



# Xe Champhone Wetlands ECOTOURISM FEASIBILITY STUDY

## Final Report



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Final Report of the Ecotourism Feasibility Study in the Xe Champhone Wetlands, Savannakhet Province, Lao PDR.

Study conducted from 5 May 2023 to 31 August 2023.

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## List of Abbreviations

AFD – Agence Française de Développement  
B2B – Business to Business (trade/wholesale marketing)  
B2C – Business to Customer (consumer/retail marketing)  
CAWA – Climate Change Adaptation in Wetlands Area  
CBT – Community Based tourism  
CHAMPA – Cultural Heritage Management, Preservation and Territorial Attractiveness project  
CTG – Community Tourism Group  
DICT – District Information Culture and Tourism Office  
ECILL – Ecosystem Conservation through Integrated Landscape Management in Lao PDR  
FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations  
GEF – Global Environment funds  
GoL – Government of Laos  
JICA – Japan International Cooperation Agency  
Lao PDR – Lao People’s Democratic Republic  
MONRE – Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment

NBT – Nature Based Tourism  
NGO – Non-Governmental Organization  
NTFPs – Non-Timber Forest Products  
PICT – Provincial Information Culture and Tourism Office  
PPP – Public Private Partnership  
SAFE Ecosystems – Sustainable Forest and Land Management in the Dry Dipterocarp Forest Ecosystems of Southern Lao PDR  
SVK – Savannakhet  
ToR – Terms of Reference  
TPA – Tourism Potential Assessment  
WCS – Wildlife Conservation Society  
WTP – Willingness to Pay



## ສະຫຼຸບສັງລວມ

### ຄວາມເປັນມາ

ການທ່ອງທ່ຽວຖືວ່າເປັນໜຶ່ງໃນອຸດສາຫະກຳທີ່ໃຫຍ່ທີ່ສຸດໃນໂລກ ແລະ ເຖິງແມ່ນວ່າໃນບາງຄັ້ງຄາວຈະເປັນທີ່ໜ້າຕົກໃຈກັບຈຳນວນນັກທ່ອງທ່ຽວສາກົນທີ່ເຂົ້າມາທ່ຽວ ແຕ່ກໍ່ຍັງມີການຂະຫຍາຍໂຕຢ່າງຕໍ່ເນື່ອງ. ໃນເຂດອາຊີຕາເວັນອອກສຽງໃຕ້, ການທ່ອງທ່ຽວທາງທຳມະຊາດມີການຂະຫຍາຍຕົວຢ່າງຫຼວງຫຼາຍ ແລະ ໃນລາວການທ່ອງທ່ຽວທາງທຳມະຊາດ ຖືວ່າເປັນຂະແໜງການທີ່ຂະຫຍາຍຕົວໄວທີ່ສຸດຂອງອຸດສາຫະກຳການທ່ອງທ່ຽວ. ໃນຂະນະທີ່ປະເທດລາວມີທ່າແຮງສູງທີ່ຈະກາຍເປັນແຫຼ່ງທ່ອງທ່ຽວທາງດ້ານນິເວດວິທະຍາທີ່ມີຊື່ສຽງ ເນື່ອງຈາກຄວາມອຸດົມສົມບູນຂອງທຳມະຊາດ ແລະ ເປັນຖິ່ນທີ່ຢູ່ອາໄສຂອງຊີວະນາໆພັນສັດປ່າ, ຜະລິດຕະພັນການທ່ອງທ່ຽວ ແບບອະນຸລັກສັດປ່າ ໃນປັດຈຸບັນ ແລະ ໂອກາດໃນການພັດທະນາຜະລິດຕະພັນການທ່ອງທ່ຽວ ແບບທຳມະຊາດສັດປ່າໃໝ່ໆ ທີ່ເປັນເອກະລັກ ສະເພາະມີຂ້ອນຂ້າງຈຳກັດ.

ພື້ນທີ່ດິນບໍລິເວນນ້ຳຮາມຊາ ເຊຊ່າພອນເປັນພື້ນທີ່ ຂະໜາດໃຫຍ່ທີ່ສຸດຂອງສອງເຂດໃນປະເທດລາວ ແລະ ມີຄວາມສຳຄັນໃນການອະນຸລັກໃນລະສາກົນ ເພາະອາດເປັນພື້ນທີ່ໃຫຍ່ທີ່ສຸດທີ່ມີຈຳນວນປະຊາກອນແຂ້ ສາຍພັນ ນ້ຳຈືດ ທີ່ມີໃນທຳມະຊາດ ທີ່ໃກ້ຈະສູນພັນໃນໂລກອາໄສຢູ່ ແລະ ຍັງເປັນແຫຼ່ງຖິ່ນທີ່ຢູ່ອາໄສທີ່ສຳຄັນ ສຳລັບປາຜາ ອາຊີ ແລະ ຊະນິດພັນສັດນ້ຳອື່ນໆ.

ໃນປີ 2012, ອົງການອະນຸລັກສັດປ່າ (WCS) ຮ່ວມມືກັບ ມະຫາວິທະຍາໄລຮາສ ສາຂາດ້ານທຸລະກິດ ໄດ້ມີການສຶກສາຄວາມເປັນໄປໄດ້ໃນຂັ້ນເບື້ອງຕົ້ນ ເພື່ອກຳນົດເປັນເຂດທ່ອງທ່ຽວທາງດ້ານນິເວດວິທະຍາໄດ້ຖືກລະບຸວ່າເປັນໜຶ່ງໃນລະບົບຕ່ອງໂສ້ຄຸນຄ່າທີ່ມີທ່າແຮງໃນການສະໜອງແຫຼ່ງລາຍຮັບທາງເລືອກແບບຍືນຍົງໃຫ້ແກ່ຊຸມຊົນທີ່ອາໄສຢູ່ໃນ ແລະ ອ້ອມຮອບເຂດທີ່ດິນບໍລິເວນນ້ຳຮາມຊາ ເຊຊ່າພອນ . ບ້ານຕາມສຸມໄດ້ຮັບການຍອມຮັບວ່າເປັນສະຖານທີ່ທີ່ເໝາະສົມທີ່ສຸດ ແລະ ມີຜະລິດຕະພັນການທ່ອງທ່ຽວສອງລາຍການທີ່ແນະນຳຄື: ສູນຂໍ້ມູນຂ່າວສານບໍລິການນັກທ່ອງທ່ຽວທີ່ຕິດພັນກັບເຂດທີ່ດິນບໍລິເວນນ້ຳ ແລະ ການທ່ອງທ່ຽວໂດຍມີພະນັກງານນຳທ່ຽວນຳພາໄປເຂດທີ່ດິນບໍລິເວນນ້ຳແບບຄ້າງຄືນ. ແຕ່ຫນ້າເສຍດາຍ, ການຈັດຕັ້ງປະຕິບັດ ແລະ ພັດທະນາ ລາຍການການທ່ອງທ່ຽວທາງດ້ານນິເວດວິທະຍາ ບໍ່ສາມາດດຳເນີນໄປໄດ້ເນື່ອງຈາກ ທີ່ຜ່ານມາບໍ່ມີງົບປະມານ ແລະ ແຫຼ່ງທຶນ.

ໃນປີ 2023, ອົງການອະນຸລັກສັດປ່າ (WCS) ໄດ້ຮັບເງິນທຶນສະໜັບສະໜູນຈາກອົງການຝຣັ່ງເພື່ອການພັດທະນາ (AFD) ພາຍໃຕ້ໂຄງການອະນຸລັກລະບົບນິເວດ ໂດຍການຄຸ້ມຄອງພູມິທັດແບບປະສົມປະສານ ຢູ່ ສປປ ລາວ (ECILL) ເພື່ອດຳເນີນການປະເມີນຕະຫຼາດການທ່ອງທ່ຽວທາງດ້ານນິເວດວິທະຍາ ແລະ ການສຶກສາຄວາມເປັນໄປໄດ້ໃນເຂດພື້ນທີ່ດິນບໍລິເວນນ້ຳເຊຊ່າພອນ. ຈຸດປະສົງຕົ້ນຕໍຂອງການສຶກສານີ້ແມ່ນເພື່ອກຳນົດໂອກາດການທ່ອງທ່ຽວທາງດ້ານນິເວດວິທະຍາທີ່ເໝາະສົມຊຶ່ງຈະເຮັດໃຫ້ຊຸມຊົນທ້ອງຖິ່ນມີທາງເລືອກໃນການດຳລົງຊີວິດ ໃນຂະນະດຽວກັນກໍ່ເປັນການສົ່ງເສີມການອະນຸລັກຊີວະນາໆພັນ.

## ວິທີການ

ເພື່ອໃຫ້ໄດ້ຕາມຄາດໝາຍຂອງການສຶກສາ ຄວາມເປັນໄປໄດ້ຂອງການທ່ອງທ່ຽວ ທາງດ້ານນິເວດວິທະຍາຢູ່ເຂດ ທີ່ດິນ ບໍລິເວນນ້ຳເຊຈຳພອນ, ໄດ້ດຳເນີນງານໂດຍທີມງານທີ່ປຶກສາ 2 ທ່ານຄື: ຫົວໜ້າທີມງານຊ່ຽວຊານ ສະເພາະດ້ານ ການທ່ອງທ່ຽວ ແລະ ຜູ້ຊ່ວຍພາຍໃນໜຶ່ງທ່ານ ສົມທົບກັບພາກສ່ວນທີ່ກ່ຽວຂ້ອງ, ການສຶກສາຄັ້ງນີ້ໄດ້ ແບ່ງອອກເປັນ 3 ຂັ້ນຕອນຄື: ການກະກຽມ, ການລົງປະເມີນພາກສະໜາມ, ການວິເຄາະຂໍ້ມູນ ແລະ ການລາຍງານ.

ໄລຍະກະກຽມປະກອບມີ 4 ກິດຈະກຳຫຼັກຄື: (1) ການຄົ້ນຄວ້າຂໍ້ມູນເບື້ອງຕົ້ນ, (2) ການປະຊຸມສະຫຼຸບກັບທີມງານອົງການ ອົງການອະນຸລັກສັດປ່າ (WCS), (3) ການປະຊຸມລາຍງານຂັ້ນເບື້ອງຕົ້ນ ແລະ ສະເໜີວິທີການສຶກສາ ກັບຄູ່ຮ່ວມງານທີ່ ສຳຄັນຂອງອົງການອະນຸລັກສັດປ່າ (WCS) ປະຈຳແຜນງານ ສະຫວັນນະເຂດ, ແລະ (4) ສະຫຼຸບວຽກງານຂອງແຜນງານ, ແບບສອບຖາມ ແລະ ເນື້ອໃນ.

ໄລຍະການຄົ້ນຄວ້າພາກສະໜາມປະກອບມີ 3 ກິດຈະກຳຫຼັກຄື: (1) ການປະເມີນສະຖານະພາບຂອງການທ່ອງທ່ຽວໃນປະຈຸ ບັນໃນເຂດໂຄງການ, (2) ການປຶກສາຫາລືກັບພາກສ່ວນກ່ຽວຂ້ອງທ້ອງຖິ່ນ, ລວມທັງພາກເອກະຊົນ ແລະ 9 ບ້ານເປົ້າໝາຍ ທີ່ໄດ້ຮັບການຄັດເລືອກໄວ້ກ່ອນລ່ວງໜ້າ ແລະ (3) ການປະເມີນ ແລະ ໃຫ້ຄະແນນສະຖານທີ່ທ່ອງທ່ຽວທາງດ້ານນິເວດ ວິທະຍາ ແລະ ຜະລິດຕະພັນທີ່ມີທ່າແຮງ. ທີມງານປະເມີນປະກອບມີ 4 ທ່ານ ຄື: ທີມງານທີ່ປຶກສາ 2 ທ່ານ, ວິຊາການຝ່າຍ ໂຄສະນາເຜີຍ ປູກຈິດສຳນຶກຂອງອົງການອະນຸລັກສັດປ່າ (WCS) ປະຈຳແຜນງານ ແລະ ພະນັກງານຫ້ອງການຖະແຫຼງຂ່າວ, ວັດທະນະທຳ ແລະ ທ່ອງທ່ຽວ ເມືອງຈຳພອນ (ຖວທ).

ບົດລາຍງານສະບັບນີ້ ໄດ້ນຳສະເໜີຂໍ້ແນະນຳ ແລະ ແຜນການດຳເນີນການສຳລັບຜະລິດຕະພັນ ການທ່ອງທ່ຽວທາງດ້ານ ນິເວດວິທະຍາທີ່ເໝາະສົມໃນສະຖານທີ່ທີ່ໄດ້ຮັບການປະເມີນທີ່ເໝາະສົມ ກັບຈຸດປະສົງການອະນຸລັກ ໃນເຂດ ທີ່ດິນ ບໍລິເວນນ້ຳເຊຈຳພອນ ແລະ ສະພາບການທ່ອງທ່ຽວໃນທ້ອງຖິ່ນໃນປະຈຸບັນ. ເຖິງຢ່າງໃດກໍຕາມ, ການສຶກສາ ການທ່ອງທ່ຽວແບບນິເວດວິທະຍາໃນປີ 2012 ຈະຖືກນຳໃຊ້ເປັນຂໍ້ມູນອ້າງອີງຜືນຖານເພື່ອປຽບທຽບກັບສະຖານະການໃນ ປະຈຸບັນ, ກໍ່ຄືໃນ ສິບປີຜ່ານມາ.

## ການຄົ້ນພົບ

ບົດລາຍງານໄດ້ນຳສະເໜີຜົນການຄົ້ນຄວ້າອອກເປັນ 2 ພາກຄື: 1) ການປະເມີນສະຖານະພາບການທ່ອງທ່ຽວໃນປະຈຸບັນໃນ ເຂດພື້ນທີ່ທີ່ສຶກສາ, 2) ບົດສະຫຼຸບການປະເມີນທ່າແຮງການທ່ອງທ່ຽວພ້ອມກັບຂໍ້ສະເໜີແນະນຳຜະລິດຕະພັນການທ່ອງທ່ຽວ ທີ່ມີທ່າແຮງສຳລັບ 9 ບ້ານເປົ້າໝາຍທີ່ໄດ້ຮັບການຄັດເລືອກໄວ້ກ່ອນລ່ວງໜ້າ ໃນເຂດທີ່ດິນບໍລິເວນນ້ຳຮາມຊາ ເຊຈຳພອນ, ເຊິ່ງນຳມາປຶກສາກັບຜູ້ຊ່ວຍພາກສະໜາມຜ່ານຄວາມສ່ຽງທີ່ອາດຈະເກີດຂຶ້ນ.

1) ສະຖານະພາບການທ່ອງທ່ຽວໃນປະຈຸບັນໃນເຂດພື້ນທີ່ຂອງການສຶກສາ. ຂ້າງລຸ່ມນີ້ແມ່ນໂຄງຮ່າງໂດຍຫຍໍ້ຂອງສະຖານະການໃນປັດຈຸບັນ:

- **ພື້ນທີ່ດິນບໍລິເວນນ້ຳຮາມຊາເຊຈຳພອນ** ແມ່ນນອນໃນຂອບເຂດຂອງວົງຈອນການທ່ອງທ່ຽວເຊຈຳພອນທີ່ມີຢູ່ແລ້ວ. ນອກຈາກນັ້ນ, ຍັງໃກ້ຄຽງກັບເຂດອະນຸລັກປ່າໂຄກໂອງ-ມັ່ງ ທີ່ມີບໍລິການການທ່ອງທ່ຽວເບິ່ງສັດປ່າ. ສະຖານທີ່ທ່ອງທ່ຽວສ່ວນໃຫຍ່ໃນປະຈຸບັນນັກທ່ອງທ່ຽວສາມາດເຫັນສັດປ່າ ໄດ້ບາງປະເພດ (ເຖິງແມ່ນວ່າມັກຈະຖືກລ້ຽງໄວ້ໃນສະພາບທີ່ບໍ່ເປັນທຳມະຊາດ ຫຼື ເຄິ່ງທຳມະຊາດກໍຕາມ) ແລະ ຊະນິດພັນເຫຼົ່ານີ້ໄດ້ຖືກບົກບ້ອງ ຄຸ້ມຄອງໂດຍຄວາມເຊື່ອຈາກຊຸມຊົນ, ທີ່ມີຄຸນຄ່າທາງວັດທະນະທຳໃຫ້ກັບພວກມັນ. ຄວາມເຊື່ອຂອງທ້ອງຖິ່ນດັ່ງກ່າວອາດຈຳກັດຢູ່ພຽງແຕ່ເຂດໜອງ (ໜອງປາຝາ ຢູ່ ບ້ານດອນແດງ), ດົງລົງ, ຫຼື ພື້ນທີ່ຂະໜາດໃຫຍ່ (ແຂ້ນ້ຳຈືດ ໃນເຂດທີ່ດິນບໍລິເວນນ້ຳຮາມຊາເຊຈຳພອນ, ໂອງ-ມັ່ງ ເຂດປ່າໂຄກ).
- **ຕະຫຼາດ:** ສ່ວນຫຼາຍແມ່ນນັກທ່ອງທ່ຽວຈາກພາກພື້ນ ແລະ ພາຍໃນປະເທດ. ນັກທ່ອງທ່ຽວຊາວໄທ ແລະ ຫວຽດນາມ ເຂົ້າມາແຂ່ງຂັນສະຫວັນນະເຂດກວມເອົາ 93%, ນັກທ່ອງທ່ຽວຊາວຕາເວັນຕົກ (ເອີຣົບ, ອາເມລິກາ, ອອສເຕລຍ, ນີວຊີແລນ) ມີພຽງແຕ່ 3%. ປະຈຸບັນ, ເຂດວົງຈອນການທ່ອງທ່ຽວເຊຈຳພອນ ໄດ້ຕ້ອນຮັບນັກທ່ອງທ່ຽວພາຍໃນປະເທດປະມານ 600 ຄົນຕໍ່ເດືອນ ແລະ ຕ່າງປະເທດ 40 ຄົນຕໍ່ເດືອນ. ນັກທ່ອງທ່ຽວປະມານ 50 ຄົນ/ປີ ໄດ້ຮ່ວມກິດຈະການອນຄ້າງຄືນ, ເຊິ່ງສ່ວນຫຼາຍແມ່ນນັກທ່ອງທ່ຽວຊາວຕາເວັນຕົກ. ເຂດວົງຈອນການທ່ອງທ່ຽວເຊຈຳພອນ ເປັນຈຸດໝາຍປາຍທາງໃໝ່ ທີ່ໄດ້ຮັບການພັດທະນາຂຶ້ນມາໃນຊ່ວງມີການລະບາດຂອງພະຍາດໂຄວິດ-19 ເຊິ່ງເປັນຊ່ວງທີ່ການທ່ອງທ່ຽວລະຫວ່າງປະເທດ ເກືອບຈະບໍ່ມີຢູ່ເລີຍ (2020-2022). ລະດູການທ່ອງທ່ຽວປີ 2022-2023 ຖືວ່າເປັນລະດູການທຳອິດຂອງການທ່ອງທ່ຽວລະຫວ່າງປະເທດນັບແຕ່ມີການລະບາດຂອງພະຍາດໂຄວິດ-19 ແລະ ຄາດວ່າຈຳນວນນັກທ່ອງທ່ຽວຈະເພີ່ມຂຶ້ນຕາມການເວລາ.
- **ການຕະຫຼາດ:** ເຂດວົງຈອນການທ່ອງທ່ຽວເຊຈຳພອນ ໄດ້ຮັບການສົ່ງເສີມເປັນຢ່າງດີຕໍ່ກັບນັກທ່ອງທ່ຽວພາຍໃນປະເທດ ແລະ ນັກທ່ຽວຕາເວັນຕົກໃນປີ 2022 ໂດຍ ອົງການ ເຕຕັກຕິດ , ເຖິງຢ່າງໃດກໍຕາ, ກິດຈະກຳທາງດ້ານການຕະຫຼາດ ແລະ ການໂຄສະນາໃນອະນາຄົດ ແມ່ນມີຄວາມຈຳເປັນຫຼາຍຕໍ່ກັບການຂະຫຍາຍຈຸດໝາຍປາຍທາງທີ່ຂ້ອນຂ້າງໃໝ່ນີ້.
- **ໂຄງຮ່າງພື້ນຖານໂຄງລ່າງ ແລະ ການບໍລິການ:**
  - **ການຄົມມະນາຄົມຂົນສົ່ງ:** ເທດສະບານແຂວງສະຫວັນນະເຂດ ຫ່າງຈາກ ເຂດວົງຈອນການທ່ອງທ່ຽວເຊຈຳພອນ ປະມານ 1 ຊົ່ວໂມງ. ມີຖ້ຽວບິນທຸກມື້ໄປ-ກັບ ນະຄອນຫຼວງວຽງຈັນ ແລະ ລົດໂດຍສານພາຍໃນປະເທດ ແລະ ລະຫວ່າງປະເທດ ທີ່ເຊື່ອມຕໍ່ກັບຕົວເມືອງອື່ນໆໃນລາວ ແລະ ປະເທດໄທ/ຫວຽດນາມ.
  - **ທີ່ພັກ:** ມີທີ່ພັກຫຼາຍປະເພດຢູ່ໃນເຂດເທດສະບານແຂວງສະຫວັນນະເຂດ. ເຮືອນພັກ ແລະ ເຮືອນພັກຊາວບ້ານ (ໂຮມສະເຕ) ແມ່ນມີຢູ່ຕາມເຂດວົງຈອນການທ່ອງທ່ຽວເຊຈຳພອນ.
  - **ການບໍລິການການທ່ອງທ່ຽວ:** ມີ 10 ບໍລິສັດທ່ອງທ່ຽວທີ່ຂຶ້ນທະບຽນຢູ່ ແຂວງສະຫວັນນະເຂດ, ສ່ວນຫຼາຍແມ່ນສຸມໃສ່ຕະຫຼາດພາຍໃນປະເທດ ແລະ ພາກພື້ນ. ບໍລິສັດທ່ອງທ່ຽວໜຶ່ງ (ບໍລິສັດມາແວ່ລາວ) ມີຄວາມຊ່ຽວຊານກັບຕະຫຼາດຕາເວັນຕົກ, ການທ່ອງທ່ຽວແບບຊຸມຊົນມີສ່ວນຮ່ວມ ແລະ ການທ່ອງທ່ຽວທາງດ້ານທຳມະຊາດ.



- **ຈຸດຂາຍທີ່ເປັນເອກະລັກ:** ຈຸດຂາຍທີ່ເປັນເອກະລັກສະເພາະຂອງເຂດວົງຈອນການທ່ອງທ່ຽວເຊື່ອມພື້ນຖານ ຄວາມຫຼາກຫຼາຍທາງດ້ານຊີວະນາໆພັນສັດປ່າ ແລະ ໂອກາດທີ່ຈະພົບເຫັນສັດປ່າແມ່ນມີຄວາມເປັນໄປໄດ້ສູງ. ອົງປະກອບທາງດ້ານວັດທະນະທຳ-ປະຫວັດສາດຂອງສະຖານທີ່ທ່ອງທ່ຽວແຫ່ງນີ້ ຂ້ອນຂ້າງຄ້າຍຄືກັບບ່ອນອື່ນໃນປະເທດລາວ.
- **ຄວາມອາດສາມາດທາງດ້ານມະນຸດສະທຳ ແລະ ສະຖາບັນ:** ການພັດທະນາ ແລະ ຄວາມສາມາດໃນການຈັດການການທ່ອງທ່ຽວທາງດ້ານນິເວດວິທະຍາ ໄດ້ຖືກສ້າງຂຶ້ນໂດຍໂຄງການພັດທະນາການທ່ອງທ່ຽວໃນອະດີດ ແລະ ຄວນໄດ້ຮັບການເສີມສ້າງຄວາມເຂັ້ມແຂງເພີ່ມຕື່ມ ໂດຍຜ່ານຂະບວນການຝຶກອົບຮົມ ແລະ ຝຶກງານຕື່ມອີກ.
- **ຜົນກະທົບດ້ານການອະນຸລັກ:** ສັດປ່າໄດ້ຮັບການບົກບ້ອງຄຸ້ມຄອງໂດຍຄວາມເຊື່ອຂອງທ້ອງຖິ່ນໃນຫຼາຍສະຖານທີ່ທ່ອງທ່ຽວໃນປະຈຸບັນ ເຊັ່ນ: ໜອງປາຝາ, ດົງລົງ ແລະ ເຂດອະນຸລັກປ່າໂຄກໂອງ-ມັງ. ສະຖານທີ່ສ່ວນໃຫຍ່ໃຫ້ໂອກາດທີ່ດີໃນການຖ່າຍຮູບສັດປ່າ. ການເຊື່ອມໂຍງກັບການອະນຸລັກ ແລະ ການຫຼຸດຜ່ອນຄວາມສ່ຽງດ້ານສິ່ງແວດລ້ອມສາມາດບັບປຸງໄດ້ໂດຍຜ່ານການພັດທະນາການປະຕິບັດທີ່ເປັນມິດຕໍ່ກັບສັດປ່າ ແລະ ການອະທິບາຍຄວາມໝາຍການອະນຸລັກ, ໂດຍສະເພາະສຳລັບເດັກນ້ອຍ.

2) **ການປະເມີນທຳແຮງການທ່ອງທ່ຽວໃນ ບ້ານເປົ້າໝາຍໃນເຂດທີ່ດິນບໍລິເວນນ້ຳເຊື່ອມພື້ນຖານ.** ຜ່ານກອງປະຊຸມປຶກສາຫາລືກັບພາກເອກະຊົນ ດ້ານການທ່ອງທ່ຽວ ແລະ ບ້ານເປົ້າໝາຍຫຼັກ 9 ບ້ານ, ໄດ້ກຳນົດສະຖານທີ່ທ່ອງທ່ຽວ ແລະ ຜະລິດຕະພັນການທ່ອງທ່ຽວທາງ ດ້ານນິເວດວິທະຍາທີ່ເໝາະສົມ ໂດຍມີຂໍ້ສັງເກດການດັ່ງນີ້:

- **ສະຖານທີ່ທີ່ໄດ້ຮັບການປະເມີນສ່ວນໃຫຍ່ມີທຳແຮງສູງ (65-75%), ແຕ່ບໍ່ມີສະຖານທີ່ໃດ ໄດ້ປະເມີນທີ່ມີທຳແຮງສູງຫຼາຍ (80-100%). ທຳແຮງສູງສ່ວນຫຼາຍແມ່ນຕິດພັນກັບຈຸດຕໍ່ໄປນີ້:**
  - **ສະຖານທີ່ - ການເຂົ້າເຖິງ - ລະດູການ.** ຫ່າງຈາກເທດສະບານແຂວງສະຫວັນນະເຂດ, ສະໜາມບິນ ແລະ ຊາຍແດນສາກົນ ປະເທດໄທ ປະມານ 1 ຊົ່ວໂມງ. ເຖິງວ່າສະພາບເສັ້ນທາງຈະຢູ່ໃນລະດັບບານກາງແຕ່ກໍສາມາດເຂົ້າເຖິງໄດ້ເກືອບຕະຫຼອດປີ.
  - **ໃກ້ກັບແຫຼ່ງທ່ອງທ່ຽວທີ່ມີຢູ່:** ເຂດວົງຈອນການທ່ອງທ່ຽວເຊື່ອມພື້ນຖານ, ເຂດອະນຸລັກປ່າໂຄກໂອງ-ມັງ ແລະ ເທດສະບານ ແຂວງສະຫວັນນະເຂດ.
  - **ຄວາມສ່ຽງດ້ານຄວາມປອດໄພຕ່າງ** ເຖິງວ່າລະດັບນ້ຳໃນຝື້ນທີ່ ເຂດທີ່ດິນບໍລິເວນນ້ຳຈະມີການປ່ຽນແປງໃນຊ່ວງລະດູຝົນກໍຕາມ.
  - **ການອະນຸລັກ ແລະ ສັດປ່າ.** ໂອກາດການພົບເຫັນສັດປ່າແມ່ນມີຄວາມເປັນໄປໄດ້ສູງ ແລະ ເປັນບົກກະຕິ, ຄວາມເຊື່ອຂອງຄົນທ້ອງຖິ່ນໃນການບົກບ້ອງຄຸ້ມຄອງສັດປ່າ-ສັດປ່າ.
- **ຂໍ້ເສຍຢູ່ໃນແຕ່ລະຝື້ນທີ່ສ່ວນໃຫຍ່ຄື:**
  - ໂຄງສ້າງຝື້ນຖານໂຄງວ່າງ ແລະ ການບໍລິການການທ່ອງທ່ຽວທີ່ມີຢູ່ ຍັງຢູ່ໃນລະດັບຕ່ຳ.
  - ແຫຼ່ງທ່ອງທ່ຽວທາງດ້ານວັດທະນະທຳ ແລະ ປະຫວັດສາດທີ່ມີຄວາມເປັນເອກະລັກສະເພາະ ຍັງຢູ່ໃນລະດັບບານກາງ.

