



Ka Tu patrol teams arrest forest crime in Tabhing

1st September, 2003

Last week, on 26th August, Tabhing Commune People's Committee passed decree 17/QD-UB on establishing 'Village forest protection teams' and decree 18/QD-UB on the roles and responsibilities of the Village forest protection teams. Both these decrees outline a full legal backup based on national and provincial laws, especially highlighting the recent national 'Decision 12' of the Prime Minister, which ordered a crackdown on forest crime and corruption.

The village forest protection teams, known as *To Quan Ly Bao Ve Rung Thon (QLBVRT)* in Vietnamese, in nine Ka Tu villages of Tabhing commune, are now a local and legal force in the fight against forest loss. Each team has four or five members, all with a deep and seasoned knowledge of the local forests. A total of 50 local rangers are now actively patrolling Tabhing's forests, with detailed routes and strategies for monitoring and enforcing local forest law.



1. Ka Tu patrol teams – discussing activities



2. Using the 3D model to plan patrol zones

The Ka Tu of Nam Giang traditionally practice shifting cultivation, based on a variety of highland crop cycles, centred upon hill rice. The Ka Tu have strong animistic beliefs in the spiritual essence of all things, and have a deeply ingrained knowledge and cultural appreciation of the forest and its offerings. Traditional clothing reflects rank, status and clan identity, with a wide range of natural motifs, colours and designs. However, modern dark green uniforms were selected for the QLBVRT teams, with an arm badge stating their authority as a patrol unit. The reason for this choice of uniform, according to the leader of Zia

Ra team, was because 'outsiders need to know we are an official, recognised force'. Traditional norms and laws still govern land use, land ownership and forest management, as well as tree tenure and rules for planting and managing trees in the forest, and are being incorporated into sustainable resource management planning for the area.

On the morning of 27th August, Pa Xua QLBVRT team apprehended two outsiders, one man setting snares, and another sawing up timber. Both men were apprehended and taken to the commune authorities for punitive measures.



3. Arresting an illegal logger



4. Forest crime robs locals of resources

The team's official inauguration followed a workshop hosted by Song Thanh Nature Reserve management board, and supported by the WWF MOSAIC project. The MOSAIC has a wide-range of conservation objectives in Quang Nam, including prioritising key areas for conservation measures; supporting community management of local forest resources; and assisting the authorities to develop a provincial conservation strategy.

The WWF MOSAIC community team, led by Mr. Phan Van Truong, had held community meetings, and in tandem with a local 'QLBVRT working group', had worked closely with villagers to design the best way to set-up these teams. Members of the teams were elected by villagers in a meeting in the *Guorrl*, or village meeting house, with some basic criteria for member's selection – they had to be fit, know the forest, and be interested in the job!. The final selection was approved by each village leader and the list submitted to the commune for their legal decrees.

The MOSAIC project has worked with Tabhing commune, Song Thanh Nature Reserve, and the local Nam Giang district government, to develop a comprehensive action plan to mobilise for conservation action in Tabhing. Following extensive biological and social research, a series of interventions were mooted with key stakeholders. A draft activity schedule was approved by the community, through a consultation 'jury' process, and finally approved at district-level. The final action partnership for Tabhing details twenty key interventions over a six month period. This plan will kick start a longer-term goal of community-based management of forest and natural resources, supported by local authorities and Protected Area staff.



5. The model allows easy understanding of forest zonations, and planning for patrol routes

The patrol teams are one step in this process. The teams' planning and zones of operation were greatly helped by an accurate 3-D model of the area, built in May 2003 by a collaborative effort of over 125 local people with Nature Reserve staff and government officials, supported by WWF through a grant from DGIS. This model gives the villagers a distinct advantage. Pathways and key access routes to the forest can be identified easily, and patrol routes can be effectively divided between teams, and timetabled in a way that any illegal exploiter will never know just when the patrol may turn up. Practical training and coordination for the team was conducted by WWF and Nature Reserve experts. Collaboration with the Nature Reserve Staff is very high. The local teams can relieve the Reserve



6. Fording the Song Thanh river



management of much responsibility in enforcing in the local area. The Reserve can focus their resources in other areas, and in continuing to work closely with the community to offer incentives for conservation. Article 4 of Decree 18/QD-UB grants the teams powers of arrest, in clear circumstances of actual forest crime, yet the teams have to bring the perpetrator and a report to the authorities within twelve hours, after which time they have to release the offender. The Decree also outlines clear responsibilities of the commune police and of the Nature Reserve to strongly support the teams in their enforcement efforts.



7. Tabhing's forests are rich in biodiversity

evaluated, with the hope that, if successful, the model can be applied to over 60 other communes in western Quang Nam province, where forest protection activities are being bolstered by devolution of management responsibilities to local communities.

The current plan seeks to allocate forestland to local communities, so within each village, management units will be responsible for a forest plot. The management unit and the size of the plot will be chosen by the community themselves. Outside support to develop the forest for local economic benefit will be provided, with agreements on conservation trade-offs - such as strictly no hunting of tigers; zoning snares around agricultural plots only; demarcating zones for agricultural use.



8. Arrested 'outsiders' came equipped with saws and snares for logging and hunting



9. The Patrol team make strategic use of camp sites for orientation, and lunch

Once this forest management transition occurs, the village teams will become more important as a local defence force. The key threats to the community and their forests are from 'outsiders', who over-exploit local resources such as rattans and timber; pollute streams through illegal gold-mining; and set indiscriminate snares that rob the forest of its wildlife. The QLBVRT teams are currently being supported by WWF in their initial, trial period. The key to success will be to identify suitable and

sustainable funding mechanism. The current plans are for:

- Percentage of all fines from arrested forest criminals to be allocated to support teams in the commune
- Annual District funds allocated as a core 'stipend'



10. WWF's Phan Van Truong on patrol with the team from Pa Xua village

This can, for Tabhing, be backed up by an innovative idea



from WWF. One responsibility of the QLBVRT teams is to set, monitor and return film from a series of camera-traps in the forest. Every six weeks, the film and batteries need changing, and the site clearing of fallen leaves or debris.

The results of the camera-traps – pictures of local wildlife – are to be sold in the World Heritage town of Hoi An, through a local tour company outlet, who are sponsoring conservation and community development in the mountainous area. The funds from the sale of pictures to tourists will adequately cover the QLBVRT team costs, and allow for a slush fund for further conservation activities within the community (such as school events, awareness materials, labour and seed costs for agroforestry, renewing equipment for team members).



11. The saola – flagship of WWF's work in the Annamites Ecoregion



12. 'Guorri' meeting house in Pa Lua village, Tabhing

WWF will continue wider support Tabhing and Song Thanh Nature Reserve in carrying out sustainable forest management activities, and support the local authorities to mobilise other communes to follow the Tabhing model. Quang Nam province are interested to replicate site-based success into their Provincial Conservation Strategy, to be finalised in 2004. WWF have a three year project supported by the MacArthur Foundation to work closely with the Forest Protection Department to further develop enforcement, protection and monitoring activities. Success by the MOSAIC project in Quang Nam is providing lessons and a blueprint for wider action by WWF and many

partners within the Central Annamites landscape and across the Greater Annamites Ecoregion. For more information, visit www.wwfindochina.org and learn about participatory 3-D modeling at www.iapad.org.

ⁱ All photographs by WWF / Phan Van Truong; except 2, 5 and 12 by WWF / James Hardcastle; and 11 by WWF / David Hulse.
Article written by James Hardcastle, Greater Annamites Ecoregion Action Programme, WWF Indochina. james@wwfvn.org.vn