
[Vietnam: Na Hang dam threatens forests, people and wildlife](#)

The Tonkin snub-nosed monkey is endemic to northern Vietnam and is one of the world's most endangered mammal species. Before a group was spotted in Na Hang district in 1992, it was considered extinct. Today, 260 of the monkeys are known to be living in northern Vietnam. Half of the population lives in the Na Hang Nature Reserve, which was created in 1994 specifically to protect the snub-nosed monkey.

The Na Hang Nature Reserve is in an area of dramatic mountainous limestone scenery. Forest within the nature reserve is extraordinarily rich in biodiversity. As well as providing a habitat for the snub-nosed monkey, it is home to the Francois' leaf monkey, lesser slow loris, stump tailed macaque, pig tailed macaque, dhole, Owston's palm civet, clouded leopard, Asiatic black bear, serow, a series of endangered birds and butterflies, an endangered tortoise and thirteen species of threatened plants. Four endangered fish species live in the Gam river, which forms the western boundary of the nature reserve.

Scott Wilson Asia Pacific, a consulting company, is leading a consortium carrying out a Protected Area Resource Conservation (PARC) project in Na Hang with funding from the Global Environment Facility. In addition, Allwetter Zoo and the Zoological Society for the Conservation of Species and Populations (both of Germany) are running the Tonkin Snub-nosed Monkey Conservation Project.

Unfortunately, the same Vietnamese government that set up the Na Hang Nature Reserve now seems determined to go ahead with plans for a US\$420 million, 300 MW hydropower dam on the Gam river. The dam would flood part of the Na Hang nature Reserve and have devastating, long-term impacts on the forests, people and wildlife in and adjacent to the reserve.

In 1997, Electricity of Vietnam (EVN), the state electricity utility, produced a pre-feasibility study for a dam on the Gam River. Two years later, EVN produced terms of reference for a feasibility study of the dam which was due to be completed at the end of last year. Scott Wilson Asia Pacific wrote, in the inception report for its conservation project in Na Hang, that it proposed to "assist the Government of Vietnam by carrying out a preliminary environmental assessment of the River Gam Dam." Scott Wilson's consultants completed their preliminary environmental assessment in 2000. According to Vietnam's Electricity Master Plan Number Five, released in 2001, the Na Hang dam is planned to be commissioned in 2006. So far, the Vietnamese government has not secured international funding for the dam.

If built, the Na Hang dam would create a reservoir stretching 30 kilometres up the Gam river and flooding 57 square kilometres, including 220 hectares of the Na Hang nature reserve. Forty five villages would be flooded, and more than 11,000 people would be evicted to make way for the reservoir. Ethnic groups living in the area include Dao, Tay, Hoa and H'mong, as well as Kinh, the Vietnamese majority group. One woman, who would be evicted by the dam, told Scott Wilson's consultants, "We may be poor, but this is our home".

Although the area of the nature reserve which would be flooded is small, the habitat of the snub-

nosed monkey is less than 1,000 hectares. The reservoir would be in an area adjacent to where the monkey is known to live. The snub-nosed monkey is very sensitive to disturbance and tends to stay at least one kilometre from roads, trails or villages.

Before the dam is built, the reservoir area would be logged. At present there is no road access to the area. Building the dam would involve building a new road, a major construction site, traffic, construction noise, dust, pollution, explosions, and up to 10,000 workers.

Construction workers will increase local demand for wildlife and other forest products. The bones, hands and feet of Tonkin snub-nosed monkeys are made into traditional medicines. With a stream of construction trucks driving in and out of the area, it would be almost impossible to stop illegal trading.

In May 1999, a group of environmental organisations, including IUCN, Allwetter Zoo and Primate Conservation Inc., wrote to Prime Minister Phan Van Khai and other Vietnamese officials. Their letters requested that a thorough environmental impact assessment of the proposed dam should be carried out, in accordance with Vietnam's Law on Environment Protection and the Convention on Biodiversity (to which Vietnam is a signatory). To date, no such study has been done. The Vietnamese government did not reply to the letters.