- ຄວາມເປັນຫ່ວງຂອງຊຸມຊົນກ່ຽວກັບການພັດທະນາການທ່ອງທ່ຽວ:
  - ບ້ານທີ່ມີການທ່ອງທ່ຽວຢູ່ແລ້ວ: ຍັງມີຄວາມລັງເລໃຈກ່ຽວກັບໜ້າທີ່ຄວາມຮັບຜິດຊອບ.
  - ບ້ານທີ່ບໍ່ທັນມີການທ່ອງທ່ຽວ: ກັງວົນກ່ຽວກັບຜົນກະທົບທາງລົບທີ່ອາດຈະມີ:
    - ຢ້ານວັດທະນະທຳບໍ່ໄດ້ຮັບການເຄົາລົບ
    - ການບໍ່ປະຕິບັດຕາມສັນຍາ (ການຍຶດເອົາທີ່ດິນ, ຂຸດຄົ້ນບໍ່ແຮ່, ກະສິກຳ).
- ຈຸດຂາຍທີ່ເປັນເອກະລັກ ແລະ ການແຂ່ງຂັນ:
  - ຈຸດຂາຍທີ່ເປັນເອກະລັກ: ຄວາມຫຼາກຫຼາຍຂອງສັດປ່າ (ນົກ, ປາຝາ, ແລະ ແຂ້ນ້ຳຈືດ) ທີ່ສາມາດພົບເຫັນໄດ້ຢູ່ໃນເຂດອະນຸລັກທີ່ດິນບໍລິເວນນ້ຳ ແລະ ເຂດບໍລິເວນບ້ານ.
  - ການແຂ່ງຂັນລະດັບທ້ອງຖິ່ນ: ອ່າງເກັບນ້ຳສຸຍ ຢູ່ເຂດວົງຈອນການທ່ອງທ່ຽວເຊື່ອມພື້ນ ມີກິດຈະກຳພັກຜ່ອນຢ່ອນອາລົມຕ່າງໆ: ຮ້ານອາຫານເຮືອແຜ, ເຮືອນພັກຊາວບ້ານ (ໂຮມສະເຕ), ຕັ້ງແຄ້ມຢູ່ເທິງເຮືອ ແລະ ການພາຍເຮືອ ຄາຍັກກັງ (kayaking).
  - ລະດັບຊາດ: ທີ່ດິນບໍລິເວນນ້ຳບຶງຂຽດໂງ່ງ, ເປັນພື້ນທີ່ດິນບໍລິເວນນ້ຳຮາມຊາ ແຫ່ງທີ 2 ຂອງປະເທດ, ມີນົກຫຼາຍຊະນິດທີ່ຄ້າຍຄືກັນ, ບວກກັບພູມສັນຖານທີ່ຫຼາກຫຼາຍ ແລະ ໄກ້ຄຽງກັບບາງສະຖານທີ່ທ່ອງທ່ຽວທີ່ມີຊື່ສຽງທີ່ສຸດໃນປະເທດ.
- ຜະລິດຕະພັນທີ່ແນະນຳ: ຜະລິດຕະພັນທີ່ນຳສະເໜີໂດຍລວມມີທ່າແຮງສູງສຸດຄື:
  - ການປັບປຸງ ແລະ ຂະຫຍາຍ ໜອງປາຝາ ຢູ່ ບ້ານດອນແດງ,
  - ສູນຂໍ້ມູນຂ່າວສານ ຕ້ອນຮັບນັກທ່ອງທ່ຽວ ຢູ່ ບ້ານ ຕານຊຸມ (ຄ້າຍຄືກັນກັບການສຶກສາປີ 2012).

ຜະລິດຕະພັນອື່ນໆທີ່ສະແດງໃຫ້ເຫັນຜົນກະທົບທາງບວກທີ່ມີທ່າແຮງສູງ, ແຕ່ໂດຍສະເລ່ຍມີຄວາມສາມາດໃນການດຶງດູດການຕະຫຼາດສູງ ແລະ/ຫຼື ຄ່າໃຊ້ຈ່າຍໃນການພັດທະນາ ແລະ ການດຳເນີນງານສູງ ໄດ້ແກ່:

- ສຳພັດປະສົບການຄ້າງຄືນທີ່ດິນບໍລິເວນນ້ຳ ຢູ່ ບ້ານຕານສຸມ (ຄ້າຍຄືກັນກັບການສຶກສາປີ 2012),
- ເສັ້ນທາງຍ່າງປ່າ-ເຂດທີ່ດິນບໍລິເວນນ້ຳ ຢູ່ ບ້ານແກ້ງກອກດົງ ແລະ/ຫຼື ບ້ານຕານສຸມ.

ຜະລິດຕະພັນທີ່ມີຜົນກະທົບທາງບວກທີ່ມີທ່າແຮງສູງ ແລະ ມີຄວາມໜ້າດຶງດູດຂອງຕະຫຼາດ ແລະ ຄ່າໃຊ້ຈ່າຍໃນການພັດທະນາ ແລະ ການດຳເນີນງານ, ແມ່ນສາມາດຈັດການໄດ້ໂດຍຊຸມຊົນຢ່າງດຽວ ຫຼັງຈາກການຝຶກອົບຮົມ ແລະ ການສະໜັບສະໜູນໄລຍະສັ້ນ (3–5 ປີ) ໂດຍອົງກອນພັດທະນາການທ່ອງທ່ຽວ ຫຼື ຜູ້ຊ່ວຍຊານການທ່ອງທ່ຽວທາງດ້ານນິເວດວິທະຍາ.

ຂໍ້ແນະນຳວ່າ, ເວັ້ນເສຍແຕ່ອົງການອະນຸລັກສັດປ່າ (WCS) ຫຼື ຄູ່ຮ່ວມງານອື່ນໆສາມາດສະໜັບສະໜູນທາງດ້ານວິຊາການ ແລະ ງົບປະມານ ໂຄງການການທ່ອງທ່ຽວທາງດ້ານນິເວດວິທະຍາໂດຍຊຸມຊົນໃນໄລຍະຍາວ (10 ປີຂຶ້ນໄປ), ຜະລິດຕະພັນທີ່ສະແດງໃຫ້ເຫັນເຖິງຄວາມໜ້າດຶງດູດຂອງຕະຫຼາດທ່ອງທ່ຽວໂດຍສະເລ່ຍ ແລະ/ຫຼື ຄ່າໃຊ້ຈ່າຍໃນການພັດທະນາ ແລະ ການດຳເນີນງານທີ່ຂ້ອນຂ້າງສູງແມ່ນໄດ້ຖືກພັດທະນາໂດຍການເປັນຄູ່ຮ່ວມງານຂອງ ພາກເອກະຊົນການທ່ອງທ່ຽວ ທີ່ມີປະສົບການ ແລະ ການອະນຸລັກໃນການຮ່ວມມືຢ່າງໃກ້ຊິດກັບຊຸມຊົນ ແລະ ດ້ວຍການສະໜັບສະໜູນຂອງ ອົງການອະນຸລັກ ສັດປ່າ (WCS).

## Executive Summary

### Background

Tourism is considered as one of the largest industries in the world and except for occasional brief shocks, globally, international tourist arrivals have shown continuous growth. In Southeast Asia, the nature-based tourism sector is growing significantly, and particularly in Laos this is the fastest growing segment of the tourism industry. While Laos has a high potential to become a renowned ecotourism destination due to its attractive and often unique natural areas and biodiversity, the current wildlife-based ecotourism product portfolio is quite limited and presents opportunities for new product development.

The Xe Champhone Wetlands is the largest of the two Ramsar sites in the country and are of a global conservation importance, holding probably the largest wild population of the critically endangered Siamese Crocodiles (*Crocodylus siamensis*) in the world as well as provides an important habitat for the Indochinese Softshell Turtles (*Amyda ornata*) and other species.

In 2012, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) in cooperation with the Haas School of Business identified ecotourism as one of the value chains with the potential to provide sustainable, alternative income sources to communities living in and around the Xe Champhone Ramsar Wetlands. The Ban Tansoum village was recognized as the most suitable site and two tourism products were recommended: a wetland visitor center and an overnight guided wetland tour. Unfortunately, the implementation of the ecotourism program was hindered by a lack of funding.

In 2023, the WCS has received financing from Agence Française de Développement (AFD) under the Ecosystem Conservation through Integrated Landscape Management in Lao PDR (ECILL) project to undertake an ecotourism market assessment and feasibility study in the Xe Champhone Wetlands. The main objective of this study is to identify appropriate ecotourism opportunities that will provide local communities with alternative livelihoods while promoting biodiversity conservation.

### Methodology

To meet the expected outputs of the Xe Champhone ecotourism feasibility study, the assignment was carried out by a mixed language team of two persons: an international team leader and a national assistant, through three key phases: Preparatory, Field Research, Data Analyze & Report.

The Preparatory Phase consisted of four key activities: (1) Preliminary Desk research, (2) A briefing meeting with the WCS team, (3) A mission orientation meeting with the key WCS counterparts in the Xe Champhone landscape, and (4) Finalization of the Work plan, Questionnaires and Table of Contents.

The Field Research Phase consisted of three key activities: (1) Assessment of current tourism status in the project area, (2) Consultations with local stakeholders, including private sector and 9 communities in the pre-selected sites, and (3) Assessment and scoring of potential ecotourism sites and products. The assessment team consisted of four people: the consultant team of two people, a WCS outreach officer and an officer of the Champhone District Information Culture and Tourism Office (DICT).

This report presents recommendations and implementation plans for appropriate ecotourism products in the assessed sites that would best fit the conservation objectives of the Xe Champhone Wetlands and the local tourism context. The 2012 ecotourism study and the recommended products are used as a baseline reference to compare with the current situation, a decade later.

## Findings

This report presents the findings in two parts: A - assessment of current tourism status in the study landscape, B - summary of tourism potential including recommendations for product development in the 9 pre-selected target villages in the Xe Champhone Wetlands, and potential risk mitigation strategies.

**A – Current status of tourism in the study landscape.** Below is a brief outline of the current situation:

- **The Xe Champhone Wetlands are located within the Xe Champhone Loop, - an existing tourism circuit.** In addition, the Eld's Deer Sanctuary, located in the neighboring district, offers wildlife spotting tours. At most of the current tourism sites visitors can see certain types of animals (although often kept in unnatural or semi-natural conditions) and these species are protected by spiritual beliefs, awarding them a cultural value. Such local beliefs can be limited to a small pond (Turtle Lake in Dondeng village), an isolated patch of forest (Monkey Forest), or larger tracts (crocodiles in the Xe Champhone Wetlands, Eld's Deer in the dry deciduous forest).
- **Market:** Mostly regional and domestic market. Thai and Vietnamese visitors present 93% of all international arrivals to Savannakhet province. The western market (EU, USA, Australia, New Zealand) is only 3%. Current tourism sites on the Xe Champhone Loop welcome around 600 domestic and 40 international visitors a month. Around 50 visitors a year enjoy the overnight activities, mostly western market. The Xe Champhone Loop is a new destination, that has been developed during the COVID19 times when the international tourism was almost non existing (2020-2022). The tourism season 2022-23 is the first international tourism season since COVID19 and visitor arrivals are expected to increase over time.
- **Marketing:** The Xe Champhone Loop has been well promoted to domestic and western markets in 2022 by the NGO Tetraktys, however, further marketing activities and communication is necessary to grow this relatively new destination.
- **Infrastructures and Services:**
  - **Transportation:** Savannakhet city is located around 1 hour from the Xe Champhone Loop. There are daily flights to Vientiane and domestic and international buses connecting with other urban centers in Laos and to Thailand/Vietnam.
  - **Accommodation:** Various types of accommodation is available in Savannakhet city. Basic guesthouses and homestays are available along the Xe Champhone loop.
  - **Tour Services:** 10 agencies are registered in Savannakhet province, most focus on domestic and regional markets. One agency (Marvelaos) is specializing on western market, Community Based Tourism (CBT) and Nature Based Tourism (NBT).
- **Unique Selling Points:** A strong selling point of the Xe Champhone Loop is the wildlife diversity and the easy wildlife spotting opportunities. The cultural-historical elements of this destination are quite like those found elsewhere in Laos.
- **Human and Institutional Capacity:** Ecotourism development and management capacity in the study area has been initiated by former tourism development projects but needs to be further strengthened through further training and internship programs.
- **Conservation Impact:** Wildlife is protected by the local beliefs in several of the current tourism sites, such as the Turtle Lake, Monkey Forest, Tansoum Crocodile Center, and Eld's Deer. Most sites offer good wildlife photography opportunities. Link to conservation and environmental risk mitigation

could be enhanced through the development of wildlife-friendly practices and conservation interpretation, especially for children.

**B – Tourism Potential Assessment in the target villages in the Xe Champhone Wetlands.** Through the consultation meetings with the tourism private sector and the 9 key target villages, suitable ecotourism sites and products were identified, and the following observations were made:

- **Most of the assessed sites present high potential (65-75%),** but none of the assessed sites present a very high potential (80-100%). The high potential is mostly linked to the following points:
  - **Location-Accessibility-Seasonality.** Located only around 1 hour from the Savannakhet city, airport, and the international border with Thailand. While the road condition is average, access is possible almost all year long.
  - **Proximity to the existing tourism sites:** Xe Champhone Loop, Eld's Deer, Savannakhet city.
  - **Low safety risk** despite the water level variations in wetlands during the rainy season.
  - **Conservation and Wildlife.** Relatively easy and regular wildlife spotting opportunities, local beliefs that protect wildlife.
- **The downside in most of the sites is:**
  - A poor level of existing tourism infrastructures and services.
  - Cultural and historical attractions of an average level of uniqueness.
  - Community concerns regarding tourism development:
    - Existing tourism villages: hesitant to expand responsibilities.
    - Villages with no tourism yet: worried about the possible negative impacts:
      - Fear of culture not being respected,
      - Agreements not being followed (land-grabbing, mining, agriculture).
- **The key unique selling point and competition:**
  - Unique selling point: The diversity of wildlife (birds, turtles, and Siamese Crocodiles) that can be found in the scenic wetland conservation and authentic villages areas.
  - Local level competition: The Soui Lake on the Xe Champhone Loop offers various wetland recreational activities: restaurants, homestay, camping on a boat and kayaking.
  - National level competition: The Beung Khiet Ngong Wetlands, the second Ramsar site in the country, hosts similar birdlife in addition to more diverse landscape and proximity to some of the most popular tourism sites in the country.
- **Recommended products:** The products that present overall the highest potential are:
  - the Turtle Lake improvement and expansion in Ban Don Daeng,
  - the Wetland Visitor Center in Ban Tansoum (similar as the 2012 study).

Other products that present high potential positive impact, but average-high market attractiveness and/or high development and operational costs are:

- Guided overnight wetland experience in Ban Tansoum (similar as the 2012 study),
- Wetland trail and/or boardwalk in Keng Kong Dong and/or Ban Tansoum.

Products that present high potential positive impact and market attractiveness, and low development and operational costs, could be managed solely by the community following trainings and short or mid-term support (3-5 years) by the tourism development organization and/or ecotourism expert.

It is recommended that, unless WCS or other partners can support the community-based ecotourism program in a long-term (10+ years), the products that demonstrate average-high market attractiveness and/or quite high development and operations costs are developed by an experienced and conservation minded tourism private sector partner in close collaboration with the community and with WCS support.

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Study Background**

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) is a US-based, nonprofit global conservation organization that saves wildlife and wild places worldwide. The WCS Lao PDR program was established in 1993 and WCS has been supporting conservation of the Xe Champhone Wetlands since 2010.

The Xe Champhone Wetlands are the largest of the two Ramsar sites in Laos and are vital to ecosystem services and local livelihoods, and critical to the survival of Siamese Crocodile (*Crocodylus siamensis*), Indochinese Softshell Turtles (*Amyda ornata*) and other endangered biodiversity. Communities living in this biodiversity-rich wetland are reliant on agriculture and fishing practices that are increasingly unsustainable.

Through the Ecotourism Feasibility study conducted by Haas School of Business in 2012, ecotourism has been identified as one of the value chains that have potential to provide alternative income sources to communities living in and around the Xe Champhone Ramsar Wetland Complex. Unfortunately, the implementation of the ecotourism program was hindered by the funding cut.

The WCS has received financing from Agence Française de Développement ("AFD") under the Ecosystem Conservation through Integrated Landscape Management in Lao PDR (ECILL) project and is using this resource to fund an ecotourism market assessment and feasibility study of ecotourism in the Xe Champhone Wetlands. The main Objective is to identify appropriate ecotourism opportunities that will provide local communities with alternative livelihoods, while promoting biodiversity conservation and strengthening community resilience to climate change.

### **1.2. Study Approach**

To meet the expected outputs of the Xe Champhone ecotourism feasibility study, the assignment was carried out through three key phases: Preparatory, Field Research, Analyze & Report. The approach and methodology for carrying out the activities and meeting the expected outputs is further detailed below. Work Plan Chart is presented in the Annex 1.

#### **1. Preparatory Phase**

The Preparatory Phase consisted of the following key activities: (1) Preliminary Desk research, (2) A briefing meeting with WCS team, (3) A mission orientation meeting with the key counterparts, (4) Finalization of Work plan, Questionnaires and Table of Contents for the final report. These key activities are further described below:

- Preliminary Desk research.

Preliminary Desk Research was conducted as the first activity of the Preparatory Phase to familiarize with the background information of the project area and to assess the lessons learned from ecotourism ventures with similar context from around the world. The key documents and subjects that were consulted are listed below and full bibliography is presented at the end of this report.

- (a) The 2012 Xe Champhone Ecotourism Study, Haas School of Business,
- (b) The 2019 and 2021 Statistical Report on Tourism in Laos,
- (c) Savannakhet and Xe Champhone Tourism Information,
- (d) Wetland and Crocodile-Alligator ecotourism studies.



- A briefing meeting with WCS team.

A briefing meeting with WCS team in Savannakhet was arranged at the commencement of the assignment to clarify the scope of the work, to discuss the key conservation challenges, objectives, and to further familiarize consultant team with WCS work in the Xe Champhone landscape. Consultant team together with WCS team in Savannakhet set conditions and selected the study villages as well as set pre-conditions for further ecotourism development in the Xe Champhone Wetlands and agreed on the assessment team.

- A mission orientation meeting.

A mission orientation meeting was hold in Savannakhet to present the Xe Champhone ecotourism feasibility study assignment to the key counterparts and to further ensure successful collaboration with the study consultant team and the key government counterparts.

- Finalization of Work plan, Questionnaires and Table of Contents.

Through discussions with the WCS team, the initial Work plan was amended, the questionnaires were finalized and the expected Table of Contents for the final report was be established.

## **2. Field Research Phase**

The Field Research Phase consisted of the following key activities: (1) Assessment of the current tourism status in the project area, (2) Consultation meetings with the local stakeholders, (3) and Assessment and Scoring of the potential ecotourism sites and products.

- **Assessment of the current tourism status in the project area**

To assess the current tourism status in the study landscape the consultant team conducted field visits to the majority of the existing tourism sites and consulted with the tourism professionals familiar with the area, including tourism private sector, NGOs, and consultants.

Field visits to the key existing tourism sites in the project area enabled to collect information on the wider context and current tourism status, to investigate the potential linkages with the Xe Champhone Wetlands, to observe the existing governance models, and to identify and better mitigate the implementation risks.

District and provincial level interest and capacity in ecotourism development and management was assessed through the mission orientation meeting during the Preparatory Phase and the field visits to the key existing tourism sites in the project area as well as through consultations with the tourism private sector.

- **Consultation meetings with the local stakeholders**

In addition to the consultation that were conducted during the current tourism status assessment activity, consultations with the local communities were conducted in the nine pre-selected WCS target villages to assess the site features, the community willingness to develop tourism and to discuss the future vision, including the possible products. To ensure objective site assessment all community consultation and potential assessment process in the 9 villages was conducted by a pre-agreed assessment team of four people: the study consultant team of two, a WCS outreach officer and a Champhone DICT officer.

- **Assessment and Scoring of the potential ecotourism sites and products**

Following the community consultation meeting, the assessment team conducted site visits to the potential tourism sites. Scoring was carried out using the Tourism Potential Assessment matrix (cf. 2.2.2.). This Initial Finding Report presents scoring results of the Part 1 – “Site Features”, and further scoring for the potential products will be conducted and presented in the Final Report.

### **3. Analyze & Report Phase**

The initial findings following the Preparatory and Field Research phase are summarized and presented in the Initial Finding Report. This Final Report presents recommendations and implementation plans for appropriate ecotourism products in the assessed sites that would best fit the conservation objectives of the Xe Champhone Wetlands and the local tourism context and would provide local communities with alternative livelihoods while enhancing their resilience to climate change. Wherever possible, the 2012 ecotourism study is used as a baseline reference to compare with the current situation, a decade later.

#### **1.3. Study Site**

##### **1.3.1. Savannakhet Province**

Savannakhet Province is the largest province (21,774 km<sup>2</sup>) in the country and is situated in the central Laos between Khammouane and Salavanh Provinces north and south, and neighbors both Thailand and Vietnam west and east. Its capital, Savannakhet, sits on the Mekong River, bordering Thailand, and is also known as Kaysone Phomvihane or Muang Khanthabouly. With a population of 125,760 (2018), Savannakhet is the second largest city in Laos after Vientiane capital.

Savannakhet Province has been inhabited since ancient times and the name of the province derives from old Pali language, meaning “a land of gold”. Savannakhet province has a rich history and wide variety of ethnic diversity. One of the symbols of the Savannakhet town is Tangvayosaurus, - a dinosaur representing the rich natural history and the evidence found that is documented in the Savannakhet Dinosaur Museum.

The climate in Savannakhet Province is classified as a tropical savannah climate and the temperature variability is rather low. April is the warmest month with an average of 29.28°C and the coolest month is December with an average of 22.25°C. The rainfall at the site consists of two distinct periods, the dry season starts from November to early May, and the rainy season from mid-May to October. The average annual rainfall is 1,510 mm and the highest monthly rainfall is 268.45 mm in July.

The projection of the climate change in the region shows that Laos is highly vulnerable. The change in rainfall situation is expected to be more intense in Savannakhet Province compared to other areas of the country. A 21% increase in annual average rainfall is predicted and the rainfall increase is predicted to be caused by the intensity of rainstorm, rather than by the increase of the rainy days.

##### **1.3.2. Xe Champhone Wetlands**

The Xe Champhone Wetlands in Savannakhet Province cover an area of 12,400 ha and is the largest of the two Ramsar sites in the country. While the wetlands complex extends to 4 districts: Atsaphone, Atsaphangthong, Champhone and Xonnabouly, the Ramsar site boundary currently lies only within the Champhone district. The Xe Champhone Wetlands are of global conservation importance and holds probably the largest wild population of the critically endangered Siamese Crocodiles (*Crocodylus siamensis*) in the world as well as is an important habitat for the Indochinese Softshell Turtles (*Amyda ornata*) and other species.

The habitat of the Xe Champhone Wetlands is composed of a mosaic of different habitat types, including perennial and seasonal rivers, freshwater lakes/ponds, reservoirs, oxbows, grasslands, forests, and rice paddy fields. The habitat's connectivity changes throughout the wet and dry season as water levels fluctuate. In the wet season, lakes, oxbows, ponds, and streams are interconnected. As the water level recedes during the dry season, many habitats are isolated, and crocodiles and fish migrate to permanently flooded sites.

There are 16 communities situated in or adjacent to the Xe Champhone Wetlands with a total population of over 19,600 (2018) people and 3 main ethnic groups, such as: Lao, Phou Thai and Makong. The main livelihoods of the surrounding communities are rice farming, livestock raising, and fishing. The climate change vulnerability assessment for the Xe Champhone Wetlands and the community vulnerability assessment for the surrounding 16 villages was completed in 2018. WCS Savannakhet program currently works closely with 14 villages and plans to expand to 18 villages in the future. Map presenting the Xe Champhone Wetlands and the current WCS target villages is presented in the Figure 1.

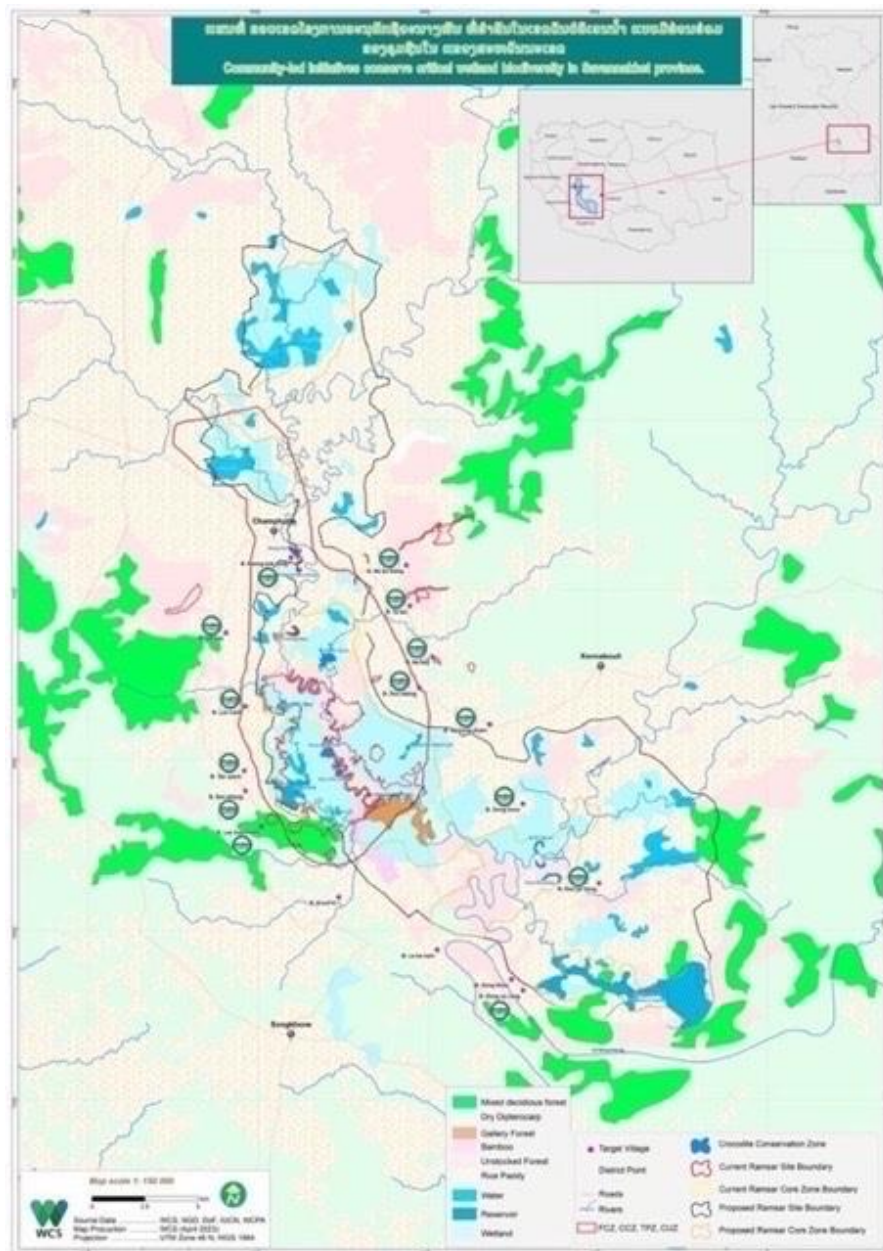


Figure 1 - Map of the Xe Champhone Wetlands (source: WCS-Lao PDR).

