



Nam Ha Ecotourism Project



1. Name of Project: Nam Ha Ecotourism Project Phase II

2. Reporting period: Year One, March 1 2005 – February 28, 2006

3. Summary of Project Progress

This report outlines the first year of implementation of the Nam Ha Ecotourism Project Phase II. Over the first year of project implementation there have been substantial changes made to the leadership of the Provincial Tourism Office and tourism management framework in the province. The new leader of the PTO has reinvigorated its staff and taken it in new directions to further strengthen Community Based Tourism development and management in the province. This has led to the most successful year ever for tourism in Luang Namtha Province, with widespread socio-economic benefits reaching local communities, business operators and the public sector.

In addition to the reinvigorated PTO the project has restarted a number of participatory activities with focal villages and key stakeholders in the tourism sector. The provincial tour guides now meet monthly to discuss ways to improve tourism products and resolve potential conflicts. Villagers are consulted bi-annually to monitor the cultural, natural and economic impacts that tourism is producing in their communities. The project has also had success in supporting the turnover of PTO designed products to the private-sector, which has increased employment opportunities and financial benefits to local communities.

Working closely with the ADB's Mekong Tourism Development Project a number of infrastructure projects have been supported including the construction of a clean water supply in Ban Nalan. Cooperation with ADB-MTDP, GTZ and the EU has led to the construction of three beautifully situated information offices for each of our priority districts. The project has added to the value of these offices through the design and production of 12 interpretive displays outlining the cultural, historical and natural attractions found in the province.

As we move into the second year of project implementation the project is focusing technical support on the creation and adoption of cooperative agreements that outline roles and responsibilities and clarify the relationships between communities, the PTO, tour operators and the Nam Ha NPA Management Authorities. At the same time Green Discovery has been negotiating similar contracts to fulfill this role. In the next year the project hopes to develop longer term action plans for each focal village, support the creation of a provincial tourism strategy and action plan, and increase the PTOs capacity to manage three district-level tourism offices.

4. List of activities undertaken during this reporting period:

- a. Training

1. Village Handicraft Training in Ban Piengnam in cooperation with the ADB funded Mekong Tourism Development Project*
 2. Conducted English Language Training for Guides in Nam Tha†
 3. Conducted English Language Training for Guides in Vieng Phouka
 4. Hospitality and House Keeping Trainings in Focal Villages
 5. Conducted Gibbon Monitoring Survey Training in Vieng Phoukha
 6. Review of Tourism Opportunities in Muang Sing
 7. Review of Tourism Opportunities in Vieng Phouka
 8. Conservation Seminar in Ban Nalan
 9. Intensive Hospitality Training for Villagers in Ban Nalan
- b. Infrastructure
1. Survey for Water Systems in Ban Nalan and Ban Nam Goi
 2. Constructed Water System in Ban Nalan
 3. Strengthened the foundation of the PTO Office in Luang Namtha
- c. others (list)
1. Recruited the project team
 2. Established a national supervisory committee
 3. Established a provincial supervisory committee
 4. Established the project office in Luang Namtha
 5. Conducted the project introductory workshop
 6. Conducted 6-month household survey to monitor tourism impacts in Ban Nalan
 7. Attended district meeting for the GTZ/Exotissimo PPP
 8. Conducted the monthly guide meeting for April
 9. Conducted 6-month household survey to monitor tourism impacts in Ban Nammat
 10. Drafted project website update
 11. Hosted a study tour from the SNV Savannakhet Ecotourism Project
 12. Conducted 6-month household survey to monitor tourism impacts in Ban Piengnam
 13. Conducted the monthly guide meeting for May
 14. Attended Thai Travel Mart, Bangkok Thailand
 15. Created Promotional Posters for Lao Tourism Product Meeting
 16. Participated in Lao Tourism Product Meeting
 17. Recruited Two Interns to conduct English Guide Trainings
 18. Attended Improving Tourism Management in Luang Namtha Meeting
 19. Conducted the monthly guide meeting for June
 20. 6-Month planning meeting with GTZ
 21. Analysis of 6-Month Monitoring Data for Ban Nalan, Ban Nammat Mai and Ban Phiengnam
 22. Field Visit to Vieng Phouka with Wildlife Conservation Society
 23. Conducted the monthly guide meeting for July
 24. Drafted Baseline Report
 25. Draft Training of Trainers Curriculum for for Community-Based Ecotourism Development
 26. Conducted the monthly guide meeting for August

* Although few formal training opportunities were presented during this quarter, numerous opportunities to improve the skills of project and PTO personnel in English language, computer operation and repair, and planning and critical thinking were presented daily throughout the reporting period

