



# Declaration of commitment of the Indigenous Karen People to preserve the wildlife in the Salween River Basin *(Way Boo Hta Declaration)*

**Date : April 30, 2025**

**Place : Salween Peace Park, Mutraw District/ Brigade # 5**

The Salween River Basin is endowed with diverse ecosystems, ranging from mixed deciduous, dry dipterocarps, pine, montane to hill evergreen forests. These ecosystems host many globally significant wildlife species. Iconic wildlife species include the Tiger, Dhole, Green Peafowl, Chinese Pangolin, Sunda Pangolin, various Leopard species, Elongated tortoise, Gaur, Eastern Hoolock Gibbon, Great Hornbill, and Grey Peacock Pheasant.<sup>1</sup>

Having these wildlife species co-habiting our ancestral territories reaffirms our Karen identity and reflects our deep relationship with nature, rooted in our traditional belief systems and cultural practices. These traditions allow us to respectfully manage and sustain our natural resources, while maintaining a balance with our neighboring wildlife species and the broader environment.

<sup>1</sup> The Tiger (*Panthera tigris*) (EN), Green Peafowl (*Pavo muticus*) (EN), Chinese Pangolin (*Manis pentadactyla*) (CR), Sunda Pangolin (*Manis javanica*) (CR), Indochinese Leopard (*Panthera pardus* ssp. *delacouri*) (CR), Gaur (*Bos gaurus*) (VU), Eastern Hoolock Gibbon (*Hoolock leuconedys*) (VU), Great Hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*) (VU), and gray peacock-pheasant (*Polyplectron bicalcaratum*) (LC) are protected under KFD regulations in accordance with traditional Karen Indigenous hunting taboos, while the Dhole (*Cuon alpinus*) (EN) and Elongated tortoise (*Indotestudo elongate*)(CR) are being proposed to the protected list.





On June 27 – 28, 2022, we conducted the first community gathering meeting in Waklay Hta Village, Kaupu Village Tract, Butho Township, Mutraw District/Brigade #5. The meeting was held under the theme of Promotion of Karen Traditional Knowledge, practices of wildlife conservation and management in the role of community rangers. During this meeting, we made a total of (9) commitments to revitalize and promote our culture practices and traditional beliefs concerning the protection and preservation of wildlife. More detailed information can be found in this link: <https://kesan.asia/publication/declaration-of-commitment-of-the-indigenous-karen-people-to-preserve-wildlife-in-the-salween-river-basin/>

Currently, however, due to the ongoing political conflict, the impact of climate change, and other contributing factors leading to increased livelihood insecurity, Karen Indigenous knowledge and cultural practices about environmental stewardship and wildlife preservation have been gradually diminishing in Kawthoolei.

To preserve the Eastern Landscape of the Salween Peace Park and protect the endangered wildlife species, the Mutraw District Kawthoolei Forestry Department (KFD) has already implemented law enforcement measures through its field officers. In addition to this, local Community Ranger groups have been formed to help enforce the rules and regulation on wildlife preservation as well as to monitor poaching and illegal logging along the Salween Basin. However, these enforcement efforts along are not sufficient. We must simultaneously take steps to revitalize Karen Indigenous Knowledge and traditional practices, while actively increasing the engagement of local communities, CSOs and all stakeholders in wildlife preservation measures.

In order to work collectively to achieve these goals, we, the local communities of the Salween River Basin, along with representatives of Mutraw District Administration, the Karen National Liberation Army's (KNLA) Brigade #5, the Salween Peace Park Governing Committee and its working groups, the Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN), Kheshorter Community Forest, local boat drivers, and hunters convened a second gathering on April 17 – 18, 2025 at Way Boo Hta Village, Htee Ler Poo Village Tract, Butho Township, Mutraw District/Brigade #5. A total of 91 participants attended this two-day gathering under the theme: Promotion of Karen Traditional Knowledge, practices of wildlife conservation and management in the role of community rangers.

**The objectives of this gathering were:**

1. To raise the awareness and values of Karen Indigenous Knowledge, traditional practices, beliefs and taboos that have supported the sustainable management and preservation of natural resources and wildlife for generations,
2. To increase public awareness of the roles that Community Rangers play in wildlife conservation,
3. To foster cooperation and collaboration among stakeholders to enforce both forest and wildlife regulations of the Kawthoolei Forestry Department (KFD) and the traditional practices, beliefs and taboos of the Indigenous Karen People.
4. To review and reaffirm the commitments made in the Wah Klay Hta Declaration and strengthen efforts toward their implementation.

Topics covered during the two-day gathering included: (1) the significance of preserving biodiversity in Salween River Basin, (2) presentation of recent wildlife survey results conducted in the Salween Basin, (3) a comparison of Indigenous People’s approaches to wildlife conservation with Western scientific methods, (4) an overview of KFD regulations and enforcement, and penalties for violations, including customary penal codes, and (5) a presentation of the one-year report and future plans of local Community Rangers.

**During this two-day gathering, the following action points were agreed upon:**

1. Conduct more awareness-raising campaigns to promote wildlife preservation.
2. Recruit more community rangers and ensure they receive proper training and are equipped with the necessary skills needed for their job.
3. Revitalize sacred sites and clearly designate non-hunting areas where wildlife can safely breed and thrive.



4. Strictly enforce regulations and penalties against poaching and illegal trading of wildlife species particularly species that are listed as Critically Endangered (CR), Endangered (EN), Vulnerable (VU), or other species traditionally protected under Karen customs.
5. Issue a special order to prohibit the hunting of wild animals while swimming across the Salween River or entering village areas, in alignment with traditional beliefs and taboos.
6. Prohibit electro-fishing in the Salween River as well as all its tributaries and streams.
7. Reforest degraded forest areas and restore wildlife corridors, and
8. Commit to strengthening collaboration with relevant stakeholders along the Salween River Basin to reduce and prevent uncontrolled forest fires, such as man-made fires that lack proper firebreaks or are not part of regulated practices such as traditional rotational farming.

Finally, we, the participants at this gathering agree to give our full consent and commitment to increase collaboration on wildlife protection and wildlife law enforcement; promote Karen Indigenous knowledge and practices in the management of wildlife and natural resource management; and to comply with KFD wildlife regulations. Through these efforts, we, and our wildlife neighbors, can continue to co-exist and thrive in the Salween River Basin of the Salween Peace Park.

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