At the present, the Xe Champhone Wetlands lack site-specific regulations, however, the Wetland Decree is under development. The laws that currently apply to Xe Champhone Wetlands include but are not limited to the following: the Constitution; Law on Land; Law on Aquatic Animal and Wildlife; Law on Water and Water Resources; Law on Forestry; Law on Fisheries; Law on Environmental Protection.

In accordance with customary law, spiritual places make up the majority of protected areas in the Xe Champhone Wetlands. Many communities have preserved the traditional belief that crocodiles are the spirits of ancestors, thus, killing crocodile intentionally is a taboo. The community spiritual sites are believed to host the guardian spirits that protect the community and therefore should be left untouched. Fishing is prohibited and limited in various of these areas and swimming and using a boat is prohibited in some of these sacred lakes as in Ban Taleo and Ban Dondeng.

While local taboos and the customary law play an important role in the protection of some species and parts of the Xe Champhone Wetlands, the increasing population growth and demand for agricultural products create threats as habitat degradation, fragmentation, and conversion to agricultural land. In addition to the habitat loss, threats for crocodiles include collection of crocodile eggs, and disturbance to crocodile hatching areas and turtle species are threatened by the high market demand and limited law enforcement.

The Wetland Decree is expected to improve the management and protection of the Xe Champhone Wetlands. Based on the draft Wetland Decree currently under development, the MONRE is assigned to manage wetlands in a centralized manner and to take the lead in coordinating with other Ministries in charge of managing the use of their respective category of land.

Several Articles within the draft Wetland Decree 2023 mention tourism. Conservation tourism is authorized in all wetland area, including the Wetland Conservation Area that is *designated as prohibited zone, and no individuals, legal entities or organizations are permitted to go inside for the purpose of using it, except for [...] and conservation tourism that has temporary and environmental-friendly infrastructure*. Article 26 notes the organizations with whom the tourism activities in the wetland should be coordinated with.

Article 31 presents the Use of Wetland for Business Purposes, including tourism and the Article 32 describes the Use of Wetland for Public Benefits, including tourism, it is stipulated that such uses shall be carried out in a sustainable manner and require the implementation of mitigation hierarchy measures, and shall be in compliance with the relevant laws.

Article 33 describes Lease or Concession of Wetland for activities, including tourism, and the principles under which it shall be carried out. The authorized lessee or concessionaire of the wetland must implement the mitigation hierarchy measures, starting from the stage of investment planning and throughout the stage of development and implementation of investment activities, in accordance with specific regulations. The Article 35 describes the Rights and Duties of the Information, Culture and Tourism Sector.

The draft Xe Champhone Ramsar Management Plan 2022, mentions tourism under various Programs:

- Program 3, Activity 6: Develop and initiate the ecotourism activities to boost the economy.
- Program 5.2, Activity 4: Promote the praise, understanding and respect of local custom and tradition linked with the preservation of the existing cultural tourism sites.
- Program 6, Activity 1: Develop the ecotourism activities to diversify the income generating sources and to provide income earning opportunity in conjunction together with environmental protection.
- Program 6.2, Activity 7: Develop tourism products with the aim of increasing production, generating income, and creating employment for the communities,
- Program 6.3, Activity 1: Promote local knowledge, belief - adherence to custom and tradition practices (customary laws) in the management of cultural tourism sites. Activity 3: Build a center for promotion and development of tourism sites. Activity 4: Advertise and disseminate tourism activities.

## 1.4. Ecotourism as tool for conservation

### 1.4.1. Nature Tourism and Ecotourism

Tourism is considered as one of the largest industries in the world and prior to the COVID19 provided around 1 in 10 jobs worldwide. Despite occasional shocks (economic, health crisis), international tourist arrivals have shown virtually uninterrupted growth: from 25 million in 1950 to 1.5 billion in 2019. While the international tourism was almost stopped by the COVID19 pandemic between 2020-2022, it is estimated that in 2023, international tourist arrivals could reach 80% of pre-pandemic levels.

Over 50% of the tourism market share is driven by NBT and is expected to grow. Nature tourism and wildlife tourism play a significant role in generating crucial revenue for protected areas and conservation, can support sustainable development and local community empowerment, and drive climate change mitigation and improved governance. In Africa, wildlife tourism generates around US\$142 million in entrance fees for protected areas.

In Southeast Asia, the nature tourism sector is growing significantly. The NBT segment of the regional markets is important as for example, the Khao Yai NP in Thailand reports that over half of its visitors are from Southeast Asian countries and that most visitors to Khao Yai NP and other NPs in Thailand are Thai people themselves.

Today, most tourism destinations are offering ecotourism activities and many countries are presenting ecotourism as the key component of their development strategies, especially in developing countries with rich biodiversity. However, ecotourism as concept is often misunderstood and misused, and is often lumped together with nature, wildlife, and adventure tourism. Although there are many products claiming to be ecotourism, tourism ventures are not ecotourism unless they positively and measurably benefit biodiversity conservation.

According to The International Ecotourism Society, ecotourism can be defined as: *Responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education*. Ecotourism when done well is conservation tourism, which focuses on the protection of wild places and wildlife, and the empowerment of local communities.

### 1.4.2. Ecotourism in Wetlands

Wetlands are amongst the most productive of the world's ecosystems, providing numerous ecosystem services such as water, food, flood mitigation, carbon storage and climate regulation as well as presents opportunities for tourism and recreation. Tourism combined with other wetland services can be economically as well as environmentally preferable to other land uses.

Various forms of tourism can take place in and around wetlands from mass to low volume ecotourism and a variety of tourism activities can be offered, these include nature enjoyment, wildlife watching, visitor centers, water recreation activities, boardwalks, birdwatching towers, and accommodations among others.

Offering memorable experiences in wetlands is important for attracting tourists, but tourism development requires careful planning to ensure environmental and social sustainability. While tourism has many potential benefits for conservation, it can also have negative impacts on wildlife and the wetlands. Some of the possible negative impacts from the tourism are degradation of wetland habitat through inappropriate infrastructure development and waste disposal, noise pollution, excessive trampling, disturbance of wildlife species and negative socio-economic impacts on the host communities such as inequality and limited economic benefits, socio-cultural disruptions, and economic vulnerability and dependence on tourism.

Sustainable tourism practices in and around wetlands can contribute to conservation, poverty alleviation, and support to local cultures. In many cases, wetlands have been and remain central to the livelihoods of communities living in and around them, and wetland landscapes have been shaped and protected by those communities. Local communities are key stakeholders in wetland management and in any tourism that is linked with wetlands. The involvement of communities in planning and decision making including on tourism development and management is an essential part of successful ecotourism. Well managed ecotourism in and around wetlands must ensure that benefits accrue to local communities and to the conservation of the wetlands and wildlife.

#### 1.4.3. Ecotourism in Laos

In 2019, tourism accounted for 9.1% of the overall economy in Laos and was one of the largest sources of foreign exchange earnings, only behind mining and electricity. The international tourist arrivals to Laos in 2019 was 4.79 million and the top four source markets were Thailand (45%), China (21.3%), Vietnam (19.3%) and Korea (4.2%). The western market presented around 6% in 2019 (Europe, Americas, and Australia) and the domestic market was 2.3 million, among a population of 7 million.

The World Bank report centered on NBT in Laos notes that NBT is the fastest growing segment of the tourism industry and emphasizes on the importance of the domestic and regional (especially to the Chinese) markets. In 2019, 56% of visitors noted “Nature” as interest for visiting when Laos, 14% listed “Ecotourism” and 10% noted “CBT”.

In 2019, the Government of Laos (GoL) adopted the National Green Growth Strategy for 2030 that identified tourism as a priority sector to deliver greener and more resilient economic growth, especially for women and young people in rural areas.

While Laos has a high potential to become a renowned wildlife ecotourism destination due to its rich natural habitat and wildlife biodiversity, the current wildlife ecotourism product portfolio is quite limited, some of the most popular ventures are: The Gibbon Experience in the Nam Kan NPA, The Rock in Khammouane Province, The Elephant Conservation Center in Xayaboury Province, the Wildlife Tours in the Nam Et-Phou Louey NP and the Nakai Nam Theun NP, the Wildlife rescue and education centers: Free the Beers, Lao Conservation Trust for Wildlife.



## 2. Findings

This section presents the findings of the (1) Current Tourism Status in the study landscape, and (2) of the suitable Potential Tourism Sites and Potential Products that align with the conservation objectives of the Xe Champhone Wetlands and the local tourism context to offer alternative livelihoods to local communities while enhancing their resilience to climate change.

### 2.1. Current Tourism Status in the study landscape

#### 2.1.1. Background - Current Attractions

The Xe Champhone Wetlands and the study landscape is situated next to the Xe Champhone Tourism Loop. The beginning of the development of the Xe Champhone Tourism Loop is found in 2009 when the Savannakhet PICT initiated a tourism development initiative, supported by JICA. The focus of this tourism development initiative was placed strongly on historic, cultural, and natural assets. The resulting recommendation for tourism promotion was in four key sites: Xe Champhone Circuit, Mekong River South Circuit, Ho Chi Minh Trail Circuit and downtown SVK.

Between 2018-2022, the tourism development of the Xe Champhone Loop was supported by the NGO Tétraktys in close partnership with DICT, PONRE, and the local communities. Tétraktys oversaw the development of a CBT circuit, gathering 5 sites in Champhone district: Souy Lake, Monkey Forest, Hotay Pidok, Taleo Old Temple, and Turtle Lake. In addition, the nearby tourism sites were included in the Xe Champhone Loop's tourism maps and communication tools, including the "Crocodile Watching" at Ban Tamsoum, one of the WCS target villages. This work was done within the frame of the CAVA program run by FAO and the MONRE and financed by GEF. Map of the Xe Champhone Loop in Figure 2.



Figure 2 - Xe Champhone Loop Tourism Map (source: Tétraktys).

In addition to the tourism attractions in the Champhone district, the National Eld's Deer Sanctuary located in the neighboring Xonnabouly district spans across 130,745 ha and holds the only known population of the endangered Eld's Deer (*Rucervus eldii*) in Laos. This sanctuary was founded in 2005 and from 2008 to 2016, was supported by WWF and the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund. Further, between 2016 to 2022, the sanctuary developed into a nature and wildlife tourism site through the SAFE Ecosystems project funded by GEF and jointly implemented by UNDP and the MAF.

### 2.1.2. Methodology - Current Tourism Assessment process

To assess the current tourism status in the study landscape the consultant team conducted field visits to the majority of the existing tourism sites and consulted with the tourism professionals familiar with the area, including tourism private sector, NGOs, and tourism consultants. The key findings are presented in a SWOT table at the end of this section.

Field visits to the existing tourism sites in the project area enabled to collect information on the current tourism status, to investigate the potential linkages with the Xe Champhone Wetlands, to observe the existing governance models, and to identify and better mitigate the implementation risks. The consultant Team assessed majority of the existing NBT, CBT sites in the study landscape as presented in the Table 1 (cf. Full current tourism site assessment summary in Annex 2).

Site Name	XCH Loop	WCS Target Village	Tetraktys project Village	Description
1. Turtle Lake & Homestay.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Wildlife, CBT, Homestay.
2. Taleo Temple.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Culture-History.
3. Soui Lake & Homestay.	Yes		Yes	CBT, Homestay, Competition.
4. Monkey Forest.	Yes		Yes	Wildlife, CBT, Nature Site.
5. Hotay Pidok Library.	Yes		Yes	Culture-History, CBT.
6. Eld's Deer Sanctuary.				Protected Area, Wildlife, CBT.
7. Dinosaur Museum.				Natural History.

*Table 1 - Current Tourism Assessment Sites*

Consultations with tourism professionals allowed to obtain further details on the key tourism challenges, product gaps in the project area and the future vision. All Tour Operators (TOs) who were invited to study tour to the Xe Champhone Loop organized by the NGO Tetraktys in August 2022 were consulted as well as Green Discovery Laos, one of the leading nature tourism companies in Laos, and one Savannakhet based company who targets domestic and regional market. List of the consulted TOs is presented below in the Table 2 (cf. Consultation summary with TOs in Annex 3).

Company Name	Xe Champhone Study Tour by Tétraktys project (2022)	SVK based	Market
Biig Travel	Yes	No	Western
EXO Travel	Yes	No	Western
Easia Travel	Yes	No	Western
Marvelaos	Yes	Yes	Western
Oudomsup Tourism	No	Yes	Thai
Green Discovery Laos	No	No	Western, Thai

*Table 2 - Consultations with Tour Operators*

During the Mission Orientation Meeting at the Preparatory Phase of this study, the government tourism stakeholders were consulted. Further, the Champhone DICT officer who formerly worked with the NGO Tétraktys to develop the Xe Champhone Tourism Loop worked closely together with the consultant team on this study to conduct the Community Consultation activity. In addition, consultations were held with the representative of the NGO Tetraktys as well as with the tourism consultant of the CHAMPA project in Savannakhet City and Champhone district.

### 2.1.3.Results

#### 2.1.3.1. *Infrastructures and Services*

##### Transportation

The current tourism sites, located mostly on the Xe Champhone Loop, are situated around 1-1.5 hour from the Savannakhet city, the closest transportation hub. The national highway 13 connects Savannakhet with Vientiane (9 h) and Thakhek (2h15) in North and Pakse (4h) in South. The highway 9E crosses the Savannakhet province East-West connecting to Thailand (Friendship Bridge II) and Vietnam (Dane Savanth). The Champhone district capital is located 18 km (25min) from the Road 13 and 53 km (1h) from Savannakhet city. While the local transportation service is available to reach the Champhone district, private transportation is recommended.

At the time of writing, the Savannakhet Airport serves only the Savannakhet-Vientiane route serviced by Lao Airlines. Prior to covid19, the Savannakhet Airport was operating flights to Pakse as well as international flights to Bangkok it is unknown when and if these routes will resume.

Daily buses are connecting Savannakhet with Northern and Southern Laos. International bus to Mukdahan in Thailand departs multiple times a day and takes around 1h, from here buses depart regularly for Bangkok and other destinations in Thailand. International buses to various destinations in Vietnam depart from Savannakhet daily.

##### Accommodation

Savannakhet province has 223 accommodation establishments in 2021 with 4'479 rooms and the occupancy rate of 53% (2019). Most accommodation establishments are basic.

Champhone district has 18 accommodations, including 12 simple guesthouses and 6 homestays available at the 5 sites that have been supported by the NGO Tetraktys: Souy Lake, Monkey Forest, Hotay Pidok library, Taleo Old Temple, and Turtle Lake. One homestay can welcome 5 guests at a time.

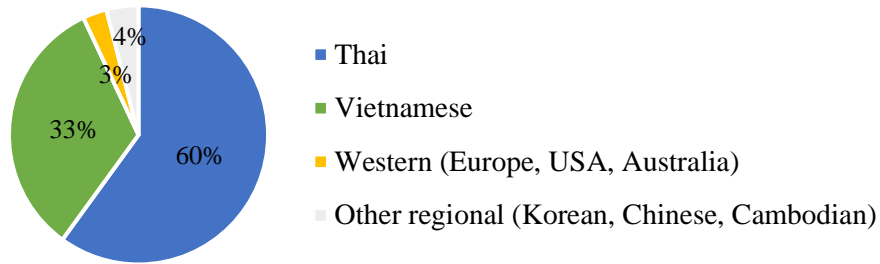
##### Tour Services

In 2012, the WCS ecotourism study, identified the Savannakhet Eco-Guide Unit as the most qualified tourism organization in Savannakhet to operate the potential ecotourism activities in the Xe Champhone Wetlands. The Savannakhet Eco-Guide Unit was a pioneer tourism organization in Savannakhet supported by PICT that organized NBT and CBT in the province. Unfortunately, the Savannakhet Eco-Guide Unit closed in 2020 due to covid19 and lack of funding.

In 2022, ten tour operators are registered in Savannakhet province, mostly serving domestic and regional markets (Lao, Thailand, Vietnam). Marvelaos ([www.marvelaos.com](http://www.marvelaos.com)) is currently the only agency in Savannakhet focusing on the western market and offering NBT and CBT in Savannakhet Province, including the Xe Champhone Loop and the Eld's Deer Sanctuary.

#### 2.1.3.2. *Market*

Tourism market in Savannakhet province is mostly regional and 42% of visitors are domestic. In 2019 (last year before covid19 travel restrictions), Savannakhet Province welcomed 650,339 international visitors and 476,697 domestic visitors. Thai and Vietnamese visitors together present 93% all international arrivals to Savannakhet province: Thai are 60% (389,024 visitors) and Vietnamese are 33% (216,343 visitors). Western market (Europe, USA, Australia) presents 3% of all international arrivals (18,792 visitors).



*Figure 3 - International Visitor Arrivals to Savannakhet Province (2019).*

The current tourism sites on the Xe Champhone Loop welcome in average 600 domestic visitors per month and around 40 international visitors (Western, Thai, other). Majority of visitors staying in the homestays and booking overnight tours to the Eld's Deer Sanctuary are western. The most popular homestay at the Soui Lake welcomes around 50 visitors a year and the Eld's Deer Sanctuary has welcomed 63 visitors, including 22 foreigners, over the past six months (Nov'22-May'23).

The Xe Champhone Loop is a new, emerging destination, that has been developed through the covid19 times when the international tourism was almost non existing (2020-2022). The tourism season 2022-23 is the first since covid19 for the international tourism and the visitor arrivals are expected to grow.

In 2019, the visitors profile in Savannakhet Province and Xe Champhone can be categorized as:

- **Domestic** travel for business, family visits and leisure mostly on weekends and national holidays. The most popular site on the Xe Champhone for Lao visitors is the Soui Lake (lake view restaurants) as well as the sites that offer an opportunity to interact with wildlife (Monkey Forest, Turtle Lake) and spiritual sites.
- **Thai** mostly cross Savannakhet province to travel overland to Vietnam. Some Thai visitors enjoy short weekend escapes to SVK city and Xe Champhone Loop. Similar as for Lao visitors, also Thai visitors enjoy interactions with wildlife. The Hotay Pidok library on the Xe Champhone Loop is a renown spiritual destination for Thai visitors and this site has received a donation of 1 million baht from Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn from Thailand.
- **Vietnamese** visitors in SVK mostly travel for leisure and shopping.
- **Western** visitors in SVK are mostly Thai visa runners over weekends, expats in Laos, and independent budget travelers.
- **Other regional visitors** (Korean, Chinese, Cambodian) and overland motorbike tours, originating from Thailand and Malaysia are crossing Savannakhet occasionally.

#### *2.1.3.3. Marketing*

The Xe Champhone Loop has been well promoted by the NGO Tetraktys in 2022 during the final phase of the project. The promotional activities organized included tourism information signs, exposure in Lao television, inflight magazines and on the social media as well as a study tour for Lao based TOs. The official Facebook page of the Xe Champhone Loop has not been active since the project end in 2022.

While no crocodile watching tours in Ban Tansoum have been established yet, this activity is already promoted through the tourism information signs developed by the NGO Tetraktys and information is available online in various tourism related websites:

- <https://champameuangleo.com/in-the-loop/>
- <https://sonasia-holiday.com/sonabee/xe-champhone-loop>
- <https://laotiantimes.com/2018/11/26/the-wilds-of-xe-champhone/>

Similar, good awareness and marketing was done around the opening of the tourism activities in the Eld's Deer Sanctuary; however, no marketing has continued since the latest project end and almost no information is available regarding the possible tourism activities.

The Savannakhet Tourism information office is currently not very active, however, the Savannakhet based western market-oriented company Marvelaos is promoting tourism sites within the Xe Champhone Loop and in Savannakhet through their social media, mostly Business to Client (B2C).

The Xe Champhone Loop has been well promoted to domestic and western markets by the latest project and the tourism information signs are displayed around Savannakhet, however, further marketing activities and communication is necessary to grow this relatively new destination.

#### *2.1.3.4. Human and Institutional Capacity*

The tourism development and management capacity in the study area has been built through the previous tourism projects and most recently through the development of the Xe Champhone Loop supported by the NGO Tétraktys between 2018-2022 who worked closely together with the government stakeholders at district and provincial level to build the Community Tourism Group to manage the various tourism products in Champhone district.

The private sector capacity to develop and manage tourism in the study landscape is quite limited. From the ten tour operators registered in Savannakhet province only one agency, the Marvelaos, is developing NBT and CBT. Marvelaos is a Lao American family business that currently works with small volume of visitors B2C mostly. Most of the other agencies provide logistic services for domestic and regional visitors.

Ecotourism development and management capacity in the study area is growing but should be further strengthened through further training and internship programs in the following sectors: conservation (wildlife friendly activities and practices), site management (plastic pollution, maintenance, interpretation development), marketing and promotion (social media).

#### *2.1.3.5. Conservation Impact*

Various current tourism sites include wildlife (Turtle Lake, Monkey Forest, Eld's Deer). The wildlife within these tourism sites is protected by the local beliefs as local people believe that these animals are sacred. While local beliefs have helped to safeguard wildlife within these sites, the surrounding natural habitat loss due to agriculture transformation and continuous wildlife trade limits the wildlife reintroduction opportunities to the wild and in some cases even creates human-wildlife conflict. Most sites lack conservation interpretation and education displays. In Monkey Forest and at the Turtle Lake, visitors feed wildlife with unsuitable food often from plastic packaging causing plastic pollution and health risk to the wildlife.

The wildlife tourism sites are some of the most popular ones along the Xe Champhone Loop, especially for domestic tourism and families with kids, and are interesting locations for conservation outreach. Conservation interpretation and educational displays as well as wildlife-friendly plastic-free food for purchase are some of the activities that could enhance the link to conservation and minimize the negative impacts on environment. The current wildlife tourism sites are further described below:

**The sacred Monkey Forest** ("Dong Ling") in Ban Don Meuang covers 3ha. It is estimated that around 300 monkeys live in this forest and between 600 to 900 monkeys, in groups of 10-13 per group spread to the nearby villages (Brakels 2018b). The Rhesus macaques living in this forest mostly rely on food from

the tourists. These macaques cause trouble for the nearby farms and households and the human-wildlife conflict is observed in the following villages: Ban Dongmuang, Ban Xevangket, Ban Thameuang and Ban Lamthen. This forest also supports various other species wildlife (birds, reptiles, small mammals) and plants. It is prohibited to remove anything from this site (ex. honey). In March 2023, to promote tourism in the province, the tourism authorities organized the first Monkey Feeding Festival.

**The Turtle Lake in Ban Don Daeng** is home to the biggest concentration of the Indochinese Softshell Turtles (*Amyda ornata*) in Laos. Visitors can observe and feed turtles from the wooden bridge leading to the charming Buddhist shrine. WCS has been supporting the local community in their conservation efforts since September 2022.

**The National Eld's Deer Sanctuary** holds the only known population of the endangered Eld's Deer (*Rucervus eldii*) in Laos and home to various other species, including: 36 mammals, 135 birds, 44 reptiles and 32 amphibians (Phiapalath et al. 2018). The Eld's Deer offers wildlife watching and nature appreciation activities.

#### *2.1.3.6. Unique selling points and Competition*

Through consultations with TOs and site visits, the unique selling point in Lao context identified for the Xe Champhone Loop is Wildlife. The Xe Champhone Loop is currently the only destination in Laos where numerous wildlife species can be easily observed over a 1-2-day trip. All these wildlife sites are located only 1-2 hours from the SVK city and airport and can be accessed easily by car and almost no physical effort is required. These wildlife tourism sites are suitable for easy travel for families with kids and elderly and these sites have the potential to be developed to suite the accessible traveler needs. Most of the sites on the Xe Champhone Loop can welcome relatively large visitor volume and are suitable therefore for school groups and public outreach activities. Unique Historical-Cultural sites, Authenticity and Wetland-Lake nature scenery can be found also elsewhere in Laos.



### 2.1.3.7. Current Tourism Status SWOT

A SWOT summary of the Current Tourism Status in the study landscape is presented in the Figure 7 and will be further detailed in the Final Report.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>1h Access from Savannakhet and Thailand and Airport.</b> Mostly paved road.</li> <li>- <b>Unique and Easy Wildlife Spotting Opportunities (Eld's deer, Turtles, Macaques, Birds, Dinosaurs).</b></li> <li>- <b>Important spiritual, cultural-historical sites. Local beliefs protect wildlife.</b></li> <li>- <b>Domestic tourism</b> - 600 monthly visitors.</li> <li>- <b>Socio-economic benefits</b> for community and district (entrance fees).</li> <li>- <b>Good marketing of the Xe Champhone Tourism Loop.</b> Interpretation in Lao and English.</li> <li>- <b>Marvelaos</b> – Pioneer SVK based western market-oriented TO focusing on CBT and NBT</li> <li>- <b>Authentic.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Far &amp; Expensive access from other tourism sites in Laos.</b></li> <li>- <b>No active marketing. Lack of information.</b></li> <li>- <b>No strong B2B partners.</b> Marvel Laos is not active in B2B.</li> <li>- <b>Low local capacity to manage and to promote tourism.</b></li> <li>- <b>No suitable accommodation for upper market.</b></li> <li>- <b>Low international visitor arrivals to XCH</b> (around 40 people a month).</li> <li>- <b>Low CBT and NBT market.</b></li> <li>- <b>No Conservation related interpretation</b> at the wildlife sites. <b>Unsuitable wildlife feeding by visitors</b> (Turtles, Macaques).</li> <li>- <b>Plastic</b> (Monkey Forest, Turtle Lake).</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Promote as Wildlife Destination</b> (Eld's deer, Turtles, Macaques, Birds, Dinosaurs + Crocodiles). Not many wildlife sites in Laos.</li> <li>- <b>Raise public awareness</b> about the <b>conservation</b> importance and needs of the <b>sacred species</b> (habitat, nutrition etc),</li> <li>- <b>Attract new markets:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Wildlife enthusiasts and photographers</b> (especially to the Eld's Deer),</li> <li>- <b>Thai market</b> (nature-lovers, families with children).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Loss of tourism services, skills and infrastructures</b> due to low visitor arrivals (Homestays, Eld's Deer).</li> <li>- <b>Wildlife death</b> due to plastic pollution and unsuitable diet.</li> <li>- <b>Loss of cultural and historical heritage.</b></li> <li>- <b>Loss of natural heritage.</b></li> <li>- <b>Loss of ecotourism potential.</b></li> </ul>

Figure 4 - SWOT summary of the Current Tourism Status

**Text highlighted in green** – comments from Tourism Private Sector.

Most of the Current Tourism Sites are located only 1 hour drive away from the Savannakhet city, airport, and the international border with Thailand. Many of the existing tourism sites are spiritual and offer the opportunity to spot and interact with wildlife, something that is unique in Lao context. Wildlife in most these sites is protected by the local beliefs. The current tourism sites receive a regular domestic tourism traffic of around 600 monthly visitors. In most sites, the local Community Tourism Group (CTG) is in charge of the site management and receive financial benefits through entrance fees as well as sale of goods and services. The current tourism sites have been well promoted by the former projects and tourism interpretation signs are available at most sites. Marvelaos a pioneer SVK based western-market oriented TO is actively promoting the current tourism products.

However, there are also several weaknesses to address. As informed by the consulted TOs, one of the key challenges is the far and expensive access from other tourist sites in Laos. Limited B2B partnership opportunities and low local capacity for tourism management and promotion pose additional obstacles. The absence of suitable accommodations for higher-end markets is an additional obstacle. Despite its potential,

Xe Champhone struggles with low international visitor arrivals, averaging around 40 people per month and 50 visitors a year for the overnight NBT and CBT activities. In addition, conservation-related interpretation at wildlife sites is lacking, and issues like plastic pollution and unsuitable wildlife feeding require attention to ensure environmental sustainability.

Nevertheless, there are opportunities for further development. It is recommended by the consulted TOs to promote the area as a wildlife destination, emphasizing the presence of Eld's deer, turtles, macaques, birds, crocodiles and even dinosaurs. Raising public awareness about the importance of conserving these species and their habitats is crucial. Xe Champhone has the potential to attract new markets, such as wildlife enthusiasts, photographers, as well as the Thai market.