† As well as formal training opportunities presented during this quarter, numerous opportunities to improve the skills of project and PTO personnel in English language, computer operation and repair, and planning and critical thinking were presented daily throughout the reporting period

27. Participated in the NZAID Country Program Meeting
28. Recruited an intern to conduct gibbon monitoring
29. Conducted the monthly guide meeting for September
30. Revised Project Document submitted to NZAID
31. Conducted the monthly guide meeting for October
32. Final Baseline Report
33. Meeting with WCS and ADRA on Route 3 Construction issues
34. Introduced a Monthly PTO Meeting
35. Conducted the monthly guide meeting for November
36. Completed improvements on the Namtha Tourism information Center
37. Designed and printed 12 interpretive panels for information centers in Luang Namtha, Muang Sing and Vieng Phoukha.
38. Conducted 6-month monitoring visits to Ban Nalan, Ban Nam Goi, Ban Piengnam and Ban Nammatt Mai
39. Transferred the Nam Ha Jungle Camp to Green Discovery
40. Met with Long District Governor to discuss tourism opportunities in the district
41. Hired photographer to supplement photos for interpretation panels
42. Conducted the monthly guide meeting for December
43. Conducted the monthly guide meeting for January
44. Surveyed Hmong traditional activities in Ban Sam Yod
45. Met to discuss Ban Nalan cooperative agreement
46. Final approval of Ban Nalan cooperative agreement
47. Continued gibbon surveys
48. Conducted tourist survey on wildlife and interest in superior nature guides
49. Developed a conceptual plan for the development of the Bor Kung Area in Vieng Phoukha
50. Reviewed and implemented a new pricing system for all PTO tourism products
51. Implemented Ban Jeulensouk survey to test for interest in establishing village home-stays
52. Distributed Information Boards to areas frequented by tourists
53. Prepared invitations for Annual Review Meeting

5. Outcome of activities undertaken during this reporting period:

a. Training

1. Village Handicraft Training in Ban Piengnam in cooperation with the ADB funded Mekong Tourism Development Project

The project supported 9 villagers from Ban Nam Hoy and Ban Nam Lu, Ban Sop Doot to attend a three-day training on handicraft production, promotion, presentation and sale in Ban Piengnam. The training was organized by the Mekong Tourism Development Project, which contracted Mr. Jim Johnson as a trainer for this activity. The event touched on numerous topics that the villagers found interesting and relevant. Subsequent follow up activities will gauge how much and what parts of the training the villagers will actually use.

2. Conducted English Language Training for Guides in Nam Tha

English language training for beginner and advanced guides was held at the Provincial Tourism Office from July 4 through September 10. Approximately 20 guides regularly attend the trainings. This training was held in a semi-formal setting and the UNESCO Intern created daily lesson plans to support additional trainers in the future.

3. Conducted English Language Training for Guides in Vieng Phouka

English language training for beginner and advanced guides was held at the Vieng Phouka Tourist Information Office from July 4 through August 6. Approximately 15 guides regularly attended the trainings. This training took on a more informal tone and was conducted in the field at every possible opportunity.

4. Conducted three Hospitality Trainings

Hospitality trainings were held in the focal villages of Ban Nalan/Nam Goi, Ban Phiengnam/Nam Hoi and Ban Nammat Mai. Representatives from 17 additional villages attended these 2 day trainings for a refresher course on how to welcome guests, cook food for tourists and continue the upkeep of village guest houses and their associated equipment and facilities. The trainings were undertaken by the project team with support from the PTO.

5. Conducted Gibbon Monitoring Survey Training

Mr. Jeff Brown, UNESCO intern, conducted a two-day training with NPA and DAFO on methods for surveying and recording gibbons in the NPA and surrounding forests. This training served as a launching point for several months of intensive field work undertaken from December 2005 – February 2006..

6. Review of Tourism Opportunities in Muang Sing

The National Project Coordinator spent December 8-19 meeting with villagers in Muang Sing to review their past experiences with tourism and to look for opportunities for improvement. In total 11 communities were visited. A number of long standing problems were discussed, primarily based on misunderstandings between villagers and tour guides. Discussions are ongoing between the Muang Sing District Government, the Luang Namtha PTO and GTZ on how to improve the guides and guide systems in Muang Sing.

7. Review of Tourism Opportunities in Vieng Phouka

The National Project Coordinator and the head of the PTO visited Vieng Phouka on December 25 to participate in a clean up day for the Nam Eng Cave and discuss current issues that the villagers face in promoting tourism in the area. The opportunity was used to provide a short training on conservation awareness and discuss the links between conservation and tourism.

8. Conservation Seminar in Ban Nalan

During the course of developing a cooperative agreement with the village of Ban Nalan, representatives of the Nam Ha NPA conducted a one-day seminar on the importance of biodiversity conservation. This seminar was attended by all residents of Ban Nalan and was used as a forum to discuss the conservation responsibilities outlined in the cooperative agreement.

