

## ALIGN Team Members Reflect, Strategize at Annual Meeting in Mongolia

ALIGN team members met in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, in June 2024 for the project's annual meeting. Attendees included staff from WWF-US, WWF-Nepal, WWF-India, WWF-Mongolia, and the Center for Large Landscape Conservation (CLLC). The team's main objectives were to reflect on ALIGN's achievements and challenges in its third year and strategize for the project's upcoming fourth and final year.



*ALIGN team members with stakeholders from Mongolia*

ALIGN—with focal work happening in Mongolia, India, and Nepal and regional work taking place across Asia—annually convenes its team members to evaluate achievements towards the project's targeted milestones and discuss ways to enhance progress and create sustainable results. This year's five-day gathering

hosted by WWF-Mongolia marks the project's third annual meeting, following the one held in New Delhi, India, last year. The first annual meeting took place online.

Kate Newman, Vice President of Sustainable Infrastructure and Public Sector Initiatives, WWF-US, kicked off the event by expressing excitement to learn about each team's achievements and together find opportunities to share lessons learned and collaboratively build on the project's achievements to date among ALIGN team members and with stakeholders.

Steven Winkates, Deputy Development Advisor from the US Agency for International Development (USAID) Mongolia, provided opening remarks, recognizing the project's accomplishments and contribution to wildlife-friendly infrastructure in Mongolia. He stressed the possibility of using the project as a model to be replicated by other countries.

The meeting's first day focused on teams presenting the past year's achievements and challenges. On the second day, major ALIGN Project stakeholders in Mongolia, including government agencies, university professors, USAID Mongolia, and private sector representatives, shared their valuable knowledge and experiences with the team members. This included

presentations from the Ministry of Road and Transport Development; Ministry of Environment and Tourism; Ministry of Economy and Development; Mongolian Sustainable Finance Association; and National University of Mongolia. These offered substantial insights and enriched the meeting's learnings for all participants. Attendees actively contributed feedback, asked questions, and engaged in dynamic discussions following each session.

During the third and fourth days of the meeting, participants engaged in detailed exchanges about the project's theory of change to re-evaluate the year four plan; synthesize ideas; and discuss monitoring, evaluation, and strategic communications. The concluding fifth day featured a visioning exercise where all attendees envisioned a world built with sustainable infrastructure and deliberated on the ALIGN Project's ultimate contributions toward realizing this vision.



*Team members visiting the southern Mongolia region*

After the meeting, the teams split into two groups for field visits to separate locations. One team ventured to the southern Gobi region of Mongolia to observe various wildlife-friendly safeguard measures such as underpasses, level crossings, and bridges along the Tavan Tolgoi railway line. They also observed camera

traps used to monitor these crossings for wildlife movement.



*Team members visiting Hustai National Park*

The ALIGN Project's lead from India, Pramod Neupane, shared his insights after the field visit. He said observing the mandatory fencing requirements along the railway lines and its impacts on wildlife connectivity across their habitats helped connect the Mongolia team's work to his work in India. He further shared, "Some of India's railway lines such as East Central Railway have also started fencing practices to increase the speed limit without considering the possible impacts on the wildlife habitats and corridors across the route. WWF-India plans to learn and intervene as required with the findings from Mongolia."

The other team visited Hustai National Park to observe its rich biodiversity and unique park management practices led by a nonprofit organization.

"Seeing the park's conservation work around the reintroduction of the Przewalski's horse was inspirational and led me to a greater understanding of Mongolia's ecosystems and how our efforts to safeguard biodiversity can play out on the ground,"



said WWF-US ALIGN team member Daniel Hornett. “We were also fortunate to see the park’s efforts to promote green incomes for local communities. Hustai is a standout example of how Mongolia is leading with sustainable solutions to conservation.”

The event was a success, providing a unified platform for team members from around the world to convene, discuss, brainstorm, plan, and visualize together. This collaborative effort revitalized enthusiasm and strengthened team connections to achieve ALIGN’s goals to safeguard natural resources in linear infrastructure projects. < To learn more about the *ALIGN Project*, visit [alignproject.org](https://alignproject.org).

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