It is essential to address the threats to ensure sustainable tourism in the Xe Champhone area. Potential loss of tourism services, skills, and infrastructure due to low visitor arrivals may impact local businesses and the preservation of the Eld's deer population. Actions should be taken to mitigate wildlife mortality resulting from plastic pollution and inappropriate feeding practices. The preservation of cultural and historical heritage, as well as the natural heritage, should be prioritized to maintain the area's authenticity and ecotourism potential.

## **2.2. Tourism Potential Assessment in the Xe Champhone Wetlands**

### **2.2.1. Background - Tourism in the Xe Champhone Wetlands**

The first ecotourism study in the Xe Champhone Wetlands was conducted by WCS in 2012 in cooperation with the Haas School of Business from the University of California. The study objective was to assess ecotourism potential in the Xe Champhone Wetlands and to compile a business plan with the goal to increase the population of the critically endangered Siamese Crocodile and to raise the local village income.

The study recommended two key products in Ban Tansoum village: (1) a Visitor Center and Crocodile Nursery, and (2) an overnight Champhone Crocodile Experience. Due to a lack of funding, these ecotourism activities could not be implemented. A summary of the tourism products recommended by this study in 2012 is presented in the Table 1 and Table 2.

In 2014, IUCN published a study *The significance of the Xe Champhone Ramsar site and its surroundings for biodiversity conservation*. This study recommended to make use of the Xe Champhone Wetlands for tourism, however, author states that it cannot be hoped to attract serious wildlife tourists and birdwatchers given the paucity of rare species, and therefore the emphasis would have to be on the general tourists.

The study author notes that in long term, wildlife appreciation opportunities easily accessible to the public could trigger the beginnings of wildlife conservation interest in the general tourists. Author recommends that such wildlife experiences would need to be based around easy to access wetlands, such as Nong Souy Lake and Pai Bak.

This study informs that in the short and even medium-term, however, ecotourism is unlikely to have much direct benefit for wildlife conservation and warns about the possibly negative impacts of over tourism and the risk of ecotourism diverting the wetland manager attention from other urgent conservation work. Study therefore recommends for ecotourism to be undertaken by entrepreneurs maintaining a close dialogue with wetland managers.

Between 2018-2022, the development of the Xe Champhone Loop was supported by the NGO Tétraktys (cf. 2.1.1) and the “Crocodile Watching” at Ban Tamsoum has been added to the Xe Champhone Loop’s tourism maps and communication tools.

### Visitor Center and Crocodile Nursery in Ban Tansoum.

The following services were recommended to be offered at the Visitor Center and Crocodile Nursery:

- Interpretation and education displays.
- Souvenir merchandise for purchase.
- A one-hour pre-booked informative sessions including a tour of the Crocodile Nursery hosted by WCS coordinator for small groups of <10 people.
  - Opportunity to view and possibly feed and hold the baby crocodiles.
  - Recommended fee of \$5.00 per tourist. Funds to be reinvested in the management of the Visitor Center-Crocodile Nursery and the Champhone Crocodile Experience.

*Table 3 - Recommendation (2012 ecotourism study) – Visitor Center.*

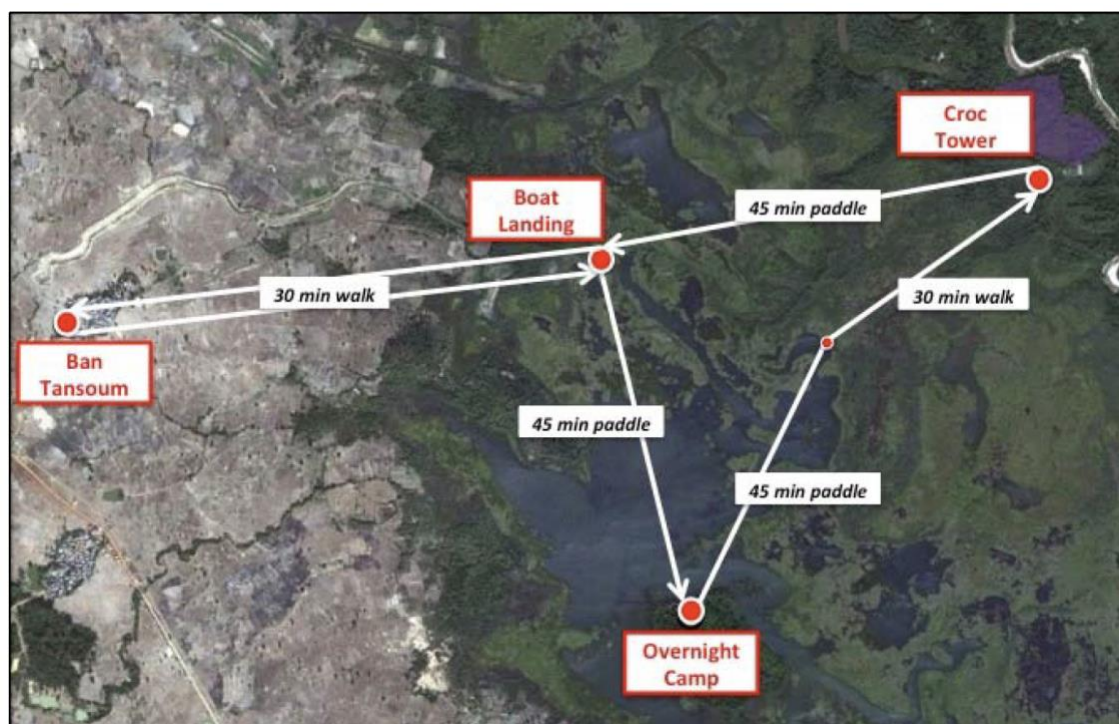
### (2) The Champhone Crocodile Experience.

The Champhone Crocodile Experience recommended by the WCS study in 2012 is a community-based nature activity with an overnight camping to enjoy birdwatching, appreciate the Xe Champhone Wetlands and to learn about the Siamese Crocodiles and the local culture. The ecotourism model of this product is inspired from the Nam Nern Night Safari in the Nam Et-Phou Louey National Park, - another landscape supported by WCS in Laos.

The recommended features of the Champhone Crocodile Experience are:

- Village Tour & Handicraft Demonstration
- Afternoon Boat Ride, Baci Welcome Ceremony, and Nature Walk
- Sunset Paddle, Campfire Dinner, and Nighttime Spotlighting
- Morning Paddle and Crocodile Observation Tower Visit

The recommended itinerary is illustrated in the map below:



*Table 4 - Products recommendation (2012 ecotourism study) – Champhone Experience.*

## 2.2.2. Methodology - Tourism Potential Assessment process

The process of the Tourism Potential Assessment in the target villages in the Xe Champhone Wetlands consists of four key parts: (1) Consultations with WCS, (2) Consultations with the target villages, (3) Potential Site Visits, (4) Tourism Site Potential Scoring.

A briefing meeting with WCS team in Savannakhet was arranged at the commencement of the assignment to select the target villages and to set pre-conditions for ecotourism development in Xe Champhone Wetlands. To ensure objective site assessment and scoring, it was agreed that all process will be conducted by the assessment team that includes: the two study consultants, a representative from Champhone DICT office and a WCS outreach officer.

Consultation meetings with the local communities were conducted in the target villages to assess (1) Site Features, (2) Community willingness to develop tourism as well as (3) the Future Vision and the possible products. Community consultation process is presented in the Figure 8 (cf. photographs in Annex 4).



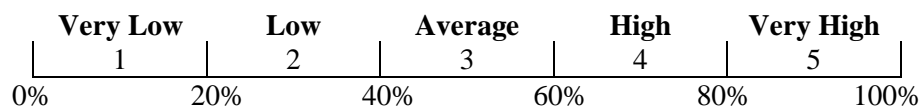
*Figure 5 - Community consultation process*

Up to ten participants representing the relevant sectors to this study were invited to attend the consultation meetings and women participation was encouraged. All points of interest were marked during the meeting in a printed map using sticky notes and all data was further entered in a GIS database.

Based on the community willingness to develop tourism and on the initial perception of the site attractiveness in regards of the nature and wildlife attractions and the potential products as discussed with the community, the assessment team agreed to conduct further site visits.

Following the community consultation meeting and the site visits, the assessment team conducted the Tourism Potential Assessment (TPA) Scoring. The TPA scoring matrix is based on four main groups: (1) Site Features, (2) Market Attractiveness, (3) Impact, and (4) Development and Operations.

Under each group there are various criteria that are all scored on a scale of 1–5 points (1 –low, negative point to 5- high, positive point). The TPA was done as a group activity through discussion followed by a scoring by each member of the assessment team to then obtain an average score per criteria. The sum of points is then divided by the maximum possible score to obtain the percentage that is presenting the tourism potential level (Very low to Very High) (Figure 9).



*Figure 6 - Tourism Potential Assessment scoring method*



### 2.2.3. Target Sites and Pre-Conditions to Ecotourism Development

Through discussion with WCS SVK team, the following conditions were site for the target site selection:

- **Area** - Within the Xe Champhone Wetland complex, does not need to be limited to the Ramsar.
- **Villages** - WCS MoU and Target Villages with high conservation importance.

The possible villages where zoned based on their geographical location and similarities. Three priority zones were selected for this study (Zone A, B, C), more details in the Figure 7.

Key priority zones:	Map
<b>Zone A: 1 village:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Keng Kok Dong</li> </ul>	
<b>Zone B: 4 villages:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ban Tansoum</li> <li>- Laonarth</li> <li>- Donkheng</li> <li>- Lao Hua Kham</li> </ul>	
<b>Zone C: 4 villages:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Don Deang</li> <li>- Taleo</li> <li>- Nakathang</li> <li>- Natay</li> </ul>	
<b>Other potential zones:</b>	
<b>Zone D:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Donganong</li> <li>- Ban Dong Sa Vang</li> <li>- Nong Long Lake</li> </ul>	
<b>Zone E:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Beung Xang</li> <li>- Eld's Deer.</li> </ul>	

Figure 7 - Target villages

Through the discussion with the WCS, the following pre-conditions for ecotourism development in the Xe Champhone Wetlands were set:

1. Community willingness to develop tourism.
2. Crocodile conservation-friendly experience.
3. Tourism Site & Product Assessment must present:
  - High or Very High Score,
  - Positive environmental impact and link to conservation,
  - Positive socio-economic impact.
4. Community Based Tourism with support from tourism private sector & district. WCS can support ecotourism development & impact monitoring, but not the management of the tourism operations.

#### 4.1.1. Results

This chapter presents findings on the suitable Potential Tourism Sites and provides recommendations for appropriate ecotourism products in the assessed sites that would best fit the conservation objectives of the Xe Champhone Wetlands and the local tourism context and would provide local communities with alternative livelihoods while enhancing their resilience to climate change. Wherever possible, the 2012 ecotourism study is used as a baseline reference to compare with the current situation, a decade later.

##### 4.1.1.1. Potential Tourism Sites

Based on the community willingness to develop tourism and on the initial perception of the site attractiveness in regards of the nature and wildlife attractions and the potential products as discussed with the community, the site visits were conducted in four villages (Keng Kong Dong, Lao Hua Kham, Don Deng and Tansoum). Further details and photographs from the potential site visits are in Annex 3. The Xe Champhone Crocodile Experience and the Visitor Center and Crocodile Nursery site in Ban Tansoum that was identified as part of the 2012 ecotourism study was partly resurveyed.

Following each community consultation meeting and the associated potential site visit, the assessment team conducted the Tourism Potential Assessment scoring, Part 1 - “Site Features”, the results are presented in the Table 5 (cf. Annex 5 - full sites assessment description; Annex 6 - site visits). The criteria highlighted in yellow presents the most relevant criteria to this ecotourism study.

	Group A	Group B				Group C			
Village Name:	Keng Kong Dong	Laonarth	Lao Huakham	Donkheng	Tansoum	Natay	Don Deng	Nakathang	Taleo
Criteria:									
Location/Accessibility	5	3	3	3,5	3,5	3	4	4	4
Seasonality	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Tourism Amenities	3	2	2,5	2	2	2	3,5	2	3,5
Proximity to other tourism sites	4	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	4
Wildlife	2,5	3	3,5	3,5	4,5	3	4	2	2
Conservation	3	3	3,5	3,5	4	3	4	2,5	3
Nature Attractions	3,5	2,5	4	4	4	2,5	3	2	3
Cultural & Historical Attractions	3,5	2	2	2	2	3	3	2	4
Uniqueness	4	3	3,5	3,5	4,5	3	4	2,5	3,5
Willingness to develop tourism	4	3	3	3,5	3,5	2,5	3	2	3
Risk - Health and Safety	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>40,5</b>	<b>32,5</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>36,5</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>40,5</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>% (from 100)</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>69%</b>

Table 5 - Potential Tourism Site Scoring Results



Most of the assessed villages present “High” potential (between 65-75%), but none of the sites show “Very High” potential (80-100%). The “High” potential is mostly due to the following points:

- Location-Accessibility-Seasonality. Most sites on the Xe Champhone Wetlands are located only around 1 hour from the Savannakhet city, airport, and the international border with Thailand. While the road condition is average, access is possible almost all year long.
- Proximity to the existing tourism sites: the Xe Champhone Tourism Loop, Savannakhet.
- Low safety risk despite the water level variations in wetlands during the rainy season.
- Conservation and Wildlife. Conservation linked local beliefs and awareness in most villages, regular and relatively easy wildlife spotting opportunities at several sites (Group B villages, Don Deng).

The downside in most of the sites is:

- Poor level of existing tourism amenities and average cultural and historical attractions.
- Average willingness to develop tourism in most of communities.
  - Existing tourism villages: hesitant to expand responsibilities.
  - Villages with no tourism yet: worried about the possible negative impacts:
    - Not respecting community’s opinion and culture,
    - Agreements not being followed (land-grabbing, mining, agriculture).

The highest score is for Ban Keng Kong Dong and Ban Don Deng:

- Ban Keng Kong Dong is a sub-village of the Champhone district capital located on the Xe Champhone Tourism Loop. This relatively urbanized village is surrounded by the wetlands and the crocodile conservation zones and occasional wildlife sightings, including crocodiles, have been reported by the community. This village expressed the highest willingness to develop tourism from all the consulted villages. In this study period, in June 2023, a local company has expressed interest to develop the Nong Kan reservoir for tourism recreation activities, see more on Annex 7.
- Ban Don Deng is one of the existing tourism villages on the Xe Champhone Loop that has been developed by the NGO Tetraktys. The Turtle Lake is the main tourism attraction, and this community is working closely with WCS on the Indochinese Softshell Turtle conservation. This community is familiar with the realities and requirements of tourism management and is hesitant to expand to new activities.

Other sites that presented High potential is Ban Tansoum and other Group B villages (Ban Donkheng and Ban Lao Hua Kham) as well as Ban Taleo from the Group C:

- Group B villages are located close to each other and share many characteristics including the wetland waters. The Group B villages are not located on the Xe Champhone Tourism Loop and require a 30 min detour from the Champhone town on an unpaved, quite bad road, regardless these villages are located only around 1-hour drive from the Savannakhet City and airport. Access from these villages to the wetlands take only 15-30 min (driving-walking) and some sites can be accessed by car.

Most of the Group B villages have regular and diverse wildlife sightings and scenic and healthy natural sites (wetlands, forest). Ban Tansoum is one of the key WCS target villages where the crocodile nursery program is located. The Xe Champhone ecotourism study in 2012 recommended Ban Tansoum for further ecotourism development and recommended two sites: visitor center and an overnight experience.

- Ban Taleo is one of the existing tourism villages on the Xe Champhone Loop that has been developed by the NGO Tetraktys. While this village has an important cultural and historical value, wildlife sightings are quite rare, and the conservation interest is average. The sacred big tree near the old Taleo temple stands as a souvenir of the once scenic forest habitat.

## Market, Unique selling points, Competition.

Currently the market demand for quality NBT and CBT in the study area is low, however, the demand is expected to grow, and new markets could be attracted with the right promotion. Through the consultations with TOs it was noted that there is a demand for sustainable quality wildlife experiences in Laos as the current product portfolio is quite limited.

At the Lao country level, the unique selling point of the Xe Champhone Wetlands is wildlife (crocodiles, turtles, birdlife) and the proximity to the SVK city and airport as well as to the Xe Champhone Loop and Eld's Deer that includes various unique sites in Lao context, including other wildlife sites.

At the local context, the Soui Lake, a current tourism site on the Xe Champhone Loop, presents a competition for nature enjoyment and recreational activities, especially for the general public. Activities that are currently offered at the Soui Lake include: lake view restaurants and boat restaurants, homestay, fishing, and boating activity offered by the homestay family, and a boat-camping and kayaking activity is planned to be offered soon by the Marvelaos company.

The key national level competition to the Xe Champhone Wetlands is the second Ramsar site in the country, - the Beung Khiet Ngong Wetlands. Ecotourism has been developed in and around the Beung Khiet Ngong Wetlands since 2008 and both Ramsar sites share similar birdlife and are located 1h from a city with a domestic market, an airport and in proximity to the Thai border. In addition, the Beung Khiet Ngong Wetlands are in proximity to some of the most popular tourism sites in the country (the UNESCO site of Wat Phou, Boloven Loop and the 4000 islands) and accordingly quality tourism amenities and strong domestic and international market is available nearby. The short, but bad road access to the Beung Khiet Ngong Wetlands as well as the degrading reputation of this destination (Figure 8) offers an opportunity for the Xe Champhone Wetlands to position as an alternative destination with a unique selling point – the Siamese Crocodiles. The advantages of both Ramsar sites are detailed in the Table 6.

<b>Beung Khiet Ngong</b>	<b>Common Points</b>	<b>Xe Champhone</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- International and Domestic airport.</li><li>- 2 international border crossings (Thailand &amp; Cambodia).</li><li>- Proximity to popular tourism sites and market (UNESCO Wat Phou Site, Boloven Loop, 4000 islands).</li><li>- Existing international market.</li><li>- Proximity to quality tourism infrastructures and services (accommodation, restaurants).</li><li>- Existing tourism facilities (accommodations (incl. Kingfisher ecolodge), activities)</li><li>- Diversity of activities and landscapes (Xe Pian NP, Cultural-Historical sites).</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Around 1-1h15 from the city and the airport.</li><li>- The only 2 Ramsar sites in Laos</li><li>- Bird species</li><li>- Proximity to the Thai border and Thai market.</li><li>- Proximity to a city with middle class (domestic market).</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Crocodiles</li><li>- Better road access</li><li>- Lessons learned from Ban Khiet Ngong ecotourism program,</li><li>- Alternative to Ban Khiet Ngong,</li><li>- New, emerging destination (Xe Champhone Loop, SVK).</li></ul>

*Table 6 - Beung Khiet Ngong and Xe Champhone Wetlands comparison.*

At the international level, the key unique selling point is the Siamese Crocodile and the 1h proximity to the airport. Bird species found in the Xe Champhone Wetlands can be spotted in the Ramsar sites in Cambodia in addition to other rare and endemic species. Given the paucity of unique bird species, it would be difficult to attract international birdwatchers and therefore the emphasis would have to be on the general tourists.

### Ecotourism in Beung Khiet Ngong Wetlands.

Ecotourism has been developed in and around the Beung Khiet Ngong Wetlands since 2008, initially supported by WWF. The Ban Khiet Ngong village is the main ecotourism village located on the banks of the Beung Khiet Ngong Wetlands and next to the Xepian National Park. Phou Asa an important historical-cultural site is located nearby the village up on the mountain offering a panoramic view over the wetlands.

Ban Khiet Ngong used to be a renown Mahout-elephant keeper village and elephant rides was one of the key tourism activities offered by the community to the visitors in addition to hiking in the Xepian National Park, boating on the wetlands, guesthouse, and homestays and handicrafts.



Photo credit: Travelfish.com

Tourism in Ban Khiet Ngong was organized by the local community and the various activities could be booked through the “village information office”. The Kingfisher Ecolodge ([www.kingfisherecolodge.com](http://www.kingfisherecolodge.com)), a privately owned Italian Lao business offers the elaborated accommodation in the village and various tours with English speaking guides.

In 2011, around 10'000 tourists visited the Ban Khiet Ngong village. It is estimated that the elephant tours generated revenue over USD\$23,000 in the season 2006-07 for the elephant keepers and the community.

Through consultations with TOs it was identified that COVID19 had impacted the tourism community in Ban Khiet Ngong severely. In 2023, no elephants are remaining in the village and most of the community managed activities are closed. Due to attractive market price for agriculture products and livestock, community has turned to more intensive agriculture practices leading to the wetland transformation for agriculture and deforestation.

Due to the degradation of the nature attraction value, numerous TOs have stopped promoting this destination. The privately owned Kingfisher Ecolodge continues to provide its services as well as organized activities with the local community: bird watching, silk weaving, mountain biking, hiking and boating tours on the wetlands.



Photo credit: Kingfisher ecolodge

Figure 8 - Ecotourism in Beung Khiet Ngong Wetlands

## Tourism Site Potential Assessment SWOT

A SWOT summary of the Xe Champhone Wetlands tourism potential is presented in the Figure 9 and will be further detailed in the Final Report.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Access</b> all year long - <b>1h from SVK, airport, and Thailand</b>. Group A and C villages: mostly paved road, acceptable condition.</li> <li>• Proximity to <b>existing tourism products &amp; marketing</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Regular</b> and relatively <b>easy wildlife sighting opportunities</b> (birdlife, turtles, crocs), mostly Group B villages and in Ban Don Deng.</li> <li>• <b>Conservation interest</b> and <b>awareness</b> in most villages.</li> <li>• Several <b>unique sites</b>, mostly in Lao context.</li> <li>• <b>Low safety risk</b> (only some during the heavy rainy – flood season).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Group B villages - Not on the Xe Champhone Tourism Loop – a detour</b>. Road is unpaved and not comfortable.</li> <li>• <b>Paucity of rare wildlife species</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Low CBT and NBT market</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Basic tourism amenities</b> (accommodation, restaurants, tourism information).</li> <li>• <b>High water level variations</b> in wetlands (around +5m in rainy season)</li> <li>• <b>Average willingness to develop tourism</b>.</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop <b>unique wildlife experiences</b> for Lao context.</li> <li>• Link to the <b>existing Xe Champhone Loop, Eld's deer and Savannakhet</b>.</li> <li>• Link to <b>Thai markets and international</b> (incl. BKK if international flights resume).</li> <li>• Trigger <b>wildlife conservation interest</b> in the general tourists.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Disappointing community expectation – low benefits from tourism</b>.</li> <li>• <b>If tourism development plans are not fully supported by the community</b> this might bring the following negative impacts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Declining relationships with WCS,</li> <li>○ Declining community conservation efforts,</li> <li>○ Lack of ownership over the tourism infrastructures and high labor, maintenance costs.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Inappropriate crocodile tourism</b> and trafficking for illegal trade.</li> <li>• Ecotourism facilities used for <b>poaching</b> (viewing tower).</li> </ul>

Figure 9 - SWOT summary of the Xe Champhone Wetlands tourism potential.

The key strength and the overall unique selling point of the potential tourism sites in the Xe Champhone Wetlands is the Siamese Crocodile and the proximity to the city and airport (1h only). Low safety risk despite the water level variations in wetlands during the rainy season and the link to the existing tourism sites and the “Crocodile Watching” being included and promoted as part of the current Xe Champhone Loop enhances its appeal.

However, the currently the NBT tourism market in the study landscape is low and given the paucity of unique bird species and charismatic wildlife species other than the crocodiles, it would be difficult to attract international birdwatchers and high volume of international higher end wildlife tourists. The cultural and historical attractions are of an average level of uniqueness. The current tourism amenities in the 9 pre-selected villages are very basic and even non-existent, and the future tourism infrastructure development in the wetlands will need to be planned carefully to take in consideration the high-water level variations during the rainy season (around +5 meters). The potential community willingness to develop tourism is average, the existing tourism villages are hesitant to expand their responsibilities to new tourism products, while the villages without tourism express concerns about the potential negative impacts on their community and culture.

Regardless, the study sites present an opportunity for development of unique wildlife ecotourism experiences that can be linked to the existing nearby tourism loop to trigger wildlife conservation interest in the general public, to attract new markets and to position as an alternative destination Khiet Ngong Wetlands. Careful planning is crucial when developing tourism in wetlands to avoid disappointing community and stakeholder expectations and to mitigate potential negative environmental impacts.

#### 4.1.1.2. Potential Tourism Products

Through the consultations with the target villages, various potential tourism products were identified as presented in the Table 7. The activities, that are already existent in the village are presented in Green (✓), the activities that following the site visit have been identified as not suitable are presented in Orange (✓), the activities that are presented in Black (✓) are further considered.

The villages that presented the highest Tourism Site Potential are highlighted in green. The tourism product suitability to fit the conservation objectives of the Xe Champhone Wetlands, the local tourism context and to provide local communities with alternative livelihoods that would strengthen community resilience to climate change is further analyzed for the sites that presented the highest potential: Keng Kong Dong, Tansoum, Don Deng and Taleo.

	Group A	Group B				Group C			
	Keng Kong Dong	Lao Narth	Lao Hua Kham	Donkheng	Tansoum	Natay	Don Deng	Nakathang	Taleo
<b>Activities:</b>									
Irrigation reservoir for recreational activities.	✓	✓							
Wetland Trail, Platform, Observation Tower.	✓		✓		✓				
Boating - Kayaking on the Xe Champhone River	✓								
Overnight wetland experience				✓	✓		✓		
Short daytime wetland visit. Boating, walking.			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Improve existing tourism product and infrastructures.							✓		
Homestay				✓			✓		✓
Visitor Center					✓				
Forest Walking Trail				✓				✓	✓

Table 7 - Potential Tourism Products

The potential product scoring summary is presented in the Table 8 (cf. detailed argumentation of the scoring is presented in the Annex 6). The products that present overall the highest potential for the Xe Champhone Wetlands are:

- the Turtle Lake tourism product improvement and expansion at Ban Don Daeng (80%),
- and the Wetland Visitor Center at Ban Tansoum (74%).

The Guided Overnight Wetland Experience presents the high potential Positive Impact, but overall, the lowest score mostly due to quite high Development and Operations costs. The Wetland Trail-Boardwalk, Observation Tower product present quite high potential Positive Impacts and Market Attractiveness, but high Development and Operations costs.

Other products that present average-high Positive Impact and an average-high overall potential are:

- Boating-Kayaking on the Xe Champhone River,
- Guided short daytime wetland visit,
- Guided Forest Walking Trail in Ban Taleo.

It is recommended that the products that demonstrate average-high Market Attractiveness and/or quite high Development and Operations costs are developed as a PPP by the community and an experienced, conservation minded private company, and with WCS support.

The development of products that do not present high positive Environmental Impact and Link to Conservation should not be initiated by WCS, however, can be developed by other entities, community including, and WCS can provide support in regards of the best practice guidance in regards of conservation friendly tourism development.

In addition to the potential products, thematic itineraries for tourism promotion and conservation outreach have been identified for the current and the potential tourism sites, these include:

- The Xe Champhone Wildlife Loop,
- The Living dinosaurs (birds, crocodiles, turtles).