9. Intensive Hospitality Training for villagers in Ban Nalan

From December 9 to January 18 an intensive hospitality training was organized in Ban Nalan. A trainer was placed in Ban Nalan for one month to work with villagers to improve their system for providing and preparing food as well as taking care of tourism infrastructure especially linens and bedding. After one month of village-based activities three key people were identified to attend a one-week hospitality training at the Boat Landing Guest House in Luang Namtha town. These same people received an additional weeklong training in product costing and basic accounting to understand the value of their services and the products they provide. A follow up visit to Ban Nalan next quarter as well as tourist and guide feedback will be used to assess the effectiveness of this training method.

b. Infrastructure

1. Surveyed for Water Systems in Ban Nalan and Ban Nam Goi

The Project Team with the assistance of the Senior Ecotourism Advisor and the provincial water department conducted detailed surveys and prepared plans to develop clean water supplies in Ban Nalan and Ban Nam Goi. District plans to relocate some villages including possibly Ban Nam Goy have delayed construction of the gravity fed water system in that village until a decision on whether or not the village will be moved is made.

2. Constructed Water System in Ban Nalan

After initial surveys in Quarter 3 a gravity fed clean water system was constructed in Ban Nalan. A similar system is planned for Ban Nam Goi and will be built as soon as a decision has been made regarding the location of the village..

3. Increased floor supports to PTO Office in Luang Namtha

Minor improvements and additions were made to the cement foundation of the Luang Namtha PTO office in order to stabilize the building.

c. others (list)

1. Recruited the project team

Two expatriate consultants, one national project coordinator, two national tourism experts and one national protected area expert have been contracted to act as the project team.

2. Established a National Supervisory Committee

The committee was established prior to the Project Introductory Workshop. Membership of the committee consists of representatives from:

Lao National Tourism Administration - Department of International Cooperation;
Lao National Commission for UNESCO - Office of the Secretary General, Lao-UNESCO;
Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry – Division of Forest Resource Conservation;
Ministry of Information and Culture - Department of Archaeology and Museums;
Office of the Prime Minister - Science Technology and Environment Agency; and
Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Foreign Investment Management Committee

The National Supervisory Committee attended the Project Introductory Workshop and all members attend the project's bi-annual supervisory meetings and tourism board meetings.

3. Established a Provincial Steering Committee

The committee was established prior to the Project Introductory Workshop. Membership of the committee consists of representatives from:

Office of the Vice-Governor
Provincial Tourism Office
Provincial Department of Agriculture and Forestry
Nam Ha National Protected Area Management Unit
Provincial Planning Office
Provincial Police Department

Provincial Information and Culture Service
Provincial Science, Technology and Environment Office
Provincial Women's Union
Provincial Foreign Investment Management Office
Provincial Department of Communication, Post, Transport and Construction

The Provincial Steering Committee attended the Project Introductory Workshop and all members attend the project's bi-annual supervisory and tourism board meetings.

4. Established the Project Office in Luang Namtha

The project team is housed in the Luang Namtha Provincial Tourism Office. This working space was cleaned and the furniture rearranged prior to occupancy to accommodate all project staff working in the province.

5. Conducted the Project Introductory Workshop

The Project Introductory Workshop was held in Luang Namtha on March 29, 2005. Representatives from the National Supervisory Committee and the Provincial Steering Committee attended as well as personnel from relevant projects and private interests in the province.

6. Conducted 6-month household survey to monitor tourism impacts in Ban Nalan

From April 21-23, 2005 the project team conducted detailed household surveys with the 33 families in Ban Nalan. The surveys are designed to understand changing trends in the village as well as changing attitudes towards tourists and tourism.

7. Conducted the monthly guide meeting for April

On April 30, 2005 most of the currently active tourist guides and drivers met at the provincial tourism office to discuss issues and constraints currently facing the guide profession in Luang Namtha. Over 30 registered guides attended the meeting and discussed issues ranging from the care and cleaning of ecolodge facilities to the rising cost of chickens and other foods in trekking villages. This was the first meeting of its kind to be conducted since the end of the first phase of the project. Constraints involving the quality of the trails were highlighted most often although in depth discussion of the management of the guide service and the PTO's role were not touched on. Following this meeting an anonymous questionnaire was used to solicit more frank comments from the guides.

8. Attended district meeting for the GTZ/Exotissimo PPP

At present there is only one private-public partnership in Luang Namtha Province. This partnership is between GTZ and the tourism company Exotissimo. The project aims to develop community based tourism in 8 Akha villages in Muang Sing District. The project has been working in the area for slightly less than a year although GTZ has many years of experience working on development issues in the same villages. Activities including identification of target villages, surveying prospective trails and building three village ecolodges. The meeting held on May 4, 2005 reviewed the project's progress to date and solicited all participants for ideas to overcome existing challenges. As a result of this meeting, the PTO with technical support of the project team provided guide training for 8 village level guides.

