the Przewalsk's horse (Takhi in Mongolian) since over 30 years. Our vision is: *Being a long-term competence partner to Mongolia and all countries in the original homeland of takhi in Central Asia in order to conserve and, where appropriate, help to create ecological networks of protected areas for the reintroduction and conservation of takhi and its habitat.* Thereby, the connectivity of ecosystems to support species migration is of central importance. Within this frame, the ITG strongly supports Mongolia's efforts for the nomination of the Mongolian Gobi, with Great and Small Gobi protected areas and two adjacent mountain protected areas as a serial **World Natural Heritage Site**.


#### **Consequences for the Great Gobi ecosystem**

For many of the animal species, including several large mammals, the Gobi Desert has become the last remaining global stronghold. The opening of the Naran Sevstei Border Post would dramatically impact the integrity of the largest of the four Gobi Strictly protected areas. **The decline or even extinction of the Gobi bear and wild camel is a real risk** and would extinguish decades of dedicated conservation work. Adding Naran Sevstei to the list of export ports to be developed **would most likely mean the end of any ambitions to nominate the Gobi Landscapes as a World Heritage site.**

***Our major concern is that the Naran Sevstei port will significantly reduce the size of the PA, negatively impact the pristine nature and low human footprint of the Great Gobi A Strictly Protected Area, increase the likelihood of extinction of the Gobi bear and wild camel, and hinder species migration between protected areas in the Gobi nationally and internationally.***

***We, therefore, ask the Mongolian government to reconsider the plans for opening of this port.***

Kind regards,  
The International Takhi Group



Dr. Reinhard Schnidrig, President of the ITG