	Potential products:	Irrigation reservoir for recreational activities	Wetland Trail-Boardwalk, Observation Tower	Kayaking on the Xe Champhone River	Guided overnight wetland experience	Guided short daytime wetland visit	Improve and Expand tourism infrastructures (Turtle Lake)	Homestay	Visitor Center	Guided Forest Walking Trail
	Potential villages:	Keng Kong Dong	Keng Kong Dong, Tansoum	Keng Kong Dong	Tansoum, Don Deang	Tansoum, Don Deang	Don Deang	Don Deang, Taleo	Tansoum,	Taleo
	Criteria:									
Impact	Socio-economic impact	3	2	2	4	2	3	2	2	2
	Political impact	3	4	3	4	4	4	3	4	3
	Environmental impact	2	3	4	4	4	4	3	4	4
	Link to conservation	2	4	3	4	3	4	2	4	3
	<b>Sub-score</b>	10	13	12	16	13	15	10	14	12
	<b>Percentage</b>	50%	65%	60%	80%	65%	75%	50%	70%	60%
Market Attractiveness	Market-Demand	4	4	2	3	2	5	2	3	3
	Barriers to Entry	3	4	2	3	2	5	2	4	2
	Operational Cost (Price)	4	3	4	3	4	4	4	4	4
	WTP	4	2	3	4	3	2	3	2	3
	Length of stay	5	5	4	3	4	5	3	5	4
	Seasonality	4	4	3	3	3	5	5	5	3
	Carrying capacity	5	4	3	2	3	5	2	4	3
	<b>Sub-score</b>	29	26	21	21	21	31	21	27	22
	<b>Percentage</b>	83%	74%	60%	60%	60%	91%	60%	77%	63%
Development and Operations	Investment	3	2	4	2	4	3	4	3	4
	Labor	3	5	3	2	4	5	4	5	4
	Training	3	3	4	2	4	4	4	3	4
	Infrastructure	2	1	4	3	4	3	4	3	5
	Maintenance	3	2	4	3	4	3	5	4	5
	<b>Sub-score</b>	14	13	19	12	20	18	21	18	22
	<b>Percentage</b>	56%	52%	76%	48%	80%	72%	84%	72%	88%
	<b>Total Score (Product)</b>	53	52	52	49	54	64	52	59	56
	<b>Total %</b>	66%	65%	65%	61%	68%	80%	65%	74%	70%

Table 8 - Potential Product Scoring Summary



The Map below (Figure 10) presents the recommended potential product locations within the Xe Champhone Wetland landscape. The products highlighted in dark green are the recommended priority products that could be managed solely by the community following the right training opportunities and short-term support from a tourism development organization or expert. The products highlighted in light green are recommended to be developed by the private sector due to the relatively low Market Attractiveness and/or high Development and Operations costs.

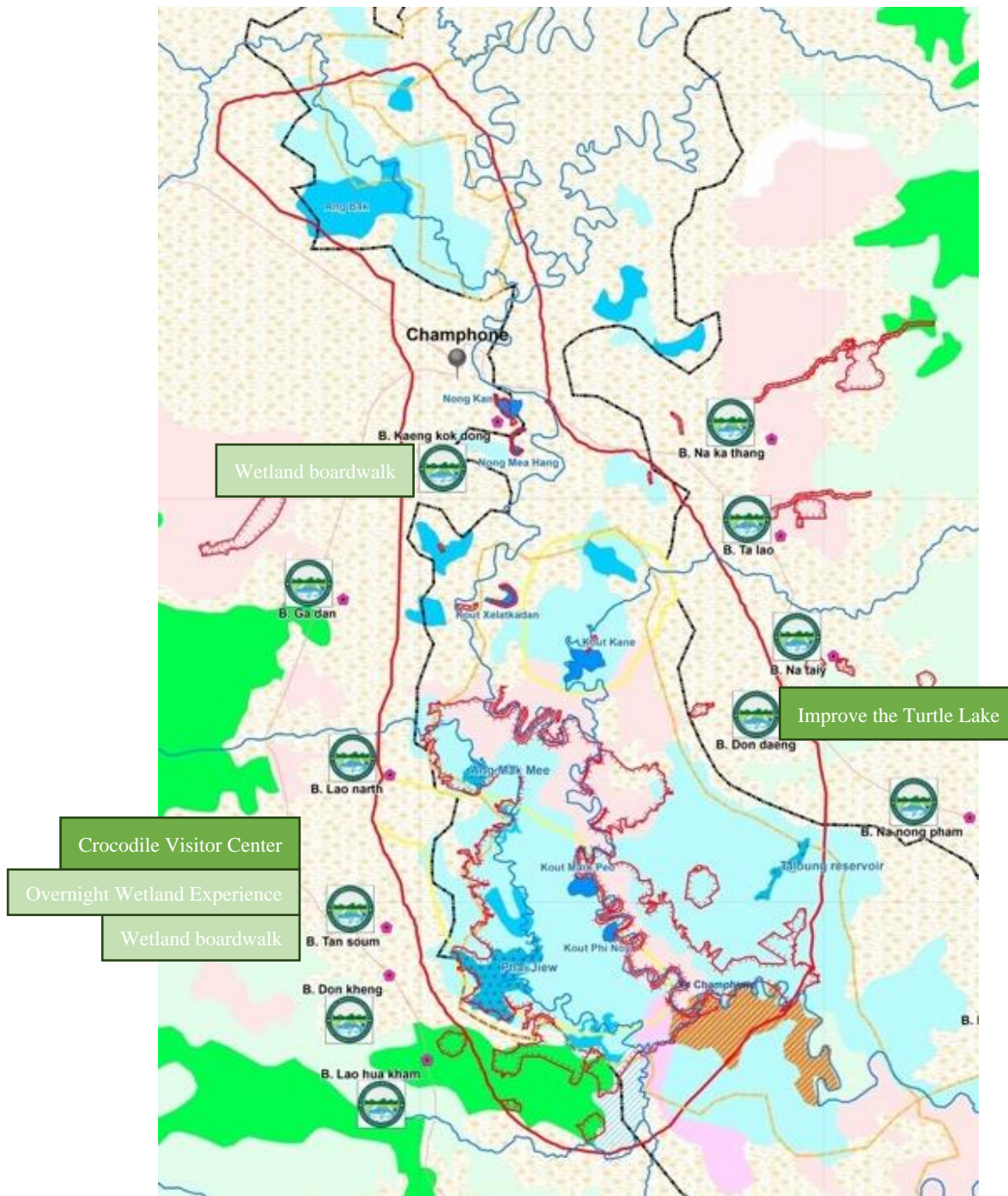


Figure 10 - Potential Product Locations

## Potential Product Descriptions

The potential community-based and managed ecotourism products recommended for development to be initiated and supported by WCS are:

- (a) Turtle Lake infrastructure improvement and expansion in Ban Don Deang,
- (b) Visitor Center in Ban Tansoum.

The potential tourism products recommended to be developed by the private sector together with the local communities and in collaboration with WCS are:

- (c) Overnight Wetland Experience in Ban Tansoum,
- (d) Wetland Trail-Boardwalk, Platform, Observation Tower in Keng Kong Dong and Tansoum.

These products are further described in detail below.

### (a) Turtle Lake infrastructure improvement and expansion

**Location:** Ban Don Deang

**Product Description:** The Turtle Lake in Ban Don Deang is one of the current tourism villages on the Xe Champhone Tourism Loop. The lake is home to the biggest concentration of the Indochinese Softshell Turtles (*Amyda ornata*) in Laos and is sacred to both Buddhist and Animist traditions. Visitors can easily observe and feed the turtles from the wooden bridge leading to the charming Buddhist shrine. WCS is supporting the community conservation efforts of the Indochinese Softshell Turtles since September 2022.

A SWOT summary below presents the existing tourism at the Turtle Lake. Through the consultations with the target villages, it was identified that further outreach and incentive mechanisms are required to raise awareness about the turtle conservation needs and regulations to the Xe Champhone wetland communities. Following the consultation meeting with the Don Deang village, it is recommended to further improve and expand the existing tourism product at the Turtle Lake to enhance the link to conservation and to grow the public awareness and the socio-economic benefits to the community.

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Rare opportunity to easily see Indochinese Softshell Turtle,</li><li>- Local beliefs protecting turtles,</li><li>- Popular domestic tourism site,</li><li>- Part of the Xe Champhone Loop,</li><li>- Existing revenue streams (entrance fee, merchandise, handicrafts),</li><li>- Community Tourism Group,</li><li>- Interpretation in Lao and English.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Plastic pollution,</li><li>- Unsuitable diet for turtles,</li><li>- Minimal conservation related interpretation and educational displays,</li><li>- Low revenue.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Enhance the link to conservation, outreach about turtle conservation needs (habitat, diet),</li><li>- Improve the site management and minimize plastic pollution,</li><li>- Improve and expand the existing tourism product,</li><li>- Higher visitor expenditure.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Turtle death caused by the plastic pollution and unsuitable diet.</li></ul>

The Market Attractiveness of the Turtle Lake is very high, however, the visitor WTP for this type of activities is low. The development and operations costs are average to low depending on the various sub-activities and would be partly observed by the existing tourism structure.

The identified potential sub-activities for further improvement and expansion of the Turtle Lake tourism site that would enhance the link to conservation and to increase the socio-economic benefits to the community and the area are:

Activity	Link to conservation	Environmental impact	Socio-economic impact
1. Conservation interpretation and educational displays.	✓	✓	
2. Unique and turtle-friendly merchandise.	✓	✓	✓
3. Expand the existing boardwalk.			✓
4. Turtle Conservation and Education Centre	✓	✓	✓

**1. Conservation interpretation and educational displays.** While the turtle lake is an important site for the Indochinese Softshell Turtle conservation, currently very little information about this species conservation importance and challenges is available to the visitors. Attractive and interactive conservation interpretation and educational displays can help to promote to the public the benefits from turtles to the people and the importance of the turtle habitat conservation.

The Turtle Lake is a popular family destination and by offering a joyful educational experience to the young generation, the conservation outreach objectives could be reached. Offering attractive photo opportunities to visitors helps to promote the destination as well as to raise public awareness about the conservation. Examples of educational displays and photo opportunities in the photographs below:



Photos (left to right): Turtle Interpretation Centre in Visakhapatnam, India; Turtle Conservation and Education Center in Bali, Indonesia.

In addition, the Community Tourism Group currently managing the Turtle Lake could provide a short, guided tour for Lao visitors and educational displays in English and in the regional languages would be available for foreign visitors.

## 2. Unique turtle-friendly merchandise.

**“Turtle Food” baskets for sale:** Snacks for sale to feed turtles are available at the entrance ticket counter. These snacks (crisps, cookies etc.) are not suitable diet for turtles and in addition are mostly packed in plastic that ends up in the lake and causes additional health hazard to the animals. It is recommended to replace the current offer with a turtle-diet more friendly plastic-free merchandise for sale in a similar fashion as the “Spirit baskets” as at the Nonglamchan Library.

The offering basket at the Nonglamchan Library consist of handmade baskets made from banana leaves with flowers and candles that are offered to visitors for sale (10’000 LAK). In addition, clothing (scarf, skirt) appropriated for entering a spiritual place is offered for rent to enter the heart of the library where the offering is done as well as create a beautiful photo opportunity. The “Turtle Food” baskets could be made by the community tourism group and consist of suitable food offerings for the turtles.





Photos (left to right): The Spruce; Edinburgh Butterfly and Insect World in Scotland; rukawajung.

**Turtle theme handicrafts and souvenirs:** Currently some local handicrafts are being made by the community and sold at the turtle lake, these handmade products include indigo natural dye cotton shirts and scarfs. The existing handicrafts made by the community are not particularly unique to this village and can be found elsewhere in district. Souvenir merchandise if designed well can generate additional revenue, but also promote the destination and the conservation message. To enhance the sales and the promotion of this tourism destination, the Turtle thematic could be added to the existing handicrafts (ex. Turtle embroidery to the existing indigo shirts), and additional products could be developed by the local handicraft community.

**3. Expand the existing boardwalk:** To offer a greater visitor experience and to encourage returning visitors, community suggested expanding the existing boardwalk to connect the Buddhist shrine to the temple. To enhance the conservation education, attractive and interactive interpretation should be displayed along the way as described above in (a) Conservation interpretation and educational displays. The Community Tourism Group already has experience developing and maintaining the existing infrastructures and further infrastructure development should be done by the community through consultations with WCS to minimize any possible negative impacts from the infrastructures to the turtle conservation.



Figure 11 - Turtle Lake boardwalk expansion. Photo: Janina Bikova

**4. Turtle Conservation and Education Center:** A community-based conservation and education center to enhance education, tourism, conservation, and research. In addition to the educational displays and interpretation, the center would further educate the public regarding the turtle conservation importance and showcase the community conservation work supported by WCS (turtle egg hatching facility, nursery, release program etc.). The Turtle Conservation and Education Center development would require probably a mid to long-term management support and guidance from WCS. The Community Tourism Group currently managing the Turtle Lake could provide a short, guided tour for Lao visitors and educational displays in English and in the regional languages would be available for foreign visitors.

## Product Potential description

Impact		
Socio-economic impact	3	Increasing revenue. Returning visitors. Low visitor WTP for an entrance fee.
Political impact	4	Public pride and awareness about turtle conservation
Environmental impact	4	Possible negative impacts from the expanded infrastructures: - Plastic pollution (to be mitigated) - Turtle disturbance (breeding, eggs)
Link to conservation	4	Raise public awareness regarding the turtle conservation needs.
<b>Sub-score</b>	15	
<b>Percentage</b>	75%	

Further improvement and expansion of the existing tourism product at the Turtle Lake would enhance the link to conservation, strengthen the relationships with the government and raise public awareness and pride about the turtle conservation natural heritage. The expected socio-economic benefits are expected to be average due to the low visitor WTP for entrance fees and NBT activities, however, this activity would grow the socio-economic benefits to the community compared to the revenue from the current tourism venture though the unique and wildlife-friendly merchandise. The expansion of Turtle Lake facilities needs to be planned carefully in close collaboration with WCS to mitigate the possible impacts on the turtles.

Market Attractiveness		
Market-Demand	5	Popular destination for Lao visitors, 700 visitors per month.
Barriers to Entry	5	Fenced area.
Operational Cost (Price)	4	Partly observed by the existing tourism.
WTP	2	WTP for an Entrance Fee in general is low. Current rates are 3'000 LAK Lao, 5'000 LAK Foreigners. Entrance Rate could be increased (esp. for foreigners) and for improved experience.
Length of stay	5	Around 30min
Seasonality	5	Possible all year long.
Carrying capacity	5	High
<b>Sub-score</b>	32	
<b>%</b>	91%	

**Market-Demand:** The Turtle Lake welcomes already around 700 visitors per month (23 per day) during the dry season. Improvement and expansion of the current facilities would create higher visitor demand and encourage repeating visitors.

**WTP & Price:** Visitor WTP for an entrance fee in general is low and the currently set Price is very low (3'000 LAK Lao, 5'000 LAK Foreigners). Improvement and expansion of the current facilities would grow the revenue generation opportunities and higher visitor WTP. The product costs are not expected to increase much as would be observed by the existing tourism arrangements.

Development and Operations		
Investment	3	Average to high depending on the sub-activities.
Labor	5	Low daily labor required (ticket, waste collection)
Training	4	Conservation, site management, new fund stream development.
Infrastructure	3	Average
Maintenance	3	Average
<b>Sub-score</b>	18	
<b>%</b>	72%	

**Investment:** The required investment value is average to low depending on the various sub-activities. The low investment sub-activities are those of the current tourism improvement as the Educational Displays and

Turtle-friendly merchandise; and the sub-activities that require higher investment capital are those of that require new infrastructure development and the current infrastructure expansion as the Boardwalks, and Turtle Conservation and Education Center.

**Labor & Training:** Currently, the Turtle Lake is managed by the CTG who has gained experience in tourism through the current tourism development and management in the Turtle Lake. The improved and expanded facility labor would be observed by the CTG, however, the capacity should be further strengthened in the following sectors: conservation (wildlife friendly activities and practices), site management (plastic pollution, maintenance, interpretation), financial management and new fund stream development (wildlife-friendly merchandise, promotion etc.). The community skills could be built through study tours and internship placements in other wildlife conservation, rescue, and education centers as LCTW, Free the Bears in Laos or other in the region.

**Infrastructures & Maintenance:** Through the existing tourism infrastructure development management, CTG has gained the necessary experience and skills to build and maintain the infrastructures. Further infrastructure improvement, expansion and maintenance can be the CTG, however, the infrastructure improvement and expansion would require financial support and should be done with closely together with WCS to ensure the link to conservation and to mitigate the possible negative impacts on the turtles.

### **Summary & Recommendations for the steps further.**

Further improvement and expansion of the existing tourism product at the Turtle Lake would permit to strengthen the conservation link of the current tourism product and grow the financial benefits for the community. By providing an engaging and educational experience for families, the conservation outreach goals could be reached.

While the CTG has experience in managing the existing tourism site and could therefore observe the recommended further sub-activities, the capacity to manage tourism should be further strengthened in the following sectors: conservation (wildlife friendly activities and practices), site management (plastic pollution, maintenance, interpretation), financial management and new fund stream development (wildlife-friendly merchandise, promotion etc.).

The expansion of Turtle Lake facilities needs to be planned carefully in close collaboration with WCS to ensure the link to conservation, mitigate the possible negative impacts on the turtles and to develop a quality attractive and interactive conservation interpretation and educational displays.

### **(b) Wetland Visitor Center in Ban Tansoum**

**Location:** Ban Tansoum

**Description:** The ecotourism feasibility study in 2012 recommended development of a Wetland Visitor Center in Ban Tansoum and decade later in 2023 this product still presents suitable for the Xe Champhone Wetlands mostly due to the potentially high Environmental benefits and Link to Conservation as well as due to the positive Market Attractiveness and relatively easy Development and Operational arrangements.

Currently, Ban Tansoum has an active crocodile nursery program, and the Wetland Visitor Center will help to showcase to public the community's conservation efforts and raise awareness about the wetland and wildlife conservation needs, with the Siamese Crocodile as the key wetland conservation advocate. However, to attract visitors to the visitor center in Ban Tansoum, a detour from the Xe Champhone Loop, it is important to offer a memorable experience with activities worth the effort.



The current wildlife tourism sites on the Xe Champhone Loop (Turtle Lake, Monkey Forest) offer the possibility to feed wildlife and to take photographs together with the wildlife. These sites currently also present the highest plastic pollution issues, and the unsuitable diet is causing health risks to the wildlife. While wildlife-friendly practices could be implemented, it is recommended to avoid the crocodiles being fed by visitors, however, visitors could observe the crocodile feeding sessions by the crocodile keepers. To minimize unsuitable behavior by visitors, the crocodile keeper should be present when visitors are at the center, especially when near the crocodiles. The study in 2012, suggested the possibility for visitors to hold the juvenile crocodiles, however, WCS recommends keeping the handling to a bare minimum and by dedicated keepers only as crocodile handling by visitors can be harmful for the following reasons: crocodiles who are too familiar with humans could cause problems in the future as adults once they are released in the wild, and this activity would increase the accident risk to visitors.

The following sub-activities and facilities are recommended for the Xe Champhone Wetland Visitor Center:

- Quality infrastructures offering attractive photo opportunities,
- Juvenile crocodile nursery: an opportunity to see the animals in a beautiful enclosure imitating the natural habitat and to observe the crocodile keeper work (crocodile feeding, other activities),
- Attractive and interactive interpretation and educational displays,
- Unique souvenir merchandise: crocodile theme handicrafts made by the community, souvenirs,
- Spiritual activity: opportunity to pay respect to the crocodile spirit,
- “Adopt a crocodile” program to fund and promote the conservation work,
- Starting point for the future wetland activities (short trips, overnight trips, voluntourism etc.).

**“Adopt & Release a Crocodile” program** – An opportunity for public to “adopt” a juvenile crocodile and to eventually release it into the wild. This program can help to raise funds to provide the necessary care until the crocodile can be released into the wild as well as can serve as an outreach tool to raise the public awareness and empathy about the crocodile conservation needs. This activity should be supported by WCS or a private sector company who has the necessary conservation outreach, marketing, and IT skills.



Photos (left to right): Worcester EcoTarium in US; Hong Kong Wetland Park; Crocodiles of the World in UK.

## Product Potential description

Impact		
Socio-economic impact	2	Low WTP for an entrance fee. Unique merchandise could create revenue. Indirect benefits.
Political impact	4	Positive exposure for district and the province.
Environmental impact	4	No significant negative impacts. Crocodile holding must be minimal and limited to the crocodile keepers to avoid any human-wildlife conflicts.
Link to conservation	4	Public pride and awareness about wetlands and crocodiles.
<b>Sub-score</b>	14	
<b>Percentage</b>	70%	

The Wetland Visitor Center presents a strong potential environmental impact and link to conservation as well as positive political impact. However, the socio-economic impacts from the Wetland Visitor Center

are estimated to be quite low due to the average market demand and the generally low visitor WTP an entrance fee. To ensure financial sustainability, it is recommended to offer unique and wildlife-friendly merchandise for sale as well as activities such as “Adapt a Crocodile” that have the power in addition to revenue generation opportunities to further promote the destination. Other potential activities that are recommended to be developed in Ban Tansoum by the private sector, as for example the Overnight Wetland Experience, would further grow the economic benefits to the Wetland Visitor Center and the community.

Market Attractiveness		
Market-Demand	3	Wildlife enthusiasts. Growing regional demand for wildlife ecotourism.
Barriers to Entry	4	Unique product and site. Village area, building permit.
Operational Cost (Price)	4	Service providers managing the facility.
WTP	2	WTP "Entrance Fee" for a facility inside a temple is very low.
Length of stay	5	Around 30min
Seasonality	5	All year long
Carrying capacity	4	Quite high
<b>Sub-score</b>	<b>27</b>	
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>77%</b>	

The Market Attractiveness to Ban Tansoum is quite high mostly due to the low operational costs, short activity duration suitable for large public, high carrying capacity and seasonality. However, the market demand is average and in general visitor WTP an entrance for a Visitor Center is quite low.

**Market-Demand:** The “Crocodile Watching” at Ban Tansoum is already promoted as part of the Xe Champhone Loop, however, during Jan-May 2023, Ban Tansoum has welcomed only around 10-20 visitors, mostly westerners. The wildlife sites on the Xe Champhone Loop (Turtle Lake, Monkey Forest) welcome around 600 Lao visitors and 40 foreign visitors per month. As Ban Tansoum is a detour from the Xe Champhone Loop, the expected visitor arrivals to this site would be lower. To attract visitors to Ban Tansoum it is crucial to offer a memorable experience worth the detour. This can be achieved by developing unique infrastructures and attractive and interactive conservation interpretation offering fun education experience and great photography opportunities.

**WTP & Price:** The WTP for an entrance fee in generally is low. To ensure financial sustainability, it is recommended to offer unique and wildlife-friendly merchandise for sale as well as activities such as “Adapt a Crocodile” that have the power in addition to revenue generation opportunities to further promote the destination.

Development and Operations		
Investment	3	Average
Labor	5	Low daily labor required (ticket, waste collection)
Training	3	Several training needs (site management, maintenance, financing)
Infrastructure	3	Average
Maintenance	4	Quite low
<b>Sub-score</b>	<b>18</b>	
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>72%</b>	

The Development and Operations present positive score, mostly due to the relatively low labor and maintenance needs.

**Investment:** Costs are expected to be average and would include the infrastructure development, and trainings and first merchandise development.

**Training and Labor:** With the right training and support the visitor center can be managed solely by the community. While Ban Tansoum has received trainings in ecotourism in 2012, a new training program

must be provided and should include the following subjects: tourism awareness, tourism business and hospitality, conservation (wildlife friendly activities and practices), site development and management (maintenance, pollution management, interpretation development), stock and financial management (merchandise), visitor management (registration, guided interpretation, and outreach), marketing and promotion. In addition, community skills can be built through study tours and internship placements in other wildlife conservation and education centers.

Similar as on the Xe Champhone Tourism sites and the Turtle Lake, a CTG should be established to manage the visitor center and welcome visitors. The crocodile keepers are probably the most appropriated personnel for this role.

**Infrastructures & Maintenance:** The planning of the visitor center infrastructures must be done with the highest attention to develop a tourism experience worth the detour to Ban Tansoum. Ideally the infrastructure planning should be done by an architect experienced in wildlife visitor center development and by an expert in wildlife outreach to develop quality conservation interpretation and educational displays, and memorable photo opportunities. Infrastructure planning should be done through close consultations with the community and approved by the community. To build the future maintenance skills within the community, the infrastructure development should be done by the community supported by the relevant infrastructure development professionals that can be outsourced as necessary.

### **Summary & Recommendations for the steps further.**

The crocodile nursery in Ban Tansoum offers a unique opportunity to see the juvenile Siamese Crocodiles and the Wetland Visitor Center presents high potential to create positive environmental impact and link to conservation as well as positive political impact. The Wetland Visitor Center would showcase to public the community's conservation efforts and raise awareness about the wetland and wildlife conservation needs, with the Siamese Crocodile as the key advocate.

However, the socio-economic impacts from the Wetland Visitor Center are estimated to be quite low due to the average market demand and the generally low visitor WTP an entrance fee. To attract visitors to the visitor center in Ban Tansoum, a detour from the Xe Champhone Loop, it is important to offer a memorable visitor center experience with activities worth the effort.

To ensure financial sustainability, it is recommended to offer unique and wildlife-friendly merchandise for sale as well as activities such as "Adapt a Crocodile" that have the power in addition to revenue generation opportunities to further promote the destination.

Other potential activities that are recommended to be developed in Ban Tansoum by the private sector, as for example the Overnight Wetland Experience, would further grow the economic benefits to the Wetland Visitor Center and the community.

To ensure sustainable tourism management by the community, the following steps are recommended: community consultations and tourism plan development, building community capacity to manage tourism, site development (infrastructures, interpretation, activities), and promotion and commercialization. The ecotourism development should be supported by a WCS ecotourism expert or a tourism development organization like the NGO Tetraktys or other.

### (c) An Overnight Wetland Experience

**Location:** Tansoum and the surrounding village area (Donkheng, Lao Hua Kham, Laonarth).

**Description:** In addition to the Wetland Visitor Center an overnight wetland experience in Ban Tansoum was recommended by the ecotourism feasibility study in 2012 and a decade later this product remains a suitable option for the Xe Champhone Wetlands. As part of this study, this product was pre-identified in Ban Tansoum and in Ban Don Deang. Following the site assessments and the community willingness to develop tourism, this product is selected as the most suitable for Ban Tansoum mostly due to a healthier and more scenic wetland habitat and better wildlife experience as offer the opportunity to see crocodiles both at the nursery and in the wild.

This Wetland Experience was initially designed as a guided overnight tour to appreciate the Xe Champhone Wetlands, enjoy birdwatching and to learn about the Siamese Crocodiles and the local culture. The 2012 study designed this product replicating the ecotourism model of the Nam Nern Night Safari in the NEPL NP, - another ecotourism product developed by WCS in Laos. The sub-activities recommended for this Wetland Experience are:

- Visit of the Wetland Visitor Center, village tour and handicraft demonstrations,
- Afternoon walk to the wetlands and paddle to the overnight camp,
- Sunset birdwatching and nighttime crocodile spotlighting, campfire dinner,
- Sunrise birdwatching, crocodiles spotting (by drone or from an observation tower), return.

The 2012 study recommends providing accommodation in comfortable huts on an island called Wang Moun, as opposed to village homestays, which may at times be uncomfortable. Following the site visits during this study and through the consultations with the community it was noted that the water level change in the area is up to 5m high. To offer a memorable wetland experience it is recommended that the overnight accommodation offers scenic wetland views and appreciation opportunities, rather than a bush-forest experience that can be found elsewhere. A floating camp or an accommodation on high pillars would offer a memorable wetland experience and is recommended to be developed in the waters of the Zone B villages (Tansoum, Donkheng, Lao Hua Kham, Laonarth).

An ecolodge similar to the Kingfisher Ecolodge in the Beung Khiet Ngong Wetlands would add a value to this destination to attract visitors. However, the rapidly growing tourism activities at the Soui Lake, including a boat-camping accommodation to be offered by the Marvelaos company will create a real competition specially to attract the general public.

This Wetland Experience has the potential to offer a unique quality wildlife ecotourism product. While this product presents high potential Positive Impacts, the Market Demand is average-high, and the Development and Operational costs are expected to be quite high. It is therefore recommended that this product is developed by an experienced and conservation minded private sector partner in close collaboration with the community and with the WCS support.



Photos (left to right): Everglades National Park in US; Okefenokee Swamp in US; Lake Oroville in US.