9. Conducted 6-month household survey to monitor tourism impacts in Ban Nammat Mai

From May 9-11, 2005 the project team conducted detailed household surveys with the 27 families in Ban Nammat Mai. The surveys are designed to understand changing trends in

the village as well as changing attitudes towards tourists and tourism. Data from this visit was analyzed and compiled into a standard report.

10. Drafted project website update

The International Ecotourism Advisor has revised the Nam Ha Ecotourism Project website to reflect the activities of the second phase of the project. The website can be seen at <http://www.unescobkk.org/index.php?id=486>

11. Hosted a study tour from the SNV Savannakhet Ecotourism Project

During the week of May 16-20, the National Project Coordinator hosted a study tour from the SNV Ecotourism Project in Savannakhet Province. Activities included a review of phase 1 activities, the current situation and planning activities in phase 2. The group then went on the Samyot Trek to experience community based tourism first hand.

12. Conducted 6-month household survey to monitor tourism impacts in Ban Piengnam

From May 23-24, 2005 the project team conducted detailed household surveys with the 56 families in Ban Piengnam. The surveys are designed to understand changing trends in the village as well as changing attitudes towards tourists and tourism. Data from this visit was analyzed and compiled into a standard report.

13. Conducted the monthly guide meeting for May

On May 30, 2005 the Luang Namtha Guide association met again to discuss issues and constraints facing the guide profession in the province. At this meeting initial feedback from the anonymous questionnaire was presented and discussed.

14. Attended Thai Travel Mart, Bangkok Thailand

The International Training Advisor attended the Thai Travel Mart in Bangkok Thailand on June 18. The Travel Mart showcases several hundred tour operators and tourism related products in Thailand and Southeast Asia, thus serving as an important source of ideas and networking opportunities.

15. Created Promotional Posters for Lao Tourism Product Meeting

Three posters were created to promote Nam Ha Ecotourism at the "Ecotourism Laos" Exhibition held in Vientiane during June 2005.

16. Participated in Lao Tourism Product Meeting

The International Training Advisor and the National Project Advisor attended the "Ecotourism Laos" Exhibition held in Vientiane during June 2005. This was the first such meeting of its kind in the Lao PDR and will hopefully become an annual event. Hosted by the ADB Mekong Tourism Development Project, the focus was primarily on new tourism products designed by that project. Since Luang Namtha is a focal province for CBT development there were numerous opportunities to promote Nam Ha Ecotourism to the press and other tourism promoters and partners.

17. Conducted Anonymous Guide Questionnaire

An anonymous questionnaire was circulated amongst all tourist guides to assess their feelings about the guide association in Luang Namtha. The questionnaire was kept anonymous to encourage frank discussion of current problems. Analysis of the questionnaire resulted in much more open discussion of the guide rotation system that was in place at the time. This is a topic that has never been discussed openly at the monthly guide meetings. A summary of the questionnaires can be found in the project's Baseline Report.

18. Recruited Two Interns to conduct English Guide Trainings

English training for guides is a cornerstone for quality nature and culture interpretation. Two volunteer interns were recruited through the project to teach English in Nam Tha and Vieng Phouka. This resulted in an intensive one month course in Vieng Phouka and a more formal three month English training in Nam Tha.

19. Attended Improving Tourism Management in Luang Namtha Meeting

The project's greatest initial challenge was sub-standard leadership of the Provincial Tourism Office. A meeting was held at the Lao National Tourism Administration in Vientiane on June 28 with all donors and projects actively involved in the tourism sector in Luang Namtha. At the meeting, all parties were assured of an imminent change in leadership. This assurance was acted upon the LNTA and a new director of the PTO was installed in October 2005.

20. Supported GTZ Guide Training in Muang Sing

The National Project Advisor participated as a trainer in the one week training of village guides in Muang Sing. This training was held by the GTZ/Exotissimo public private partnership with technical assistance from the Luang Namtha PTO. Specific topics included: An overview of tourism; Reasons tourist come to Lao; Locations that tourist come from; and Activities tourists wish to participate in.

21. Conducted the monthly guide meeting for June

The monthly meeting on Nam Tha Guides was held on June 30. 18 guides attended the meeting. This was the highest attendance since the meetings started. Topics discussed included the continued deterioration of trails and the quality and cleanliness of sleeping facilities.

22. 6-Month planning meeting with GTZ

On July 26 the International Training Advisor met with Ms. Meike Mumm from GTZ-Muang Sing. The meeting focused on GTZ's desire and willingness to become more involved in supporting the tourism sector in Muang Sing. These activities include a training assessment of the Muang Sing guide association and improved district level tourism planning. These activities are complimentary to the activities planned by the Nam Ha Project and are an excellent opportunity to strengthen tourism in Muang Sing.

23. Analysis of 6-Month Monitoring Data for Ban Nalan, Ban Nammat Mai and Ban Phiengnam

The 6-month monitoring data collected during Quarter 1 for three target villages was summarized and analyzed and used to produce the project's Baseline Report. In general attitudes remain positive towards tourism in all three villages. Both Ban Nalan and Ban Nammat Mai receive significant streams of revenue from the tours and funds are dispersed well through out the village. In Ban Phiengnam tourism is less of a factor in the village since it has a large population, lies closer to the provincial town center and has a much more diversified set of income streams.

24. Field Visit to Vieng Phouka with Wildlife Conservation Society

In Quarter 3 the Wildlife Conservation Society worked with the project to gain greater understanding of the Black-cheeked Gibbon population in Vieng Phouka. Starting in October the project hosted an intern to conduct research on the Gibbons and their potential role in ecotourism development. This preliminary visit was done to introduce the sub-project to Vieng Phouka and visit the primary Gibbon focal village of Ban Nam Lo.

25. Conducted the monthly guide meeting for July

The monthly Nam Tha Guides meeting was held on July 30. Only 9 guides attended the meeting. This was the lowest attendance ever. The meeting was held during a heavy rainstorm which surely limited participation to a certain degree. The topics discussed once again included the continued deterioration of trails and the quality and cleanliness of sleeping facilities. Low attendance may also have been attributable to the lack of action on the part of the PTO (at the time) to respond to any of the guides' complaints.

26. Hosted Minister Somphong Mongkhounvilay's visit to Luang Namtha

Minister Somphong Mongkhounvilay the Chairman of the Lao National Tourism Administration visited Luang Namtha province from August 10 – August 12. The project met the Minister in Vieng Phouka and traveled with him throughout his visit providing many opportunities to openly discuss the current situation and the remarkable opportunities for tourism development in Luang Namtha.

27. Met with Gary Oughton, Nam Ha Poverty Alleviation Project

On August 25 the International Training Advisor met with Gary Oughton the team leader for the Nam Ha Poverty Alleviation Project. This project is supported by the ADB and involves the NGO ADRA and the private consulting group ECOLAO. The project will focus on communities between Ban Nam Ha and Vieng Phouka for the next four years. Although not directly linked with existing Nam Ha Project villages, the project hopes to expand to the entire NPA buffer zone over time. This could present interesting opportunities for collaboration in the future. In particular the project's dedicated GIS staff could become an important source of maps while opportunities for integrated conservation and development activities may also arise in the future.

28. Draft Baseline Report

The project's Baseline Report summarizes data collected from villages, guides and tourism revenue at the beginning of the Nam Ha project. This data was compiled during the biannual village monitoring visits, the guide assessment and the monthly tourism statistics from the province. The project hopes to facilitate marked improvement over the baseline situation by the end of the project.

29. Draft Training of Trainers Curriculum for for Community-Based Ecotourism Development

The Training of Trainers Curriculum for Community-Based Ecotourism Development builds on the experiences of Nam Ha Phase I and the Mekong Tourism Development Project to provide a step-by-step guide on how to establish future Community Based Ecotourism Products. This will serve as the National Tourism Administration's starting point for developing future tourism products in the country and could potentially be used regionally as well.

30. Conducted the monthly guide meeting for August

The monthly meeting of the Nam Tha Guides was held on August 30. 15 guides attended the meeting and an additional 5 guides were on treks and unable to attend. The meeting was held during the workday so guides who work other jobs were not able to attend. The meeting was productive in reviewing problems consistently faced by guides. In the past month new sleeping material was purchased by the tourism office and provided to Ban Nalan. The meeting touched on the need for a system for regular cleaning of all materials provided by the office. Other discussions focused on the standardized pricing of food, the transparency of the guide rotation system and the implementation of a new financial arrangement where village funds are co-managed in a village specific bank account.