## Product Potential description

Impact		
Socio-economic impact	4	Positive socio-economic benefits for numerous community service providers.
Political impact	4	Public pride and awareness, positive international exposure.
Environmental impact	4	Minimal negative impact. Some pollution risk (plastic, wastewater).
Link to conservation	4	Direct link to conservation: - Wildlife conservation linked revenue, - Monitoring, - Public pride and awareness about wetlands.
<b>Sub-score</b>	16	
<b>Percentage</b>	80%	

The Overnight Wetland Experience has the potential to create a very high Positive Impacts. While this product is recommended to begin in Ban Tansoum, the overnight experience would be operated through the wetland waters of multiple nearby villages: Laonarth, Donkheng, and Lao Hua Kham. This product has the power to create high socio-economic benefits and conservation incentives to numerous households and to the surrounding villages through the Ecotourism Wetland Conservation Fund (Figure 12).

While the visitor WTP for a quality wildlife ecotourism product is high, the overall Market Demand is average-high, and the Development and Operational costs are expected to be quite high, therefore, to ensure positive outcomes of this product, it is recommended that this product is developed by an experienced and conservation minded tourism private sector partner in close collaboration with the Ban Tansoum community and other Zone B villages, and with WCS support.

**Ecotourism Wetland Conservation Fund.** Inspired from the Nam Nern Night Safari ecotourism model in the NEPL NP, the 2012 study recommended connecting the tourism revenue to an Ecotourism Fund to share the tourism benefits and therefore to incentivize and reward to the surrounding communities for their conservation efforts. The Ecotourism Fund would be distributed at the end of the tourism year, weighted by the village population, and conditioned on all community members abiding by to Conservation Agreements (Land Use Plan, poaching etc). If any members of the community breach the agreement, the fund payout value would be reduced for the specific village. The Village Fund would be used to finance communal community activities as village improvement initiatives and individual incentive payments for crocodile nest reporting.

Figure 12 - Ecotourism Wetland Conservation Fund

Market Attractiveness		
Market-Demand	3	Mostly western market, wildlife enthusiasts (Thai, Lao). Currently low NBT demand in the area. Demand for conservation wildlife experiences in Laos.
Barriers to Entry	3	Village area, but shared wetland resources.
Operational Cost (Price)	3	Multiple service providers required to support this activity.
WTP	4	Western market's WTP for a quality wildlife ecotour is high.
Length of stay	3	Overnight
Seasonality	3	Not ideal during the rainy season.
Carrying capacity	2	Small groups for a quality experience
<b>Sub-score</b>	21	
<b>Percentage</b>	60%	

**Market demand:** The “Crocodile Watching” at Ban Tansoum is already promoted as part of the Xe Champhone Loop, however, the visitor arrivals are low as no quality product is established yet. The current overnight NBT-CBT products (Eld’s Deer, Homestays) welcome around 50 visitors a year. The 2012 study estimated less than 250 visitor per year in the High Case scenario from the third year of operations onwards.



However, the NBT demand is expected to grow especially from the regional markets. For an ecotourism activity in a fragile ecosystem, the high-value low-volume model is recommended.

**WTP & Price:** For a quality overnight wildlife ecotourism venture in Laos, international (mostly western) visitors are willing to pay around 100-200 USD per person per night (Gibbon Experience, Elephant Conservation Center, Nam Nern Night Safari in NEPL NP). The ecotourism feasibility study in 2012, recommended a price of 160 USD for this overnight experience.

**Seasonality:** The heavy rainy season months in August and September are not ideal for outdoor activities and can be even create safety-risk for activities on the water. The best time of the year to spot the crocodiles in the wild is during the dry season months when the water level in the wetlands is the lowest (March-May). Birdwatching can be enjoyed all year long with bigger groups of Openbills in September-October. Table 9 below presents the seasonality for this product.

		January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Accessibility	Heavy rainy season (higher-safety risk, more difficult access to the village)								x	x			
Accessibility	Strong wind (safety risk for water activities)	x	x										
Accessibility	High water level (easy navigation)	x	x					x	x	x	x	x	x
Accessibility	Overall accessibility	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Demand	Tourism High Season	x	x	x							x	x	x
Wildlife	Crocodiles lay eggs. Nesting sites should not be visited by tourists solely.					x	x						
Wildlife	Crocodile eggs hatch.								x				
Wildlife	Crocodile release in the wild.			x									
Wildlife	Best time to spot crocodiles in the wild (Low water level)			x	x	x							
Wildlife	Birdwatching - Openbills big groups									x	x		

Table 9 – Seasonality Wetland Experience

**Carrying capacity:** To offer a quality wildlife ecotourism experience it is recommended to welcome visitors in small groups. The current boats can welcome comfortably two visitors per boat, to ensure that all visitors receive a similar experience, it is recommended to limit the group size to six join-in visitors per tour and larger groups up could be welcomed on a special request.

Development and Operations		
Investment	2	Quite High to develop a quality wildlife experience
Labor	2	Multiple service providers required to support this activity
Training	2	Multiple training needs: service providers, first aid & wilderness rescue.
Infrastructure	3	Overnight accommodation. Equipment: Boats, Sleeping, Cooking, Safety, Wildlife Spotting
Maintenance	3	Average maintenance needs
<b>Sub-score</b>	<b>12</b>	
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>48%</b>	

**Investment:** The 2012 ecotourism feasibility study estimated the initial investment for infrastructure and launch costs to almost 65'000 USD. In 2023, the investment needs for a product as designed in 2012 would be around 90'000 USD and additional investment needs would be required for a development of a quality wetland accommodation.



**Labor & Trainings:** To provide a quality wildlife ecotourism experience, this product would require well-trained service providers with diverse skills, the following groups are recommended:

- Nature Guide Group,
- Cooking Group,
- Equipment Management Group,
- Handicraft Group,
- Ranger-Monitoring Group,
- Management Group (village and ecotourism heads).

Ban Tansoum has received trainings in ecotourism in 2012, however, a new training program should be provided by an experienced ecotourism expert or a tourism development organization to all the service provider groups in addition to a study tour to similar product as the Nam Nern Night Safari should be organized to raise the awareness. This overnight outdoor product requires the First Aid & Wilderness Rescue training to be provided on annual basis by experienced certified trainers to all Nature Guides.

The 2012 study recommended to draw in the eight surrounding wetland communities to participate as service providers. Through the observations made on the current tourism products on the Xe Champhone Loop it is recommended that only one village, the key village where the product is based/starting from is providing the services. However, to enhance the conservation efforts, the tourism benefits should be shared to the surrounding communities who co-habit the wetland area where tourism is developed (cf. Impact – Ecotourism Wetland Conservation Fund).

As this product is recommended to be managed by a private sector, these trainings should be done by the private sector. In a scenario where the private sector partner is not approved yet, all trainings needs and plans should be done through consultations with the potential private sector partners.

**Infrastructures & Maintenance:** The main infrastructure requirement for this product is the overnight accommodation, however, this product also requires various types of equipment: boating, sleeping, cooking, safety, wildlife viewing equipment.

The development of the overnight accommodation should take in consideration the high-water level change in the wetlands (up to 5m) and should offer a scenic and unique wetland experience.

The current boats used by the community are neither comfortable or safe and an alternative engine-free paddle or electric boat solution should be identified to offer a better visitor experience.

As this product is recommended to be managed by private sector, the infrastructure and equipment need planning, development and purchase should be done by the private sector in close collaboration with the Ban Tansoum community with WCS support. In a scenario where the private sector partner is not approved yet, any infrastructure developed by WCS must be done through active consultations with the potential private sector partners. Private sector understands the market needs the best and development of unsuitable infrastructures would decline the opportunity to attract potential partners in the future (ex. Eld's Deer).

This product will require daily equipment management and maintenance, and the infrastructures will require routine seasonal maintenance as well as urgent improvements in a case of unexpected events.

### **Summary & Recommendations for the steps further.**

If planned and developed carefully, the potential Positive Impact of the Wetland Experience is expected to be very high. This product presents high potential to create positive environmental impact and link to conservation as well as positive political impact. While this product is recommended to begin in Ban Tansoum, the overnight experience would be operated through the wetland waters of multiple villages:

Laonarth, Donkheng, and Lao Hua Kham. This product has the power to create quite high socio-economic benefits and conservation incentives to numerous households and to the surrounding villages through the Ecotourism Wetland Conservation Fund (Figure 12).

However, as the Market Demand is average-high and as the Development and Operational costs are expected to be quite high, it is recommended that unless WCS can support this ecotourism program in long-term (10+ years) that this tourism product is developed by a conservation minded tourism private sector partner in close collaboration with the Ban Tansoum community and WCS. To offer a quality wildlife ecotourism product in a fragile wetland ecosystem, the high-value low-volume model is recommended.

Ban Tansoum has received trainings in ecotourism in 2012, however, very few visitors have visited the site since and accordingly a new training program should be provided by an experienced ecotourism expert or a tourism development organization to all the service provider groups. A study tour to similar products and sites as the Nam Nern Night Safari and Boung Khiet Ngong is recommended to be organized to raise awareness.

Overall, the wetland experienced can be enjoyed all year long, except during the heavy rainy season months (August-September), and the best time to spot crocodiles in during the dry season months (March-May). The development of the overnight accommodation should take in consideration the high-water level change in the wetlands (up to 5m) and should offer a scenic and unique wetland experience. As this product is recommended to be managed by private sector, the infrastructure and equipment need planning, development and purchase should be done by the private sector in close collaboration with the community and with WCS support.

#### (d) Wetland Trail, Platform, Observation Tower

**Locations:** Keng Kong Dong, Tansoum.

**Description:** The establishment of a Wetland Trail, Platform, and Observation Tower is a great way to add value to an area and to attract tourism to the wetlands. These infrastructures can help to improve visitor access, enhance educational and conservation outreach opportunities, promote wildlife tourism, and facilitate research.



Photos (left to right): Orlando Wetlands Park in US; Bueng Bua Nature Observation Center in Thailand; Creole Nature Trail in US.

#### Product Potential description:

Impact		
Socio-economic impact	2	Low direct economic benefits to the community. May trigger indirect benefits. Wetland boardwalks shouldn't negatively impact fishermen routes.
Political impact	4	Public pride and awareness about wetlands.
Environmental impact	3	Risk of plastic pollution and infrastructures being used for illegal activities.
Link to conservation	4	Foster nature appreciation, raise public awareness, facilitate education.
<b>Sub-score</b>	<b>13</b>	
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>65%</b>	

Boardwalks and wetland trails, towers can “open up” the wetland for public to raise awareness about the wetland beauty and conservation needs, enhance bird watching and ecotourism, and facilitate research and education.

However, constructing infrastructures in a fragile environment brings many challenges and requires careful consideration of several factors. Environmental impact assessment, careful site, design and material selection, visitor management, maintenance, and stakeholder engagement all play a crucial role in ensuring that the construction minimizes the ecological disruption and promotes sustainable wetland management. By addressing these factors thoughtfully, the wetland boardwalk trails can provide enhanced visitor experience while preserving the wetland ecosystem.

These infrastructures need to be developed through close consultations with the local communities to ensure that the fishermen and other wetland-user livelihood routes are not impacted. In addition, when developing wetland boardwalks and birdwatching towers it is important to make sure that these infrastructures do not create threat to wildlife (disturbance, hunting) and that the necessary law enforcement is in place.

While boardwalks and birdwatching towers are a great way to add value to an area and attract tourism to, the visitor WTP for this type of infrastructures is low and in most countries these types of infrastructures are free of charge, accordingly the direct benefits to the local community are expected to be quite low, however, indirect benefits could be quite high depending on the local entrepreneurship.

Market Attractiveness		
Market-Demand	4	All public. Quite high demand if easily accessible and attractive infrastructures and photo opportunities.
Barriers to Entry - Competition Risk	4	Requires permit to be constructed.
Operational Cost (Price)	3	Low operational costs, but high annual maintenance costs.
WTP	2	WTP "Entrance Fee" in general is low.
Length of stay	5	Few hours.
Seasonality	4	Can operate almost all year long.
Carrying capacity	4	Quite High
<b>Sub-score</b>	26	
<b>Percentage</b>	74%	

Overall, the market attractiveness, including the market demand, for this product is high, however, the visitor WTP for this type of activity is low and the operational costs are quite high mostly due to the quite high annual maintenance needs.

Development and Operations		
Investment	2	High
Labor	5	Low daily labor required (ticket, waste collection)
Training	3	Some training needs (site management, maintenance, financing)
Infrastructure	1	High level of infrastructures development required
Maintenance	2	High annual maintenance needs and costs
<b>Sub-score</b>	13	
<b>Percentage</b>	52%	

The Development and Operational costs are expected to be quite high for this activity, including important annual maintenance expenses that would be difficult to be covered sustainably due to the low visitor WTP for this type of activity. Unless this product is joint together with another highly profitable tourism venture, to ensure quality maintenance and high safety standard, this product will require financial support from public or private sector in long-term.

As the community and public sector might not be able to financially support maintenance costs of this product, a collaboration with a private sector entity that has a profitable business is recommended. This could include a private business in the proximity of these infrastructures (nature recreation business, wetland accommodation, restaurant, etc) or an unrelated business or donor who could support this product for the benefit of the public and conservation.

In Ban Keng Kong Dong in June 2023, a private sector company has expressed their interest to develop the Nong Kan reservoir for tourism recreation activities and a Wetland boardwalk and Observation Tower could be built developed to enhance the conservation education and wetland appreciation. Through this study Ban Keng Kong Dong was identified as one of the best potential sites for ecotourism development, mostly due to its location within the district capital. This site is suitable for conservation outreach to reach the general public, to create link to conservation, WCS could support the wetland conservation interpretation and educational display development.

### **Summary & Recommendations for the steps further.**

Boardwalks and trails are a popular tourism infrastructure in wetlands as it can raise awareness about the wetland beauty and conservation needs, enhance bird watching and ecotourism, and facilitate research and education. However, constructing infrastructures in fragile environments requires careful considerations to minimize the possible negative environmental and social impacts.

The market attractiveness for this product is high, however, the visitor WTP for this type of activity is low and the operational costs are quite high mostly due to the quite high annual maintenance needs. The development and operational costs associated with this activity are anticipated to be substantial, including significant annual maintenance expenses. However, due to the low visitor WTP for this type of activity, it may be challenging to sustainably cover these costs. Unless this product is integrated within another highly profitable tourism venture, it will require long-term financial support from either the public or private sector.

Given the potential limitations of the community and public sector in providing financial assistance for maintenance to ensure high safety standard, it is recommended to collaborate with a profitable private sector entity. This could include a private business in the proximity of these infrastructures (nature recreation business, wetland accommodation, restaurant, etc) or an unrelated business or donor who could support this product for the benefit of the public and conservation.

In Ban Keng Kong Dong in June 2023, a private sector company has expressed their interest to develop the Nong Kan reservoir for tourism recreation activities (more in Annex 7) and a Wetland boardwalk and Observation Tower could be built developed to enhance the conservation education and wetland appreciation. WCS could support the development conservation interpretation and educational display development to create link to conservation outreach.

### 3. Risk Mitigation Strategies

Just like other forms of tourism, ecotourism generates impacts that require management. Negative impacts from tourism activities can be minimized by careful development and appropriate management planning and monitoring. Appropriate legislation and its effective enforcement are also vital to prevent damage to the environment and to the tourism assets as well as to protect the rights of the host communities and to enable communities to benefit from tourism.

While there are numerous risks to be considered when implementing community-based wildlife ecotourism ventures in fragile ecosystems as wetlands, this chapter presents the key risk mitigation strategies as identified particularly relevant to the Xe Champhone Wetlands and describes the potential risk mitigation strategies in the following categories: Implementation-Operational Risks, Conservation Risks and Socio-economic risks.

#### **Implementation-Operational Risks**

**Planning.** Developing comprehensive tourism business plan is an important step to ensure the financial viability and operational efficiency for the ecotourism success. A detailed business plan should be developed for all the future ecotourism products in the Xe Champhone Wetlands.

**Market Demand Forecast.** Through the consultations with the communities, it was identified that most community leaders see tourism as a high potential revenue generation activity. While tourism can create high economic benefits, the current tourism landscape in the Xe Champhone Loop presents relatively low visitor arrivals and low WTP: around 600-700 visitors a month paying in average 5'000 LAK per person, this is around 3'500'000 LAK (190 USD) per month (2'280 USD a year) to be shared between the CTG, village, and district.

The “Crocodile Watching” at Ban Tansoum is already promoted as part of the Xe Champhone Loop, however, the visitor arrivals are very low as no quality product is established yet. The current overnight NBT-CBT products (Eld’s Deer, Homestays) welcome around 50 visitors a year. For the overnight Wetland Experience, the 2012 study estimated less than 250 visitor per year in the High Case scenario from the third year of the operations onwards.

While the current NBT and CBT tourism demand in the study landscape is low, the demand is expected to grow especially from the regional markets. For an ecotourism activity in a fragile ecosystem, the high-value low-volume model is recommended, and this type of clientele could be attracted to a quality wildlife ecotourism venture with the right marketing and management done by an experienced conservation minded private sector organization or through long-term commitment by WCS with an experienced ecotourism staff or other tourism NGO.

**Governance.** Most community-based and managed ecotourism projects that have succeeded in Laos have the following elements in common: high visitor demand, good accessibility, high visitor WTP, low operational costs, and/or a long-term private sector or an NGO partner. However, numerous community managed ecotourism projects around the country have demonstrated that the tourism activity slows down, reduces in quality, and even stops once the project support has ended and when a market difficulty is encountered or when another livelihood opportunity with a faster financial gain is present.

Products that present high potential Positive Impact and Market Attractiveness, and low Development and Operations costs, could be managed solely by the community following the right trainings and a short-term support (up to 3 years) by the tourism development organization, ecotourism expert.



However, unless WCS can commit to supporting the community-based ecotourism program for an extended period (10+ years), it is advisable to partner with an experienced and conservation-minded tourism private sector entity to develop the tourism products that show above-average Market Attractiveness and/or relatively high Development and Operations costs. Experienced private sector partners can bring the necessary expertise to develop an effective and successful wildlife ecotourism product, however, balancing the private sector engagement with community involvement and conservation considerations is essential for the overall success of wildlife ecotourism program. The Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in tourism can take various forms depending on the nature of the project and the level of involvement of each partner, more details Figure 13.

Some of the most common forms of PPP in tourism:

- **Service Contracts:** private sector is contracted to provide specific services, such as maintenance, operation, or management of a public facility or service.
- **Concessions:** long-term user rights are granted to the private sector to develop, operate and generate revenue from a public asset for a specific period, while the ownership remains with the public sector.
- **Joint Ventures:** Joint ventures involve a partnership between the public sector and private sector to collaborate on a specific project, with shared investment, risks, and returns.
- **Lease Agreements:** typically a short-term agreement with the private sector to lease the public asset by paying rent and taking on complete operating responsibility (operate tours, filming etc). Meanwhile, the government usually remains accountable for funding capital expenditures associated with the assets.
- **Management Contracts:** An agreement with a private operator to oversee the operations of an existing tourism facility. Government compensates the operator with a fixed management fee, which is contingent on their performance.

*Figure 13 - PPP in Tourism*

If it is expected for the private sector to take over the management of the tourism product, then it is crucial to identify, consult, and involve the tourism private sector partners early in the development of the project. Waiting until the late stage of the project to attract a private sector partner can lead to ineffective outcomes, as tourism projects without the tourism private sector inputs may lack the essential elements to attract the target markets and could create inappropriate infrastructures, impacting the site's overall value as well as creating unsustainable expectations from the communities and the government regarding the tourism business and market demand realities.

To ensure sustainable ecotourism management by the community, the tourism development requires various steps, these include community engagement and ecotourism plan development, building community capacity to manage tourism, site development (infrastructures, interpretation, activities), and promotion and commercialization, - these steps are further detailed below. The community-based ecotourism development process should be led by a dedicated and experienced WCS ecotourism expert or a partner tourism development organization, like the NGO Tetraktys or similar.

- a) **Plan development through close consultations with the communities:** Through the community consultations it was identified that the existing tourism villages (Ban Don Deng, Ban Taleo) are hesitant to expand responsibilities to new tourism products and that some of the villages without tourism yet express concerns about the potential negative impacts on their community.

To achieve successful community-based tourism management, it is important to develop the tourism plans through close consultations and approval from the community. Engaging local communities and other tourism stakeholders in the planning and decision-making processes at the early stage of the project is crucial for successful and sustainable ecotourism development as it helps to gain the necessary support, ensures participation and future collaboration, and reduces potential conflicts. With guidance from WCS and tourism expert, the community can develop a tourism product that brings economic and social benefits while ensuring positive environmental and conservation outcomes.

- b) **Build community capacity in tourism awareness and management:** While few of the potential tourism villages have received some tourism trainings in the past, a new training program should be developed by an experienced ecotourism expert or a tourism development organization to build community capacity in tourism awareness, service skills and site management. In addition, skills can be strengthened through study tours and internship placements. Trainings should be provided to the service providers annually prior to the new tourism high season.
- c) **Site development:** Building infrastructures in a fragile environment brings many challenges and there are several factors that need to be considered. Environmental impact assessment, careful site, design and material selection, visitor management, maintenance, and stakeholder engagement all play a crucial role in ensuring that the construction minimizes the ecological disruption and promotes sustainable wetland management. For example, by addressing these factors thoughtfully, the wetland boardwalk trails can provide enhanced visitors while preserving the wetland ecosystem.

These infrastructures need to be developed through close consultations with the local communities to ensure that the fishermen and other wetland-user livelihoods are not negatively impacted. In addition, when developing wetland boardwalks and birdwatching towers it is important to make sure that these infrastructures do not create increasing threat to wildlife (disturbance, facilitate hunting etc) and that the necessary law enforcement is in place to manage the possibly occurring issues.

To ensure that community has the right skills and knowledge to successfully manage and maintain the tourism infrastructures in the future, it is recommended that the site development is done by the community with support from the required specialists (architect, conservation outreach expert etc) and WCS.

If it is expected that the tourism product is managed or taken over by a private tourism company in the future, then it is recommended that the infrastructure planning and development is done by the private sector in close consultations with the local community and WCS. In a scenario where the private sector partner is not approved at the early stage of the project, then the product and infrastructure planning and development should be done through active consultations with the tourism professionals and the potential partners who understand the target market needs and nuances. Unsuitable infrastructure development would jeopardize the future tourism value of the site and decline the opportunity to attract private sector partners in the future.

- d) **Commercialization:** Balancing economic interests with environmental and social sustainability is essential to ensure the long-term success and integrity of ecotourism initiatives.

Most visitor WTP for an entrance fee is low. To ensure product sustainability, new funding streams and activities must be identified, for example a well-designed merchandise for sale can bring not only additional revenue but serve as a marketing tool to promote the destination. Donations collection is also an option as well as private funding programs as “Adopt a Crocodile” etc.

However, for a quality overnight ecotourism venture in Laos, visitors WTP is quite high, around 100-200 USD per person per night (Gibbon Experience, Elephant Conservation Center, Nam Nern Night Safari). Most of the quality wildlife ecotourism experiences in Laos have been developed by a private sector or a long-term NGO partner in a close collaboration with the local community.

- e) **Promotion:** To ensure the success of a new tourism product, marketing is key to attract visitors and to maintain sufficient demand. Marketing and promotional campaigns must focus to the key target groups who can be reached through media and collaborations with travel influencers. A concerted effort must be made to establish strong B2B relationships with the TOs who have the connections to promote the destination widely to the target audience through the relevant media.

While the current tourism demand is low, the Nam Nern Night Safari in NEPL NP is an example that with the right marketing efforts and strong B2B partnerships a quality ecotourism product can attract visitors to even some of the most remote destinations, - it takes around 6 to 10 hours to reach NEPL NP from the closest airports and tourism towns. The Xe Champhone Wetlands are located 1 hour from the airport.

Attractive photography opportunities and unique merchandise also help to promote the destination within the former visitor network. Over time, as more and more customers experience the product, “word of mouth” will drive an increasing visitor traffic, however “word of mouth” and social media also has the power to decline the visitor arrivals if the former visitor experience was not positive.

### **Socio-economic Risks**

**Benefit sharing mechanisms** in ecotourism play a vital role in empowering local communities, promoting social equity and alleviating poverty, and ensuring long-term community support for conservation. Various benefit sharing mechanisms can be implemented at different levels including the ecotourism service provider and village level as well as at a larger scale with the surrounding village who co-habit the area as well as district and province.

- **Ecotourism Service Provider level.** To ensure equity and benefit sharing within the village, the service provider participation should be limited to one service provider per household and women participation should be encouraged. Low-income households should be prioritized.
- **At the village level** an “Entrance Fee” can help to increase the community support to ecotourism and commitment to conservation, including within those households who are not involved as ecotourism service providers. Village Entrance Fee should be included in the tour price and should be used to support village improvement activities. Agreement should be developed between the parties and clearly state the roles and responsibilities (keeping the village clean, no begging etc).
- **Surrounding communities.** Inspired from the Nam Nern Night Safari ecotourism model in the NEPL NP, the 2012 study recommended connecting the tourism revenue to an Ecotourism Fund to share the tourism benefits and therefore to incentivize and reward to the surrounding communities for their conservation efforts. The Ecotourism Fund would be distributed at the end of the tourism year, weighted by the village population, and conditioned on all community members abiding by to Conservation Agreements (Land Use Plan, poaching etc).

**Income diversification.** Tourism is often seasonal and can be impact by various outside elements (politics, health, economic crisis etc). To mitigate the possible negative social impacts, local communities should not be encouraged to become solely dependent upon ecotourism: rather, ecotourism ideally should complement other activities and help to diversify an economy.

### **Conservation Risks**

While ecotourism has the potential to provide opportunities for conservation, tourism development, when done improperly, can be a major threat to the biodiversity.

In short and even medium-term, ecotourism might not deliver high direct benefits for wildlife conservation and the wetland habitat protection. Developing a quality ecotourism venture is time consuming and might divert the WCS and the community ranger attention from other urgent conservation work. Therefore, unless the organization has the resources to recruit dedicated and experienced ecotourism staff, then it is recommended that the tourism program development is led by an experienced conservation minded private tourism private sector partner or a partner tourism development organization.

**Planning.** Conducting an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) helps to assess the potential risks and impacts of the ecotourism activities and through this assessment, measures can be identified and implemented to effectively mitigate or minimize any negative effects on ecosystems, wildlife, natural

resources, and socio-economic factors. When developing infrastructures in wetlands as accommodation, boardwalks, and birdwatching towers, it is important to make sure that these infrastructures do not create additional threat to wildlife (disturbance, hunting facilitation) and that the necessary law enforcement is in place. The Article 33 in the draft Wetland Decree describes Lease or Concession of Wetland for activities, including tourism, and notes that the authorized lessee or concessionaire of the wetland are required to implement the mitigation hierarchy measures.

**Increasing demand for resources.** Increasing visitor arrival to the destination creates increased demand for various tourism-related resources, including food. The consulted communities during this study have expressed their interest to improve their rice cultivation skills to grow better crops in the existing areas and to therefore avoid further expansion needs into the wetlands. This might be an opportunity for WCS support the farmers to develop wildlife-friendly agriculture, maybe in a similar way as the WCS Ibis Rice project in Cambodia or the Forest Coffee project in NEPL NP. In addition, large tourism-conservation concessions as well as agriculture concessions to experienced entrepreneurs dedicated to conservation can help to safeguard the wetland habitat.

**Monitoring & Adaptive Management.** Monitoring is vital in ecotourism as it permits to understand the impact of the ecotourism operations on the wetlands and wildlife and enables to implement adaptive management practices to ensure that ecotourism is not harming the very resource on which it depends.

**Knowing when to stop.** The financial sustainability of an ecotourism operation is essential for the long-term sustainability, however income generation should never overcome the environmental impacts, and the ultimate goal of an ecotourism product is conservation. If adding another ecotourism activity to increase funding for a site is going to interfere with the conservation, then it should probably not be carried out.