- 31. Participated in the NZAID Country Program Meeting**
The International Training Advisor attended the NZAID review of the newly proposed Lao Country Program with Heather Peters and Rik Ponne. Discussion was planned to cover the deteriorating situation in Luang Namtha due to sub-standard management by the head of the PTO. Fortunately word that his removal was imminent arrived just prior to the meeting. Subsequent discussions centered on the revision of the project document for final approval by NZAID. This included the idea that additional funds could be requested to fulfill the additional recommendations provided by the external SNV review.
- 32. Recruited an Intern to conduct gibbon monitoring**
The project recruited Mr. Jeff Brown as an UNESCO intern. Mr. Brown is working towards a Masters of Science at Antioch New England University. He focused his attention on finding remaining populations of the endangered Black-cheeked Gibbon. A result of Mr. Brown's research is proposed ecotourism activities and systems that can be used to help conserve the gibbon's dwindling population.
- 33. Conducted the monthly guide meeting for September**
The monthly meeting of the Namtha Guides was held on September 30. 12 guides attended the meeting. Main topics discussed included the continued deterioration of trails and the quality and cleanliness of sleeping facilities.
- 34. Revised Project Document submitted to NZAID**
On October 17 2005 a fully revised project document was submitted to NZAID for final approval. This document extended the timeframe of the project into March of 2008 and requested a substantial increase in funds to cover more TA time and additional activities as outlined by the external SNV review. The document was approved based on a Letter of Variation to the project's funding agreement between NZAID to UNESCO, which was sent in late February 2006.
- 35. Conducted the monthly guide meeting for October**
The monthly meeting of Namtha Guides was held on October 30. Attendance was up to 15 slightly higher than the month before. This was the first opportunity for the new PTO leader to meet with the guides. The discussion centered on how many of the issues facing the guide service could be corrected and improved.
- 36. Final Baseline Report**
The Draft Baseline Report mentioned in the Q2 report was circulated for comments and subsequently revised into its final version.
- 37. Meeting with WCS and ADRA on Route 3 Construction issues**
The NGO ADRA has begun implementing a 5 year project to help develop community development strategies for communities living between the Nam Ha NPA and Vieng Phouka Town. Although none of these communities are currently in PTO run tourism areas there is potential to collaborate with this new project. In particular the links to spatial planning and improved agriculture systems. As part of this project WCS is investigating issues related to NTFP trade and sale. At the request of the head of the NPA the three organizations held a meeting to discuss issues related to the construction of the Route 3 (Bangkok to Beijing Highway). Discussions covered a number of topics related to the location of spoil piles and re-vegetation of road cuts as well as monitoring and patrolling. Of particular interest was the discussion of placement of two check-points on the road where it enters and leaves the NPA. This has been recommended by all previous environmental impact assessments on the project but has apparently not approved. The development of a single checkpoint within the NPA is being discussed by

the road builders. This strategy is impractical for a number of reasons and all parties agreed that two check points are needed. One of these checkpoints would be located in Ban Jeulensouk, a PTO tourism village. If developed this checkpoint could serve as an entry way to the NPA as well as an area to double check trekking permits prior to NPA entry.

38. Introduced a Monthly PTO Meeting

The new PTO leader has introduced a monthly meeting of the PTO staff to compliment the monthly guide meeting. This meeting was held on 15 November and will continue to be held on the 15th of subsequent months. This initial meeting focused on team work, increased transparency and revitalizing the systems to insure a well run PTO.

39. Visited Ban Jeulensouk to discuss the development of a home stay program

On November 18, the International Training Advisor went with the head of the PTO to visit Ban Jeulensouk. This was part of a series of re-familiarization visits the PTO head made since his return to the province. Discussions in the village revolved around the potential to supplement existing tourism income with a small home stay program. This would allow tourists the option of staying in the village rather than the provincial town on the night prior to a trek. It was decided that a questionnaire be developed to ask visitors to the Ban Nalan area if they would be interested in such a system and how much they would be willing to pay for it.

40. Conducted the 6-monthly Monitoring in Ban Nammat Mai

The project team visited Ban Nammat Mai on November 22 and 23 to interview all families in the course of our 6-month monitoring protocol. Despite hearing the contrary in town, Ban Nammat Mai had not completed their rice harvest and only half of the families were available for interviews. The remaining families were interviewed once the rice harvest was completed.

41. Conducted the monthly guide meeting for November

The November monthly guide meeting saw an increase in attendance to 18 guides, up from 15 the month before.

42. Completed improvements on the Namtha Tourist Information Center

The LNTA-ADB Mekong Tourism Development Project financed the construction of a new Tourist Information Center. The center was completed in December and handed over to district officials on December 28. The Nam Ha Project supported a number of improvements to the building as well as the installment of a wooden façade on a neighboring concrete building to make for a more aesthetically pleasing tourism compound.

43. Designed and printed 12 interpretive panels for information centers in Luang Namtha, Muang Sing and Vieng Phoukha.

In addition to supporting renovation of the Tourist Information Center building the project developed a series of interpretive panels for information centers in Luang Namtha, Muang Sing and Vieng Phoukha. These panels provide general information on community-based tourism, local products and festivals as well as more specific information on history, ethnic diversity and natural attractions in the three priority districts.

44. Conducted 6-month monitoring visits to Ban Nalan, Ban Nam Goi, Ban Piengnam and Ban Nammat Mai

The project team visited all four priority villages to conduct the six-monthly monitoring interviews. The team met with representatives of all families in the villages and collected a variety of information related to economic progress, land changes and tourism impacts.

45. Transferred the Nam Ha Jungle Camp to Green Discovery

In accordance with plans to improve cooperation with the private sector, operation of the Nam Ha Jungle camp trail was handed over to Green Discovery a local private tour operator. This trek will be closely monitored to see how the transfer from the PTO to the tour company affects the product and its benefits to villagers.

46. Met with Long District Governor to discuss tourism opportunities in the district

The project supported the National Coordinator and the head of Luang Namtha PTO to visit Long District and discuss tourism opportunities with the District Governor. Long District lies on the northern side of the Nam Ha NPA and could provide access to some high elevation areas in the center of the NPA. Long also includes the Mekong port town of Xieng Kok, potentially a future access to neighboring Myanmar.

47. Worked with photographer to supplement photos for interpretive materials

Mr. Kees Sprengers accompanied the national coordinator to visit a number of project sites in the three priority districts to develop a library of photos for use in future interpretive work.

48. Conducted the monthly guide meeting for December

The monthly guide meeting was held at the PTO and 28 guides attended (10 female and 18 male). The meeting discussed the upcoming changes to the pricing system based on guide's suggestions.

49. Conducted the monthly guide meeting for January

The first monthly guide meeting of 2006 was held at the PTO on January 30. 28 guides (28 male) attended the meeting. Discussions were based primarily on the new pricing system and its implementation. Guide's also voiced small problems that they had encountered with various tours in the past month. In general many fewer problems are being discussed in these meetings.

50. Surveyed Hmong traditional activities in Ban Sam Yot

The National Coordinator and the head of the PTO visited Ban Sam Yot to discuss their local customs and traditions with the hopes of developing interpretation materials and methods to be used villagers and tourists. A number of customs were highlighted for interpretation but a plan has yet to be developed.

51. Met to discuss Ban Nalan cooperative agreement

A number of meetings between the PTO and Ban Nalan were conducted in order to clarify responsibilities between all stakeholders especially the village, the PTO and the NPA. This process was linked with the construction of a gravity fed water system. The meetings were successful in increasing understanding between all parties as well as improving cooperation.

52. Final approval of Ban Nalan cooperative agreement

On January 24 the first cooperative agreement between villagers, the PTO and the NPA was official approved by all parties. The agreement outlined rules through a participatory process that will hopefully create a stronger commitment to sensible resource management, improved conservation of key habitats and good long term working relations between all parties.

53. Continued gibbon surveys

Mr. Jeff Brown, UNESCO intern, made several field surveys for Black-cheeked Gibbons in Vieng Phoukha and Nale districts. These surveys have been unfortunately less successful than those last conducted by the Wildlife Conservation Society in 2003. Only one group of gibbons has been recorded and a number of previous areas of suitable forest have been cleared for cultivation. It is unlikely that gibbons can be used as a suitable tourist attraction since their low numbers and quiet nature make them very difficult to locate and very unpredictable. There is clearly a greater need to try and conserve these magnificent creatures and this could be one of the projects greatest challenges.

54. Conducted tourist survey on wildlife and interest in superior nature guides

Mr. Jeff Brown also conducted a survey of tourist perceptions regarding wildlife and the need or potential market for superior quality guides that could provide much higher quality information and guide services for wildlife and other natural history information. The results of this survey will be reported in March 2006..

55. Developed a conceptual plan for the development of the Bor Kung Area in Vieng Phoukha

During the course of Mr. Brown's field work in Vieng Phoukha District he was able to produce a conceptual plan for the development of the Bor Kung area next to the Vieng Phoukha Tourist Information Office. The plan includes recommendations for bicycle rentals, a restaurant and interpretive trails to the area's spring and ancient temple ruins.

56. Reviewed and implemented a new pricing system for all PTO tourism products

As of January 1 2006 there were significant increases in the pricing of all treks in Luang Namtha. Part of this was due to increased energy prices while it also increased profits for a number of service providers, particularly in villages. Specific changes included an incentive fee for the information officer that books the treks, a rise in the trekking permit fee from \$1 per entry per person to \$1/day per person, a rise in transport costs to and from the trailheads, and higher pricing of village guesthouses and village meals. This increase has been met with broad support from most tourists and treks have continued to run successfully.

57. Implemented Ban Jeulensouk survey to test for interest in establishing village home-stays

The project and the PTO asked tourists going on the Ban Nalan Trek if they were interested in adding a home-stay in Ban Jeulensouk to their itinerary and if so how much would they be willing to pay. Response was overwhelmingly positive and a suggestion of \$5 was made for pricing. This option will be developed further during 2006.