#### 4. Conclusion & Next Steps

The Xe Champone Wetlands are located within an existing tourism circuit, the Xe Champhone Loop, situated one hour from the Savannakhet city, airport, and an international border with Thailand. Tourists in the Savannakhet province are primarily Lao, Thai, and Vietnamese, with western market representing around 3% of all the international arrivals. The Xe Champhone Loop mostly receives domestic visitors. Most of the existing tourism sites are spiritual and several have sacred wildlife species that are protected by local beliefs (turtles, monkeys, crocodiles, Eld's Deer in nearby Xonaboulli district). Currently, the overnight nature-based and community-based tourism market is low (mostly western). Infrastructures and services in Savannakhet and on the Xe Champhone Loop are relatively basic, with simple accommodations and the few tour agencies mostly focusing on domestic and Thai markets. The Xe Champhone Loop has been well promoted to domestic and western markets in 2022 by the NGO Tetraktys, however, further marketing efforts are needed to foster this emerging destination.

Through the Tourism Potential Assessment activity and consultations with the 9 pre-selected WCS target villages in the Xe Champhone Wetlands, it was found that most pre-selected target sites show high potential due to their accessibility, proximity to the existing tourism sites (Xe Champhone Loop, Savannakhet city and the Eld's Deer sanctuary), and as wildlife sightings are possible (crocodiles, turtles, and birds). However, challenges such as limited infrastructures, average cultural attractions, low nature-based and community-based tourism market, and community concerns regarding the tourism development exist.

Regarding the competition and the key unique selling points, at the local level, the key main competition to the Xe Champhone Wetlands is the Soui Lake on the Xe Champhone Loop that offers a range of wetland recreational activities. At the national level, the Beung Khiet Ngong Wetlands, the country's second Ramsar site, offer similar birdlife and proximity to some of the most popular tourism destinations in the country. However, the Xe Champhone Wetlands is the only site in Laos, and in the region, that offers the opportunity to see the critically endangered Siamese Crocodile in their natural habitat, a scenic, large wetland landscape.

This study has identified several ecotourism products with various management models that would fit the conservation objectives of the Xe Champhone Wetlands and the local tourism context. The following two ecotourism products present overall the highest potential and are recommended to be developed first:

- **the Turtle Lake improvement and expansion in Ban Don Daeng,**
- **and the Wetland Visitor Center in Ban Tansoum (similar as the 2012 study).**

These two products also present high potential positive impact and market attractiveness, and low development and operational costs, and therefore these products could be managed solely by the community following appropriate training opportunities and a short, mid-term support (3-5 years) by a tourism development organization and/or expert.

Other product that presents high potential Positive Impact, but average-high market attractiveness, and/or high development and operational costs are:

- Guided Overnight Wetland Experience in Ban Tansoum (similar as the 2012 study),
- Wetland Trail-Boardwalk in Ban Keng Kong Dong and/or Ban Tansoum.

As these products demonstrate average-high market attractiveness and/or relatively high development and operational costs, it is recommended that, unless WCS or another partner organization can support the community-based ecotourism program in the long-term (10+ years), that this product development is led by an experienced, conservation-minded tourism operator working together with the local community and with WCS support.

It is important to note that just like other forms of tourism, ecotourism generates impacts that require management. By undertaking cautious development practices and implementing suitable risk mitigation plans, it is possible to minimize the negative impacts associated with tourism activities. This report outlines potential strategies for mitigating risks in three key categories: (1) Implementation-operational risks, (2) Conservation risks, and (3) Socio-economic risks.

The Champhone district and Savannakhet town are relatively new tourism destinations that have gained popularity during the COVID-19 times within the domestic market. With the reopening of borders, this emerging destination is expected to attract an increasing volume of international travelers. A decade after the first ecotourism study was conducted, in 2012, the Xe Champhone Wetlands, along with the existing tourism sites on the Xe Champhone Loop and Eld's Deer, still have the potential to become renowned community-based wildlife ecotourism destination. This potential is attributed to various factors, including easy and diverse wildlife sighting opportunities, the authenticity of the destination, proximity to Savannakhet city and airport, and, most notably the presence of Siamese Crocodile in its natural, scenic wetland habitat which makes this destination unique not only within the country but also in the Mekong region.



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## Annex 1 – Draft Work Plan Chart

[illegible]

## Annex 2 – Current tourism site assessment summary.

[Link to full excel file.](#)

SITE FEATURES	SUMMARY - COMMON POINTS
<b>Location.</b>	Most sites are in Champhone district. Eld's Deer is in Xonbouly district.
<b>Accessibility</b>	<p>Most sites (Except the Eld's Deer) are located around 1h from Savannakhet and 20-40min from Champhone. These sites form a loop and are located on main road or very close. Road condition to access all sites is overall acceptable, mostly paved. Bridges need to be improved.</p> <p>Eld's Deer is located 2h from Savannakhet and 1h from Champhone.</p> <p>All sites can be accessed all year long. However, heavy rainy season (August-September) is not ideal, and access can be more difficult.</p>
<b>Governance</b>	<p>Most sites (Except the Eld's Deer) are located on the community land and managed by a Community Tourism Group.</p> <p>At the commencement of tourism development, most families wished to be involved, however, due to low visitor arrivals, currently most sites are located by the village authorities, the key village (sub-village) where the site is located or private business.</p> <p>Eld's deer is currently managed by PAFO, with DAFO support on the site and tourism / ranger services providers from the community. This site is currently looking for a private sector partner to take over the tourism management.</p>
<b>Activities</b>	Most sites are spiritual (except the Soui lake) and wildlife in the sites is protected by the local beliefs (Eld's Deer, Monkeys, Turtles). Activities that include wildlife feeding are some of the key highlights for Lao visitors.
<b>Seasonality</b>	All year long. Heavy rainy season (August-September) not ideal. The high season is December-March
<b>Proximity to other tourism sites</b>	Most sites (except the Eld's Deer) are located around 10-30min drive away and around 1h drive from Savannakhet. Eld's Deer is a 1h detour from Champhone and 30 min detour from the last site on the loop, the Turtle Lake, on relatively good road.
<b>Wildlife</b>	Almost all sites (except the Taleo temple) include a wildlife experience. All these wildlife experiences are unique for Laos and offer a very accessible and easy wildlife spotting experience.
<b>Conservation</b>	Most species in these sites are strongly protected by the local beliefs as well as village regulations.
<b>Nature Attractions</b>	Eld's Deer, Soui lake and the Monkey Forest offer nature appreciation opportunities.
<b>Cultural &amp; Historical Attractions</b>	Most sites have cultural, spiritual, and historical elements.
<b>Uniqueness</b>	Most sites are unique, but in Lao context only. Eld's Deer offers a unique opportunity for wildlife enthusiasts to easily see this endangered species.
<b>Risk - Health and Safety</b>	Overall low Health & Safety risk.
<b>Visitor Type</b>	<p>Mostly Lao visitors. Some regional visitors from Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam.</p> <p>Eld's Deer and Homestays target mostly western foreigners.</p>
<b>Barriers to Entry</b>	Most sites are fenced or have some legal or spiritual barriers of entry. Regardless, the zoning is not always followed.
<b>Cost</b>	<p>Entrance fee in most sites on Xe Champhone loop is 3'000 LAK for Lao and 5-10'000 LAK for foreigners (western, regional). Entrance in spiritual sites as Taleo Temple and Library is free but accept donations and sell goods and can have parking fees.</p> <p>Homestays: 70-100'000 LAK (accommodation, include 2 meals. Activities can be organized in some of the homestay villages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Boat trip &amp; fishing</li> <li>-Traditional music performance - 200'000 LAK</li> <li>-Traditional dance performance - 700'000 LAK</li> </ul> <p>Eld's Deer sanctuary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Entrance Fee is 50'000 LAK per person.</li> <li>- Village Fund Fee: 200'000 LAK</li> <li>- Village Guide: 50'000 LAK/ per day</li> <li>- Toktok: 100'000 LAK/per day</li> <li>- Tent rent: 50'000 LAK (include sleeping bag)</li> <li>- Guesthouse: 100'000 LAK/room/4 beds</li> </ul>
<b>WTP</b>	Domestic and Thai visitors tend to try to avoid paying the entrance fees and don't use the services provided by the community (guide, homestay etc).

<b>Length of stay</b>	Length of stay in all sightseeing sites is between 10-30min. Lengths of stay in Eld's Deer is between few hours to overnight.
<b>Visitor Arrivals/Demand</b>	<p><b>Xe Champhone Loop:</b></p> <p><b>Library</b> is the most popular site on the loop and welcomes around 900 visitors per month, including around 17-60 foreigners (Thai, western) per month.</p> <p><b>Monkey Forest</b>, located on the way to the Library welcomes in around 600 visitors per month, including around 40 foreigners (Thai, western) per month.</p> <p><b>Turtle Lake</b>, is a short detour from the main Xe Champhone Loop, located around 40 min from the Library, welcomes between 10-20 Lao visitors per day between Dec-May and 3-10 Lao visitors per day between June-November.</p> <p><b>Eld's Deer:</b> Very few foreign visitors, no clear stats. Last tour by Marvel Laos was 3 months ago in February 2023.</p> <p><b>Homestays:</b> The most popular homestay (near Soui lake) that is promoted by the Marvelaos company welcomed 10 groups in the last year (max 50 people). Don Deang (Turtle village) homestay have welcomed only 1 group (5 people).</p> <p><b>Limitations:</b> Data from the DICT and from the consultations with the community and the ticket offices is not matching.</p>
<b>Seasonality</b>	Mostly Weekends, National Holidays, Religious events. December-May is the dry season.
<b>Capacity</b>	<p>Most sites have a capacity to welcome around 50 visitors at the same time.</p> <p>Eld's Deer can welcome more than 100 visitors and Homestays can welcome up to 10 visitors at the same time.</p> <p>Homestays can welcome 5 visitor per time. 6 homestays in 5 villages are available.</p>
<b>Investment</b>	<p>Most sites (except Eld's Deer) have received investment and support from the NGO Tetraktys.</p> <p>Eld's Deer development has been supported by WWF and UNDP.</p> <p>The Library has received various important private donations.</p>
<b>Labor</b>	Labor is most sites is from the village where the site is located or again from the surrounding villages located near the entrance of the site (Eld's Deer).
<b>Skills/Capacity/Training</b>	<p>All sites (except Eld's Deer) have received trainings by the NGO Tetraktys, DICT and their partner organizations. Eld's Deer has received training by WWF and UNDP.</p> <p>In most sites where the NGO Tetraktys provided trainings have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- entrance ticket system,</li> <li>- visitor monitoring,</li> <li>- staff are friendly and welcoming.</li> </ul> <p>Most sites require further outreach regarding plastic waste and wildlife conservation.</p> <p>Eld's Deer requires further overall training in the protected area and tourism management.</p>
<b>Infrastructure</b>	<p>All sites that have been supported by the NGO Tetraktys have the following infrastructure: ticket office, parking, interpretation signs, toilets.</p> <p>Eld's Deer has the following infrastructures: Visitor Center (no interpretation), Office, Campsites and huts, Ranger sub-stations, Tower, Restaurant (closed), Guesthouse, Interpretation, Sculptures and Photo areas. Camping equipment.</p>
<b>Maintenance</b>	<p>All sites that have been supported by the NGO Tetraktys are currently in good condition (project ended in 2022), but maintenance of the current infrastructures will be required in the future (especially for the wooden structures).</p> <p>Several infrastructures at Eld's Deer are no longer in a good condition and require maintenance (interpretation signs) or will need to be maintained soon (observation tower-rust).</p>
<b>Socio-economic impact</b>	<p>Most of the sites that have been developed by the NGO Tetraktys have a sustainable financing mechanism in place (entrance fee) that benefits the local community and the district.</p> <p>Most Lao visitors to Eld's Deer try to avoid the entrance fees and only very few western international visitors who pay entrance fees have visited this site.</p>
<b>Environmental impact</b>	<p>Negative: Plastic pollution, Unsuitable nutrition for wildlife, wrong impression about the species conservation. Human-Wildlife conflict at the Monkey Forest.</p> <p>Cultural sites as Taleo and Library that do not have wildlife, have no significant positive or negative environmental impact.</p>

<b>Link to Conservation</b>	Local beliefs are the key element that protects wildlife and environment. In all sites the various wildlife species are believed to be sacred or spiritual (Eld's Deer, Turtles, Monkeys). Revenue from tourism permits to better protect sacred wildlife sites and the natural habitat can host also various other wildlife species.
<b>Strengths</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Easy access. Most sites (except Eld's Deer) are located near the main road 1h from Savannakhet City and around 30min from Champhone district capital. Sites are located around 10-40 min from each other and form a Loop.</li> <li>- Unique and easy wildlife spotting opportunities (Eld's deer, Turtles, Macaques).</li> <li>- Local beliefs protect various wildlife species (Eld's deer, Turtles, Macaques).</li> <li>- Important spiritual and cultural sites.</li> <li>- Good marketing of the Xe Champhone Tourism Loop done in 2022 by NGO Tetraktys.</li> <li>- Proximity to Savannakhet town and Thailand.</li> <li>- Popular domestic tourism sites with monthly visitor arrivals of around 600 visitors in dry season months (Dec-May).</li> <li>- Interpretation in Lao and English languages available at all sites.</li> <li>- Socio-economic benefits for the local community and area (entrance fees, restaurants, homestays).</li> <li>- Private tourism company Marvelaos promotes the area to western market and leads guided tours to Xe Champhone Loop, Eld's Deer, Homestays. Focusses on community-based tourism and nature appreciation.</li> </ul>
<b>Weaknesses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Only around 40 foreign visitors per month (western, Thai, other).</li> <li>- Unsuitable wildlife feeding (Turtles, Macaques).</li> <li>- Plastic management issues (Monkey Forest, Turtle Lake).</li> <li>- No Conservation related interpretation at the wildlife sites.</li> <li>- No active marketing and communication (Last post on the Xe Champhone Loop's FB page is in Oct. 2022).</li> <li>- Local authorities and community have limited knowledge to manage tourism.</li> <li>- Eld's Deer and Homestays are mostly visited by the few western visitors and are promoted only by the Marvelaos.</li> </ul>
<b>Opportunities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Raise public awareness about the sacred species conservation importance and needs (habitat, nutrition etc),</li> <li>- Create additional revenue to the community and more suitable food to wildlife by providing "wildlife food basket" similar as at the Library.</li> <li>- Attract wildlife enthusiasts and photographers (especially to the Eld's Deer),</li> <li>- Attract Thai market (nature-lovers, wildlife enthusiasts and photographers, families with children).</li> </ul>
<b>Threats</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wildlife death due to plastic pollution and unsuitable diet.</li> <li>- Loss of cultural and historical heritage sites.</li> <li>- Loss of natural and tourism resources.</li> <li>- Damage and loss of the existing infrastructures (if no maintenance).</li> <li>- Loss of ecotourism potential.</li> </ul>
<b>LESSONS LEARNED</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Local authorities and community have limited knowledge to manage tourism and wildlife tourism sites.</li> <li>- Private sector partner should be identified from the project start. It is challenging to attract a tourism private sector partner later in the process.</li> <li>- Local beliefs is the key element that protects wildlife. In all sites the various wildlife species are believed to be sacred or spiritual (Eld's Deer, Turtles, Monkeys). Revenue from tourism permits to ensure continuous supervision of these sites. In addition, these sacred sites can host various other wildlife species (birds, reptiles etc).</li> <li>- Most visitor enjoy spiritual sites and wildlife sites where it is possible to interact with animals (feed, touch) and to have a good photo opportunity.</li> <li>- Entrance Fee collection by the community works if the tourism site is in the village and if the visitor arrival is daily.</li> <li>- Multiple Community service provider groups don't work if the site is located mainly in only one of the multiple community areas.</li> </ul>



### Annex 3 – Consultation summary with TOs

QUESTIONS	SUMMARY ALL
<b>Organization</b>	6 agencies (4 non-SVK based, 2 SVK based)
<b>Target Group</b>	4 western market, 1 Lao, Thai & Regional market, 1 Western and Lao, Thai market.
<b>The Xe Champhone Loop Study Tour by the NGO Tetraktys</b>	All the 4 agencies who were invited to the Xe Champhone study tour organized by the NGO Tetraktys are focusing on western market. The invited TOs are: Biig Travel, Easia and EXO Travel, and the SVK-based company Marvelaos.
<b>Did you know about the Xe Champhone Loop before the Study Tour?</b>	Most of the non-SVK based TOs (except GDL) did not know about the Xe Champhone Loop prior to the study tour in August 2022. All SVK-based TOs knew about the Xe Champhone Loop prior to the study tour organized by Tetraktys.
<b>Was the Study Tour to the Xe Champhone Loop your first visit to this area?</b>	The study tour was the first time to visit the Xe Champhone Loop for most SVK non-based TOs (except GDL).
<b>Has your organization been selling tours that include SVK and/or Xe Champhone Loop before the Study Tour?</b>  <b>Yes – What activities? Who are your partners?</b>	Marvel Laos is the only travel agency in SVK who focused on western market and CBT, nature tourism. This agency organizes activities around SVK city, in Xe Champhone as well as to Eld's Deer and used to organize hiking to Don Phou Vieng NPA. Opened little before covid in 2018 and don't work B2B yet.  Most other SVK based travel agencies focus on Lao/Thai visitors and mostly provide minivan transportation service for overland country travel between Thailand and Vietnam through Laos, but also include some stops along the Xe Champhone Loop.  Most of the non-SVK based TOs did not sell tours to SVK prior to the study tour. One of the consulted TOs would stop for lunch in SVK between Thakhek and Pakse.
<b>Have you been promoting and selling Xe Champhone Loop since the study tour?</b>  <b>Yes – Who are your partners?</b>	The agencies who are not based in SVK did not promote and sell SVK or Xe Champhone much prior to the study tour. Since, agencies have promoted the area, but have not made any sales.  The agencies who are based in SVK have been promoting and selling the area prior and post the study tour and do not collaborate B2B with the non-SVK based agencies. Marvel Laos the only agency that focusses on western market works B2C only and does not have B2B partners. The agency that focusses on domestic and regional market has active B2B partnerships with agencies in the market countries (Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia).
<b>What are the key challenges to sell the Xe Champhone Loop?</b>	For the non-SVK based agencies the key challenges to sell Xe Champhone Loop are: -Far and expensive to get to. -Not enough information available about the different sites and activities. -No reliable contact or B2B partner. -No suitable accommodation for high market in SVK (no problem for wetland activities).
<b>What do you like about the Xe Champhone Loop?</b>	Authentic atmosphere of Lao countryside without busy tourism sites. The Real Laos.  Wildlife is the unique selling point as not many sites like this in Laos.  Cultural-Historical sites are also nice, but there are many other cultural places in Laos.  Lao-Viet: Spiritual sites (Library, Temple) and interaction with wildlife (Monkey Forest, Turtle Lake)
<b>What target group you believe has the highest potential for the Xe Champhone loop?</b>	<b>Lao</b> visitors. <b>Thai</b> if infrastructures are improved. <b>Wildlife enthusiast</b> (Eld's Deer, Turtle Lake, + if have a quality crocodile experience). <b>Western:</b> Backpackers (have time), Returning visitors who have been to Laos before and wish to visit new places.
<b>Have you experienced the Xe Champhone homestay?</b>  <b>Yes – feedback.</b>	All agencies who attended the study tour to Xe Champhone Loop have stayed overnight in 2 homestays (Taleo and the Monkey Forest), preferred the Taleo homestay with the Lao Whisky tasting activity.  Marvelaos is the only consulted TO who promotes and sells homestays on the Xe Champhone Loop.  While Tetraktys developed 6 homestays in 5 villages, Marvelaos works only with 2 homestays (in Soui and Taleo) as these homestays offer the best experience and activities for visitors.
<b>What sites you believe require further improvement? Why? What should be done?</b>	Most western market agencies state that majority of the sites are quite well developed. TOs working with Lao and Regional market stated that road condition and infrastructures would need to be improved in most sites. Trash is a problem. Destination requires further marketing.
<b>What activities/facilities you hope to see in the future in Xe Champhone?</b>	Better infrastructures: nice cafes, viewpoints. Quality accommodation: camping (glamping), ecolodge would attract more visitors to this destination. Beautiful photo opportunities. Hiking (alternative to Don Phou Vieng NPA)

<b>How long should be activities to suit your clients?</b>	1-3 Days in SVK. 2D1N in Champhone with overnight at homestay or at Eld's Deer.
<b>Have you been to Eld's Deer? Do you sell Eld's Deer?</b>	None of the non-SVK based agencies have been to Eld's Deer.  Marvelaos is the only consulted TO that promotes and sells Eld's Deer. Marvelaos have submitted proposal to become the official managers of the Eld's Deer's tourism.
<b>Have you been to Ban Tansoum?</b>	Marvelaos is the only consulted TO that have been to Ban Tansoum before and have brough visitors to this site.
<b>Does your agency sell activities to Bueng Kiet Ngong?</b>  <b>Yes - What activities your clients enjoy? What could be done better?</b>  <b>No – Why?</b>	Most of the non-SVK based agencies used to promote and sell tours to Ban Kiet Ngong Wetlands and the nearby Xe Pian NPA, but don't sell this destination much anymore due to the loss of the nature tourism value and activities (habitat degradation-deforestation, loss of elephants).  In Ban Kiet Ngong-Xepian, these agencies used to enjoy the following activities: hiking, boat trips on wetland, birding, flora tour.  None of the SVK based agencies have been to Ban Kiet Ngong.
<b>Other comments:</b>	<p>Invite Thai influencers to attract Thai market.</p> <p>Private sector must be involved in the tourism development from the project start so that the site development, infrastructures are developed in a suitable way for the future clients.</p> <p>Low interest loans for private sector would support tourism growth.</p> <p>Marvelaos Skills &amp; Capacity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication by email takes long time for answers.</li> <li>• Staff English is quite good. Guide – English and French speaking, knowledgeable.</li> <li>• Staff are kind, polite, and friendly.</li> <li>• Good tour presentation printouts (sales folder) available in the office.</li> <li>• Sales skills are quite limited.</li> <li>• Prices are not updated. Higher than informed.</li> <li>• No B2B and limited tourism business understanding</li> </ul> <p>Marketing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quite active communication on social media.</li> </ul>

#### Annex 4 – Community Consultations Photos



In Ban Nakathang



In Ban Keng Kong Dong.



In Ban Tansoum



In Ban Natay.



In Ban Laonarth



In Ban Don Deang at Turtle Lake

## Annex 5 – Potential Site Scoring Summary

	Group A		Group B							
Village Name	Ban Keng Kong Dong		Ban Laonarth		Ban Lao Hua Kham		Ban Donkheng		Ban Tansoum	
Location/ Accessibility	5	Easy. Located within the Champhone district capital - one of the sub-villages (neighborhoods). Only some rainy season months heavy rain cannot access (August-October). Distance: Road 13 to village 19km. From SVK 52km. Road is paved, condition is good/acceptable dry season. Village is located between the Xe Champhone River, the wetlands and an oxbow lake is in the village.	3	Village is located 7km from the road No13 (unpaved road) and 17km from Champhone. Both roads are unpaved and quite bad condition. Local public transportation service from Champhone (songteaw).  Wetland around 7km from the village and takes around 30min. Rainy season (June-November) by boat. Dry season (Dec-May): by toktok + boat.  Daily public transportation from Champhone (songteaw).	3	Road 13 is located 12km away and 17km (take around 30min) from Xe Champhone on a bumpy dirt road. Local public transportation service from Champhone (songteaw). Wetland is nearby, closest 1km by motorbike and 300m walk or around 5km (15 min) by car.  Daily public transportation from Champhone (songteaw).	3,5	Village is located 17km (take around 30min) from Xe Champhone and 12km from the Road 13. Both roads are unpaved, dusty, bumpy. From village wetland can be accessed in two ways: (a) 2.5km by toktok (cross Ban Lao Hua Kham village) or (b) walking through the rice fields for around 1.5km (around 30min). November - May dry enough to walk, but rice season (December - April) and clients should not damage rice. Could do a loop.  Daily public transportation from Champhone (songteaw).	3,5	Village is located 65 km from SVK city (around 1h): Road 13 + 12km on quite bad dirt road. Village can also be accessed from the Champhone town 17 km (around 30min) on quite bad dirt road.  Wetland is located nearby the village. In dry season (December - May) takes around 2km (around 30min walking) to reach the boat landing area. Can be accessed by car, toktok, walking. In rainy/high-water season (July-November) boat landing is only around 500m from the village.
Seasonality	5	All year long.	4	Village can be accessed all year long, but the potential ecotourism site is little difficult to be accessed during the heavy rainy season months.  Wetland: Rainy season (June-November) by boat. Dry season (Dec-May): by toktok + boat.	4	Village can be accessed all year long, but the potential ecotourism site might be little difficult to be accessed during the heavy rainy season months.	4	All year long. Road from Champhone to the village is average in rainy season.	4	All year long.  Road from Champhone to the village is average during the rainy season.  Rainy season easy with boat.
Tourism Amenities	3	Have small simple restaurant, shops, internet, guesthouses (simple) available in nearby villages,	2	Have small restaurant, shops, internet coverage.	2,5	Internet good, some small shops, no restaurants or accommodation, but can organize.	2	Internet, small shops.	2	Internet, small shop.
Proximity to other tourism sites	4	Xe Champhone Loop. Soui lake, Monkey Forest, Turtle Lake	3	Xe Champhone loop 16 km away.	3	Closest tourism attraction on the Xe Champhone Loop is around 20km. Detour to get to the site from the key tourism sites.	3	Xe Champhone loop not too far. Ban Tansoum crocodile center is already promoted even though no activities available yet.	3	30 min detour from Xe Champhone Loop.
Wildlife	2,5	Crocodile, Turtles, Monkeys, Bird species can see sometimes.  <b>Crocodiles:</b> Rainy season/Dry season opinion are mixed, depends on the luck, cannot say exactly when and how. See daytime when walking on the water banks. Hard to see. Not clear what is the best time to see. Never see nighttime. Possibly (unclear information) 2 crocodile sightings in last 7 days on Xe	3	Quite hard to see.  <b>Crocodiles:</b> nighttime easier to see. Last see in Feb'23. Oct'22 collected crocodile eggs (1 nest) Nong Way area. Areas: (1) Phou see Hac and (2) Nong Way. Don't hunt crocodile in their village.  <b>Turtles:</b> 10Y ago many turtle species, but now less. Last time see in Dec'22	3,5	Wildlife is there, but hard to see.  <b>Crocodile:</b> Can see in several areas around the village. (1) Vang Sanat Ang Geo (2) Nong Puey. Last seen in Ang Geo in March 2023, nighttime. Last see in Nong Puey in Sept. 2022.  <b>Birds:</b> Nok Ket Hoi (Openbill) can see all year long in the wetlands, best time to see is early long, can see regularly at Irrigation (Vang Sanat).	3,5	<b>Crocodile:</b> Can see almost every night and several times a week daytime.  <b>Birds,</b> incl. openbills can see all year long.  In spirit forest can see squirrels, birds, snakes.  In wetland area in the forested islands can see monitor lizards.	4,5	<b>Crocodile:</b> Nursery in the village. Can see in Ang Geo area almost every time. Last seen 15 and 17 May.  Kut See Hak, Kut Mak Peo, and in KutPii Noy on 17 May. *17 May - last biodiversity survey.  Croc currently stuck in a fishpond 800m from the village as water level goes down.