58. Distributed Information Boards to areas frequented by tourists

Eight information boards were constructed and placed in important areas for tourists. These included the airport, bus station, guest houses and popular restaurants. Each board presents information on tourist products in the three priority districts as well as maps, do's and don'ts and messages from villagers to tourists.

59. Prepared invitations for Annual Review Meeting

The project originally planned to hold it's annual review meeting on February 28, 2006 in Luang Namtha. Due to scheduling conflicts with a number of key stakeholders the meeting has been postponed until early April. At the time of writing there is no confirmed

date for the meeting but many preparations have already been made for its successful implementation.

60. Began drafting an ecotourism strategy and action plan for the Nam Ha NPA

The project team, in cooperation with the LNTA-ADB Mekong Tourism Development Project, supported consultations and data collection in Luang Namtha to draft the first chapter of an ecotourism strategy and action plan for the Nam Ha NPA. Ongoing consultations to draft chapters II-V of this strategy will take place through 2006.

61. Developed the next Project 6-month Project Work Plan

The International Ecotourism Advisor, the National Project Coordinator and the Head of the Luang Namtha PTO developed a draft work plan in late January. This plan (March – August 2006) has subsequently been reviewed by the International Training Advisor and submitted for subsequent approval to the Lao National Tourism Administration.

6. Amount of funds liquidated during the period:

- a. project funds \$ 34,100
- b. matching Government funds \$ 27,510

7. Project's financial position:

- a. status of project account \$ 0.00
- b. cumulative expenditure through the reporting period \$ 34,100
- c. projected budgetary expenditure for next six months \$ 34,750

8. Subcontracts and partnerships:

(List all subcontracts executed by the PIT during this period)

The project implemented a single subcontract with the company iDesign to design and layout the 12 interpretive panels for the province's three tourist information centers.

9. Difficulties encountered and lessons learned:

During the first year of project implementation the project encountered significant difficulties in project implementation that were brought about by a lack of cooperation and transparency of the former Luang Namtha PTO director. Once the PTO saw a change of leadership in October 2005, these problems were immediately resolved. The differences between the old PTO and the new are considerable and have resulted in an obvious shift from a stalled and decaying system to a vibrant and creative one. Clearly this issue of leadership serves as an example to all future projects of the importance of interested and competent field staff to achieve planned project outcomes. A number of difficulties mentioned during the course of the year have become irrelevant due to the change in leadership. Difficulties that still persist are listed below:

Monitoring and Data Analysis – The PTO collects a substantial amount of data every six-months from villagers. It also collects data from tourists on the quality of the trek as well as overall demographic information on tourists. This data is collected in slightly different formats by several projects and in some cases is not collected in areas it probably should be such as Muang Sing. In many cases this data is compiled by people at the NTA or project advisors

rather than being done within the PTO for PTO use. The various tourism projects should work together to streamline the monitoring process to ensure that monitoring information can be accessed and used by the PTO for planning.

Nam Ha National Protected Area – The project works with one staff member of the NPA on a daily basis. This member of the team has improved cooperation with the NPA and has helped in a number of project activities. Unfortunately there are little to no other activities being conducted in the NPA. The overall capacity of the NPA is severely limited by the low number of existing staff (3) and lack of resources dedicated to effectively managing the NPA. The use of trekking permit fees is unclear and it is evident that this substantial revenue stream is not resulting in increased patrols, enforcement, or education and therefore having negligible effect on conserving the natural resources of the NPA or in the areas where CBT is taking place. If the PTO and project hope to achieve conservation goals in relation to community based tourism a new system (perhaps using village patrolling) should be developed.

10. Requests and recommendations for year two of the project:

As the project completes its first year of implementation there are a number of new challenges to be faced:

- The project team should continue to improve its capacity for understanding and implementing all aspects of the project.
- The PTO will need to internalize project activities and work as a unified entity making its own plans for the development and regulation of tourism in Luang Namtha and understand where the external projects can support the PTO's long term goals.
- In the next 6 months the project will move towards longer term strategic planning for all three priority districts, begin developing a provincial tourism development strategy and action plan, and work to develop the systems necessary to support multiple offices.

11. List of attachments

- a. The Nam Ha Ecoguide Service in Luang Namtha: Organizational Structure and Direct Financial Benefits Generated by Community-based Tours in Luang Namtha, Lao PDR
- b. Trekking in the Nam Ha National Protected Area: A Best Practice Community Based Tourism Programme in the Lao PDR
- c. Bor Kung Nature Area Development Plan
- d. Interpretive Panels for Luang Namtha District Tourism Information Offices