		Champhone River not very far from the village.  Monkey: sometimes.		(mating season for turtles).  <b>Birds:</b> Many kinds of birds. The special one is Nok Ket Koi. No local beliefs for this bird. Migrating bird (Dec-Jan.) Hard to catch. Wild ducks and other birds in the area.  <b>Fish.</b> Used to have more species, but now less. Paa Doo (less now than before, because easy to catch) weight around 5kg.  Snakes: Python.		Wild ducks - can see all year long. And many other birds in this area.  Turtles: Mostly see when catch in the fishing nets or when trapped.  <b>Fish:</b> Some species (Paa Pao) only Sept-Oct.			Birds: Many species. Openbills, Kaa Nam, Wild ducks.  Turtles: Turtle with 3 lines - Ang Geo area several locations. Got stuck on fishing line this morning 19 May.  Big Turtle (Tao Hua Khouay) - March'23 on fishing line.  Monitoring lizard in AngGeo Nov'23.  Small water snakes around fish nets.	
Conservation	3	<b>Crocodile,</b> want to protect this species because this species increases slowly, habitat quite rare, DAFO wildlife law, it is forbidden in the village to kill crocodile.  <b>Turtle:</b> Population reduces, eggs are eaten by rats, some local people hunt turtle, nighttime spotting, fishing line, trap in big fishing nets. Turtle conservation areas.  <b>Monkey:</b> Small group 3-4 Monkeys per group. Just come some season. Don't worry much about the Monkey, because people don't eat Monkey here, regardless Monkey's area traded as pets.  <b>Birds:</b> jungle flaws, wild ducks. Population is not increasing. Hunter use bird songs to attract the birds to fly in the nest.	3	Ongoing illegal activities. Rules and regulations are known mostly by the village authority. Habitat loss, agriculture expansion into the wetland. From village consultation, the leaders seem quite active, know about crocodile conservation, local beliefs, regulations. Community inform WCS if they find crocodile eggs.  <b>Turtles:</b> 10 Y ago many turtles, but now less as are hunted to be sold in the market. Community is not sure what turtle species are protected and not.  <b>Fish:</b> Paa Doo would like to protect more.	3,5	<b>Crocodile:</b> Villagers understand about the importance of crocodile conservation.  <b>Turtles:</b> Worry very much as no regulations and quite high market demand. <b>Wish to recommend more outreach campaigns about the benefits from turtles to humans to raise awareness in the community on how and why this species is important to protect. Create a similar system as for the crocodiles, so that community can inform when they find turtle nests and eggs and can get some money for that.</b>  <b>Birds:</b> Before the population was less and has increased as no more guns in the village. Duck is a problem for the community as damage community farms.  Village committee understand well about the conservation, but community not so much, especially about the turtle conservation.	3,5	<b>Crocodile:</b> Populations has increased in the last 10 years.  <b>Turtles:</b> population has reduced. The area where turtles go to lay eggs get flooded or get eaten by rats. Market demand is high. Habitat transformation for agriculture. Understand the conservation issue now and have village regulations to protect it.  <b>Openbills:</b> no conservation issues identified.  Spirit Forest - Community has regulations and respects the area. But some people still hunt if wildlife exists the area (birds, squirrels).	4	<b>Crocodile</b> nursery in village. Before collect crocodile eggs, but not from spirit zones. Now if find eggs then inform rangers to collect eggs and to bring to the nursery facility (Kut See Hak, Pii Noy).  Some species in the area decrease turtles, monitor lizards,  Village quite active to manage the area, rangers have a patrol plan, good knowledge about the wildlife conservation issues.  Have regulations in the village. Have fish, crocodile conservation zones. Strong local beliefs don't hunt crocodile.  Habitat transformation, encroachment issues.
Nature Attractions	3,5	Nong Kan - near the village meeting room and temple, nice view, water lily. Village wish to increase the water level to do tourism activities. Trail around the pond to link with Xe Champhone River and cultural sites.  Nong Me Han oxbow sometimes can see crocodile.  Xe Champhone River – could do kayaking (dry season), boating (August-November).10 pax per boat max.	2,5	Important Wetland with various species, but little far (30min-1h) from the village. Mostly agriculture land around the village. No big trees. Nong Kud Nant - dry season no water, not very good for tourism. Mostly only some ponds have lotus.	4	Sanap Irrigation zone (visited) link to Ang Gen and Nong Puey, Some forest area around, Nice view over the wetland. Multiple wildlife species in the wetlands (including crocs, birds).	4	Nog Puie - Future fish conservation zone.  Don Sonhon - Future conservation forest.  Ang Geo - Reservoir.  And two spirit forests.	4	Healthy wetland habitat.  Ang Geo area, Phou Phii Noy.



<b>Cultural &amp; Historical Attractions</b>	3,5	<p>Temple - special style for the poles, more than 50 years.</p> <p>Festival - the generous/greedy people festival "Boun Pavet" in April. Rocket Festival in May. Handicraft - Make mattresses from wetland grass.</p> <p>History: White House Mr Phounsavanh. Black House: Mr Bounhu. White House has some historical tools (agricultural, cars).</p>	2	<p>Not many important historical-cultural sites.</p> <p>Temple is new, nothing special.</p> <p>Festivals similar as in other villages.</p> <p>Handicrafts - [Phuu] mattress (same as Ban Keng Kong Dong).</p>	2	<p>No history to share. Quite similar culture to other places.</p> <p>Lao Lum ethnic group. No special festivals. Rattan village.</p>	2	<p>Not many cultural sites.</p> <p>Putay ethnic group, local beliefs that protect crocodiles.</p> <p>Festival - Boun PatuLaoKhao same as in Ban Taleo and same time (around February).</p> <p>Mr Boun Oum's fishing site - building ruins and big traps made from ropes, irrigation.</p>	2	<p>Temple looking over the agriculture fields and wetlands.</p> <p>Putay ethnic group. Strong local beliefs.</p> <p>Handicraft - matt making from the grass in wetlands.</p>
<b>Uniqueness</b>	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unique opportunity to spot crocodiles</li> <li>- Easy access</li> <li>- City-village with crocodiles</li> <li>- Culture &amp; History</li> </ul>	3	<p>Quite like other areas, somewhat unique due to wildlife in wetlands, especially the crocodile and fish (Paa Doo), and birds.</p>	3,5	<p>Unique for crocodile, birds, Habitats of wetland and forest together. Village and culture are similar to many.</p>	3,5	<p>The culture and village are quite similar to many, however, village has quite large spirit forest and if can see crocodile every night then this place is quite unique.</p>	4,5	<p>One of the only places in Laos to see juvenile Siamese Crocodile nursery as well as in wild. Healthy wetland habitat.</p>
<b>Willingness to develop tourism</b>	4	<p>Participants very active. Used to have plan to develop tourism, but no funding and no private investors to develop. Before they organized boat racing festival, but now stopped as too many water plants in the lake and no budget to build the irrigation wall.</p>	3	<p>Active in the meeting, but no ideas on what to do, no ideas what to do with tourists or what to show. Used to have some people who come to do boating. 2015 had a project to develop some tourism (some sala for picnic), but also irrigation channel.</p>	3	<p>Before this meeting they had never thought about it. But more interested now and have ideas. But would need support to develop and manage tourism as no experience.</p>	3,5	<p>First very interested, but don't have budget, no private sector to invest here. Previously tried to develop Don Sanoum (future conservation forest) village authority wanted to see tower and camping site.</p> <p>Have many ideas.</p> <p>Not aware of tourism management needs and risks.</p>	3,5	<p>In 2012 ecotourism development began in the village supported by WCS but stopped due to budget cut. Village had received trainings in ecotourism services and a marketing was done to promote this site, but no tourism has been developed and operated by the community since (no homestay, no entrance tickets, no visitor registration, no handicraft sale).</p> <p>Some visitors arrive to the village and visit the nursery facilities. Mostly foreigners, but also Lao people (during holiday time). Foreigners don't speak Lao (not expats), different age groups, mostly come with motorbike. Come to see crocodile nursery and then go away as no activities.</p> <p>Around 10 visitors Jan-May 2023. No visitor registration. Last visitors in April'23 (2 foreign visitors).</p>
<b>Risk - Health and Safety</b>	3	<p>Flooding risk during rainy season. Xe Champhone River can be dangerous for Boating (wood/rocks).</p>	4	<p>No high risk.</p>	4	<p>No significant risk. Little flooding sometimes.</p>	4	<p>No high risk. Don Sanoum is higher and doesn't flood much. If crocodile population high, then might be an issue.</p>	4	<p>January-February strong wind can be dangerous for the boat rips.</p> <p>Small flooding risk.</p>
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>40,5</b>		<b>36</b>		<b>39</b>		<b>36,5</b>		<b>39</b>
<b>% (from 100)</b>		74%		65%		71%		66%		71%

	Group C							
Village Name	Ban Natay		Ban Don Deng		Ban Nakathang		Ban Taleo	
Location/Accessibility	3	Village is located near the main road, the Xe Champhone Loop. To access the wetland, it takes around 1h toktok ride + walking.	4	Village is located on the main road and the Turtle Lake. To get to the wetlands there are various ways: (1) shortest: 15min toktok + boat. (2) or 1h toktok + boat. (3) dry season only: go around.	4	Village is located near the main road, the Xe Champhone Loop.  From village to the wetlands around 2km by car and then walk 200m to Nong Lom the fish conservation zone.	4	Village is located on the main road, the Xe Champhone Loop. Wetland 4-5km by toktok (30min-1h).
Seasonality	4	Village can be accessed all year long, but the potential ecotourism site is little difficult to be accessed during the heavy rainy season months.	4	Village can be accessed all year long, but the potential ecotourism site is little difficult to be accessed during the heavy rainy season months.	4	All year long can access, rainy season little more difficult	4	All year long.
Tourism Amenities	2	Internet, small shops, some restaurants (closed during the harvest season).	4	Internet, Homestay, small restaurant, shops, handicrafts, visitor center	2	Small shop, internet, small vegetable market.	3,5	Homestay, small restaurant, small shops, internet. Located close to Champhone Town.
Proximity to other tourism sites	4	Xe Champhone Loop, Turtle Lake is the next village.	4	Xe Champhone Loop & Eld's Deer	4	Xe Champhone Loop, Turtle Lake, Taleo very close.	4	Xe Champhone Loop
Wildlife	3	Have some wildlife, including crocodiles, but quite hard to see.  Croc – April'23 Python – March'23  Python, crocodiles, turtles, monitor lizards, openbills, and other species.  Villagers don't go much to the wetlands.	4	Softshell Turtle: Talum area in wetlands. Last saw in Nov'22.  Crocodiles: See around KeTaLum (NongKhamSoi), last seen in April 2023. See quite often.  Can also see crocodile in rainy season only in Nong PaKaDuk and NongBoNyik areas.  Birds: Nok Kaa Nam, Openbills (can see all year long, Sept-Oct big groups).	2	Used to have, now not much.  Many kinds of fish (big catfish [Pak Kheun]).  Birds: Openbill many Sept-Oct.  Crocodile: saw the spirit crocodile in September 2023. 7y ago try to catch big crocodile, but very hard. 6 people together try to trap it.  Saw spirit hippopotamus.	2	First, said that have no wildlife.  Birds: not many species, Openbill and Non Njak, wild ducks.  Crocodiles: only sometime during the rainy season. Last sighting December 2022 in KoutKen area (Nong Lat). (Sticker No1)  Turtles: Sometimes, Nong Puey and KoutKen. Last saw in March'23. Make traps for turtles. (Sticker No6)  Monitor Lizard in the village forest called SoungPaaMaiDeeng. (Sticker No2).  We saw 2 macaque at the big tree.
Conservation	3	Regulations, respect to crocodile. Don't go much into the wetlands for fishing or hunting. Proud about the big rice paddies, some fall within the Ramsar site boundaries.	4	Priority is Nok Kaa Nam - Hard to protect, if in the conservation zone is fine, but if species go to the agriculture zone, then local people can catch this bird quite easily. Now this species is quite rare, village leaders try to raise awareness about this species and to patrol.  Don't worry about the crocodile, because no one 2hunts them.  Openbills: quite big population. Happy to have this species as they eat snail and protect their rice fields.  Turtle (3 lines on the back): population has reduced a lot as local people make traps as no regulations for this turtle. Now village has added to species to the village regulations. High market value, so still some people hunt it.  Softshell turtle: hard to see in the wetlands nowadays because people hunt a lot before. Now easier to protect because of the Turtle Lake in the village and when local people find the turtle in the wetland, they would bring it to the Turtle Lake.	2,5	Active on fish conservation. Have fish conservation zones. Have rangers to protect the area.  Have village forest.  Today don't hunt crocodile anymore and now believe in crocodile as spirit animal.	3	Are aware about the importance of crocodile. Respect crocodile but collect crocodile eggs.  Worried about turtle population that has decreased a lot.  Understand that agriculture transformation makes crocodile and turtle habitat loss. Wish to receive support from government regarding rice growing techniques to have two harvests a year and better harvest, so no need to expand the agriculture land.  Have rangers to patrol around the wetland and the forest zone. Seems to have quite strong law enforcement-ranger team.  Have regulations to protect crocodiles and turtles.  Committee of this village is quite strong, but some community members are transforming wetlands to agriculture land.

<b>Nature Attractions</b>	2,5	Low water in dry season. Quite difficult to access the natural attractions to enjoy. Have trees in some parts of the wetland, have crocodiles.	3	Talum zone in the wetlands (around the irrigation) Ban Kee, KoKaDon sacred tree with big leaves.  Turtle Lake.  Concession in the wetlands for private company to grow vegetables and fish.	2	Two Spirit Forests (no one can go) - some birds in this area.  Nong Lom - Fish conservation zone.  Active agriculture area.	3	Spirit Forest, big tree near Old Taleo Temple, Spring, sacred rocks.  Fish conservation zones in Kout Ken and Nong Laa.
<b>Cultural &amp; Historical Attractions</b>	3	Has a story telling culture. Natural dye (black color) January – March. Artisanal Salt making (March-April). Sacred rock. History: war bomb craters.  Temples: have 2 temples in the different parts of the different sub-villages. One temple is old (1903), but the old charm is gone. The second temple is not as old, but still has the old charm and wooden roof.	3	Natural Due Indigo.  Buddhist worshipping on the Turtle Lake.  Monk meditation place nearby.  Spiritual beliefs about the softshell turtle.	2	[Don Sim] - sacred rock for the community. Buddhist story about lazy-greedy person.  Artisanal Salt making.  Bru ethnic group, but village looks like a Lao Lum village.	4	Old Taleo temple and history, New Taleo Temple, Weaving and shirt making,  Special festival: After harvest (in February), all families go fishing or to collect shrimp to make offering for spirits.
<b>Uniqueness</b>	3	Various important species, some special cultural elements and salt area.	4	The only place in Laos where softshell turtles can be seen like this. Wetland with crocodiles and other species nearby. High agriculture area.  Ka Dong - special tree that has beautiful flowers and can eat leaves with fish.	2,5	Quite similar to many, the salt making tradition is little special.	3,5	The history of Old Taleo temple is quite unique.  Natural elements are quite similar.
<b>Willingness to develop tourism</b>	2,5	Used to think about developing tourism, but did not know how to do, not many ideas and did not have budget. Waiting for government to lead them on this.	3	Village has tourism already (Turtle Lake) and one homestay.  The willingness to develop new activities is average. Have experience in ecotourism. Worried about who will manage, maintain, and that not enough demand from visitors.  Village committee worry that tourism place/activities would take land away from people in the wetland.	2	Interested, but have no ideas as no experience.  Suggest: Don Sin to stop on the way. Trekking in the spirit forest possible but cannot overnight there.	3	Have existing tourism activities. Wat Taleo, Homestay. Not very good management.  Not much interest in nature tourism, more in cultural tourism.
<b>Risk - Health and Safety</b>	4	No significant risk. Rainy season small boat is not appropriate but can use a bigger boat with engine.	4	This area is higher and does not flood too much. But little risk during rainy season.	4	No high risk, maybe flooding in the rainy season.	4	No high risk identified. Rainy season maybe a small risk.
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>34</b>		<b>40,5</b>		<b>31</b>		<b>38</b>
<b>% (from 100)</b>		62%		74%		56%		69%

## Annex 6 – Potential Tourism Site Visits and Photos

The following potential tourism sites in the Xe Champhone Wetlands were surveyed:

Village	Site	Key features
1. Ban Keng Kong Dong	Wetland walking	Afternoon (5-6pm): Oxbow
2. Ban Lao Hua Kham	Wetland by car	Afternoon (5-6pm): Wetland views, birdwatching.
3. Ban Don Deang	Wetland by boat	Morning (5-8am): Sunrise birdwatching.
4. Ban Tansoum (Included Ban Donkheng and Lao Hua Kham village area)	Wetlands by boat	Morning (5-8am): Sunrise birdwatching, crocodile spotting with drone.  Evening (5:30-8:30pm): Sunset birdwatching, crocodile nighttime spotting from boat.

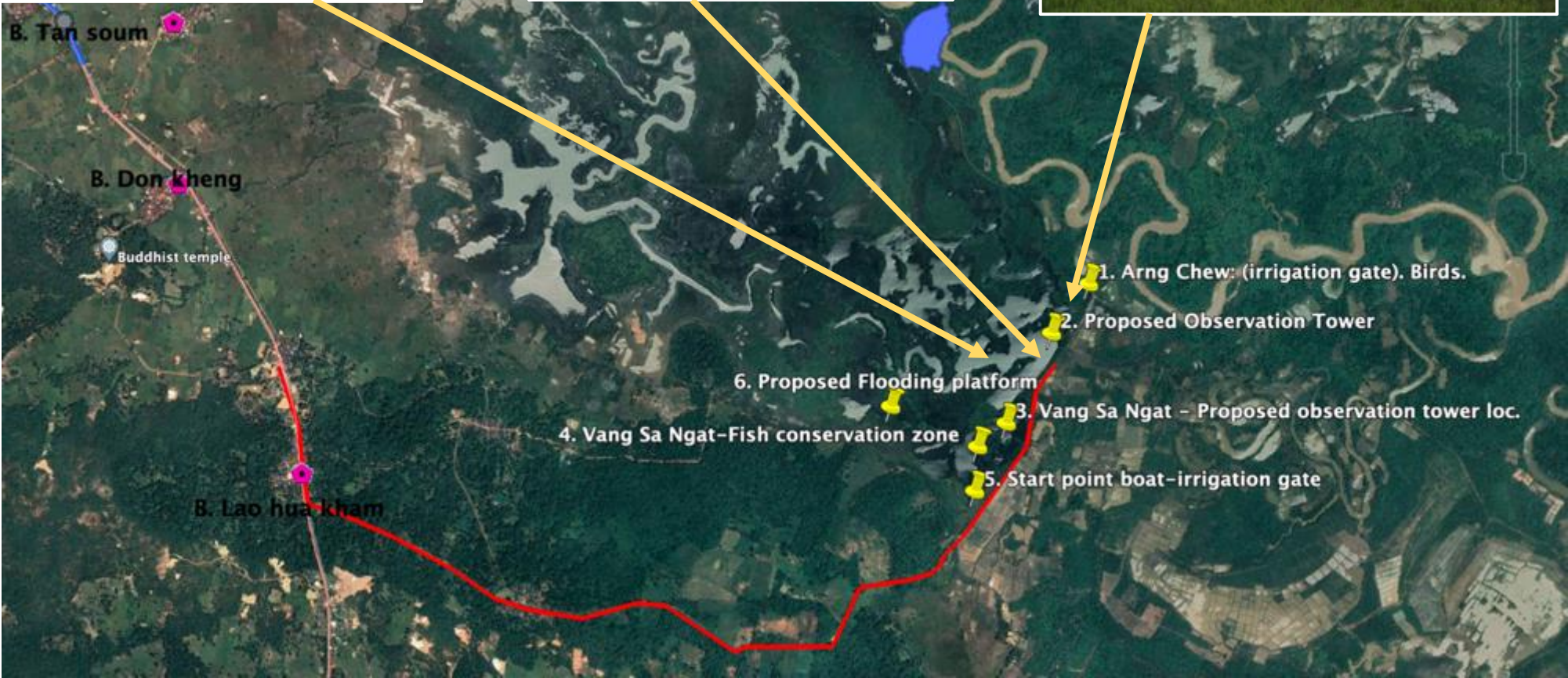


Ban Keng Kong Dong





Ban Lao Hua Kham.





Ban Tansoum - Early morning survey.





**Birds Tansoum - Birds.**



Ban Tansoum - Evening survey.





**Ban Don Deang.**

Early morning wetland survey & the Turtle Lake:





Annex 7 –Tourism development plans for Nong Kan reservoir in Ban Keng Kong Dong.



## Annex 8 – Potential Product Scoring Summary

	Potential Products:	Irrigation reservoir for recreational activities (restaurants, picnic, paddle boats etc)		Wetland Trail- Boardwalk, Platform, Observation Tower		Boating - Kayaking on the Xe Champhone River		Guided overnight wetland experience: birdwatching, crocodile spotting.		Guided short daytime wetland visit (boating, walking).		Improve and Expand the existing tourism infrastructures (Turtle Lake).		Homestay		Visitor Center		Guided Forest Walking Trail	
	Potential Sites:	Keng Kong Dong		Keng Kong Dong Tansoum		Keng Kong Dong		Tansoum Don Kheng Don Deng		Tansoum Don Kheng Don Deng		Don Deng		Don Kheng Don Deng Taleo		Tansoum		Don Kheng Taleo	
Impact	Socio-economic impact	3	Possibly quite high economic benefits, but with negative social impacts (noise, alcohol, etc) for the community.	2	Low direct economic benefits to the community.  May trigger positive indirect socio-economic benefits.  Boardwalks shouldn't negatively impact fishermen navigation routes.	2	Low NBT demand. Economic benefits for few entrepreneurs	4	Positive socio-economic benefits for multiple service providers.	2	Low NBT demand. Economic benefits for few service providers.	3	Increasing revenue. Returning visitors. Low WTP for an entrance fee.	2	Low demand and existing competition.	2	Low WTP for an entrance fee, unique merchandise could create revenue. Possible indirect benefits.	2	Low NBT demand. Economic benefits for few service providers.
	Political impact	3	Popular and supported activity in Laos, however, other than economic, the positive benefits to the society are minimal.	4	Public pride and awareness about wetlands	3	Neutral	4	Public pride and awareness about wetlands, positive international exposure	4	Raise public awareness concerning the wetland beauty	4	Public pride and awareness about turtle conservation	3	Neutral	4	Public pride and awareness about wetlands, positive international exposure	3	Neutral
	Environmental impact	2	Pollution (plastic, wastewater, noise).	3	Risk of plastic pollution, Risk of the infrastructures being used for bird hunting and illegal fishing.	4	Neutral	4	Minimal negative impact.  Some pollution risk (plastic, wastewater)	4	Minimal negative impact, some plastic pollution risk	4	Possible negative impact on turtle breeding and eggs	3		4		4	Minimal negative impact. Some plastic pollution risk
	Link to conservation	2	No direct link. Additional revenue might reduce pressure to the wetlands.	4	Can “open up” the wetlands to public to:  • Foster nature appreciation and ecotourism. • Raise public awareness concerning the wetland beauty, functions, and conservation importance. • Facilitate education and research.	3	Neutral	4	Direct link to conservation:  - Public pride and awareness about wetlands, - Wildlife conservation linked revenue - Monitoring	3	Raise public awareness concerning the wetland beauty	4	If the negative impacts are avoided, then additional infrastructures and interpretation could help to raise public awareness regarding the turtle conservation needs.	2	No direct link to conservation. Commitment to conservation may be added to the service agreements.	4		3	
	Sub-score	10		13		12		16		13		15		10		14		12	
	Percentage	50%		65%		60%		80%		65%		75%		50%		70%		60%	



	Potential Products:	Irrigation reservoir for recreational activities (restaurants, picnic, paddle boats etc)		Wetland Trail- Boardwalk, Platform, Observation Tower		Boating - Kayaking on the Xe Champhone River		Guided overnight wetland experience: birdwatching, crocodile spotting.		Guided short daytime wetland visit (boating, walking).		Improve and Expand the existing tourism infrastructures (Turtle Lake).		Homestay		Visitor Center		Guided Forest Walking Trail	
Market Attractiveness	Market-Demand	4	Mostly local Lao market.  Popular activity, quite high demand, but seasonal (weekends, holidays)	4	All public.  Quite high demand if easily accessible and attractive infrastructures and photo opportunities.	2	Outdoor enthusiast (Lao, International).  Currently low NBT demand in the area.	3	Mostly western market, wildlife enthusiasts (Thai, Lao).  Currently low NBT demand in the area. Demand for conservation wildlife experiences in Laos.	2	Wildlife enthusiasts.  Currently low NBT demand in the area.	5	Lao market mostly.  Existing market.	2	Western market.  Currently low demand and existing competition.	3	Wildlife enthusiasts.  Demand for conservation wildlife experiences in Laos.	3	Western market.  Demand for hiking in the area. Currently low NBT demand in the area.
	Barriers to Entry - Competition Risk	3	Village area.	4	Requires permit to be constructed.	2	Quite low. Shared water resource. Product can be copied by easily.	3	Village area, but shared wetland resources.	2	Quite low. Shared water resource. Product can be copied by easily.	5	Fenced area.	2	Any family can copy this product.	4	Village area, building permit.	2	Village area, but shared forest resource easily accessible.
	Operational Cost (Price)	4	Quite low.	3	Low operational costs, but high annual maintenance costs.	4	Service provider, transportation to support the activity	3	Multiple service providers required to support this activity	4	Service provider, transportation to support the activity	4	Partly observed by the existing tourism.	4	Service provider family	4	Service providers managing the facility.	4	Service provider
	WTP	4	Lao market WTP for this type of activities is quite high.	2	WTP "Entrance Fee" in general is low.	3	WTP for a short NBT activity is average	4	Western market's WTP for a quality wildlife ecotour is quite high.	3	WTP for a short NBT activity is average	2	WTP "Entrance Fee" in general is low.	3	WTP for a homestay accommodation is average	2	WTP "Entrance Fee" for a facility inside a temple is very low.	3	WTP for a short NBT activity is average
	Length of stay	5	Few hours.	5	Few hours.	4	Few hours- Half Day	3	Overnight	4	Few hours- Half Day	5	Around 30min	3	Overnight	5	Around 30min	4	Few hours- Half Day
	Seasonality	4	Can operate almost all year long.	4	Can operate almost all year long.	3	Not ideal during the rainy season.	3	Not ideal during the rainy season.	3	Not ideal during the rainy season.	5	All year long	5	All year long	5	All year long	3	Not ideal during the rainy season.
	Carrying capacity	5	High	4	Quite High	3	Average	2	Small groups for a quality experience	3	Average	5	High	2	Small groups	4	Quite high	3	Average
	Sub-score	29		26		21		21		21		31		21		27		22	
	Percentage	83%		74%		60%		60%		60%		89%		60%		77%		63%	

	Potential Products:	Irrigation reservoir for recreational activities (restaurants, picnic, boats etc)		Wetland Trail- Boardwalk, Platform, Observation Tower		Boating - Kayaking on the Xe Champhone River		Guided overnight wetland experience: bird watching, crocodile spotting.		Guided short daytime wetland visit (boating, walking).		Improve and expand the existing tourism infrastructures (Turtle Lake).		Homestay		Visitor Center		Guided Forest Walking Trail	
Development an Operations.	Investment	3	Average	2	High	4	Quite low	2	Quite High to develop a quality wildlife experience	4	Quite low	3	Average to high depending on the plan.	4	Quite low	3	Average	4	Quite low
	Labor	3	Some service providers required.	5	Low daily labor required (ticket, waste collection)	3	Several service providers required.	2	Multiple service providers required to support this activity	4	Some service providers required.	5	Low daily labor required (ticket, waste collection)	4	Some service providers required.	5	Low daily labor required (ticket, waste collection)	4	Some service providers required.
	Training	3	Several training needs (site management, maintenance, financing)	3	Some training needs (site management, maintenance, financing)	4	Some training needs (safety)	2	Multiple training needs	4	Some training needs (safety)	4	Some training needs (turtle conservation, nutrition)	4	Some training needs.	3	Several training needs (site management, maintenance, financing)	4	Some training needs.
	Infrastructure	2	Several infrastructure needs (irrigation lake, improvement, huts, bathrooms, parking etc)	1	Quite high level of infrastructures development required	4	Boating equipment.	3	Average to high depending on the overnight accommodation plan	4	Boat improvement, equipment	3	Average	4	Sleeping equipment	3	Average	5	Almost no infrastructure needs
	Maintenance	3	Average maintenance needs	2	High annual maintenance needs and costs	4	Low maintenance needs. Boating equipment.	3	Average maintenance needs	4	Low maintenance needs. Boating equipment.	3	Average	5	Very low maintenance needs	4	Quite low	5	Almost no maintenance needs
	Sub-score	14		13		19		12		20		18		21		18		22	
	Percentage	56%		52%		76%		48%		80%		72%		84%		72%		88%	
	Total Score (Product)	53		52		52		49		54		64		52		59		56	
	%	66%		65%		65%		61%		68%		80%		65%		74%		70%	