

Nature offered more protection

Standard for recognition and management of national parks to be released next year

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China has unveiled a guideline for improving the protection of nature reserve areas, with the aim of reaching world-leading management and preservation levels by 2035.

According to the guideline, released by the State Council late last month, a new mechanism for the management and protection of nature reserve areas, including national parks, will be built.

It is expected to provide systemic protection for natural ecosystems, relics, scenery and biodiversity, and also safeguard the country's ecological security.

The guideline calls for the establishment of a batch of national parks and a unified management system for the country's nature reserves — at all levels — by 2020. The next step will be the building of a protection mechanism, with national parks as a major component, by 2025.

“The guideline is a move by the

country to advance sustainable development,” a top official from the National Forestry and Grassland Administration said in a recent interview.

According to the administration, China has established more than 11,800 nature reserve areas at different levels that are protecting 18 percent of the country's land and 4.6 percent of its territorial waters.

In a report delivered at the opening of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2017, President Xi Jinping said China would develop a nature reserves system composed mainly of national parks as part of the effort to build a beautiful China.

The primary purpose of establishing nature reserve areas is to protect a fragile ecosystem, which has been under constant attack from human activities.

In national parks, for example, development and construction that could hurt the ecosystem will be prohibited, and those engaging in practices such as illegal mining, the discharging of pollutants and

poaching will be punished.

“But the overall planning of the country's nature reserve areas is imperfect and the management system also needs to be improved to keep pace with the rapid development of the country,” the administration official said.

“The guideline marks a milestone in the country's comprehensively deepening reform on nature reserve areas. It will support China's overall ecological protection work and lay a foundation for our sustainable economic and social development.”

Under the guideline, there will be three kinds of protected areas — national parks, nature reserves and nature parks — based on their ecological value.

Overlapping nature reserves or ecologically-connected areas that used to be managed separately by different departments will be integrated, with management and protection work enhanced, and the total area covered by the three kinds of protected areas will be no smaller than the previous areas.

The habitats of some endangered

wild species and regions with representative geological conditions will be included in the nature reserves. Nature parks will be those regions holding natural scenery or relics with potential for scientific or cultural study.

National parks will be regions that can showcase typical Chinese ecosystems.

Since 2015, China has approved the construction of 10 pilot national parks covering more than 200,000 square kilometers across the country, including the Giant Panda National Park, which includes parts of Sichuan, Shaanxi and Gansu provinces; the Qilian Mountains National Park in Gansu and Qinghai province; and the Northeast China Tiger and Leopard National Park in Jilin and Heilongjiang provinces.

In national parks, the strictest protection occurs within “red line” zones, a key government strategy putting designated areas under mandatory protection.

The pilot program will end next year and the administration will then release a national standard for the recognition of national parks and their management. By the end of next year, a batch of national parks under the new standard will be unveiled.

Last year, a research center for national park planning was established in southwestern China's Yunnan province in an effort to facilitate the protection of China's nature reserves.

With more than 70 researchers

specializing in zoology, botany, wetland and nature reserve protection, and landscaping, the research center is building on work conducted by an institute that has been dedicated to national park research since the 1990s.

To simplify management, the guideline says each nature reserve area will receive uniform management from one administrative body, and management and control will feature a range of restrictions on human activities.

National parks and nature reserves will have core protection areas and general control areas. Human activities will be prohibited in the former and be subject to strict restrictions in the latter. Nature parks will be defined as regular control areas and be subject to less stringent restrictions.

The guideline includes several principles to guide protection work, with government departments to play a leading role and input from social organizations and experts from research institutes also welcomed.

It also emphasizes that the new mechanism will be formulated according to the law and the interests of the people. International experience will also be factored into the new mechanism.



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POLICY RESPONSE

Duty-free sector and fire safety among issues addressed

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Several ministry-level departments, including those for finance, emergency management and health, have responded recently to issues of public concern.

Regulation to ensure fair duty-free market

China will beef up oversight of duty-free shops at ports with measures to encourage fair market competition, according to a temporary regulation published on Thursday.

The regulation, issued jointly by the Ministry of Finance and four other government departments, said operators of duty-free shops must be decided through a bidding process, during which eligible businesses must be offered unbiased treatment.

The sustainable development of businesses must be taken into



account during the selection of operators, and the variety of products they offer, in addition to liquor and cigarettes, will be an important factor.

Products sold at duty-free shops must be in line with the categories of products authorized by the General Administration of Customs, the regulation said.

Fire safety inspections ordered near campuses

The Ministry of Emergency Management has called for heightened efforts to reinforce fire safety inspections of rental housing units and businesses near campuses in the wake of several accidents in recent months.

In a notice issued with three other government departments on Wednesday, the ministry said problems such as a lack of fire control measures, failure to assume safety responsibilities and a lack of safety training were behind a number of deadly fires in rental housing in recent years that have each claimed at least 10 lives.

Meanwhile, businesses around campuses, such as internet cafes, games rooms and hotels, also pose severe fire hazards due to the large flow of people attracted to their



commercial activities, it said.

Government departments must launch comprehensive fire safety inspections targeting rental housing units and business venues, the notice said.

Housing units accommodating more than 10 tenants that fail to ensure safe evacuation procedures must be shut down temporarily, and electric bikes that are illegally parked or charged inside residential buildings must be removed.

The notice also called for property owners and managers to organize fire extinguishing and emergency evacuation drills on a regular basis, carry out fire safety inspections, and keep firefighting equipment well maintained.

Psychological health of elderly a priority

The National Health Commission said on Thursday that it has

launched a two-year pilot program to evaluate the psychological conditions of senior residents and improve the ability of health workers at the primary level to offer help.

The program, covering 1,600 urban communities and 320 villages, will conduct evaluations of the psychological conditions of residents age 65 and older to learn about the common psychological issues they face, said Wang Haodong, head of commission's department of aging and health.

Under the program, psychological assessments will be carried out on a voluntary basis, and interventions and suggestions for medical treatment will be offered depending on the results, he said.

The commission said the program has been prompted by an increase in mental problems among the elderly in recent years. More



senior citizens are now part of the migrant population or have been left behind at home by their children, making them vulnerable to mental issues, especially when they catch chronic diseases or lose their spouses or friends, it said.

The program is expected to improve the ability of medical workers at the primary level to identify common psychological issues and offer corresponding help, Wang said.

Action plan to boost security of data

The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology said on July 1 that it has launched a one-year action plan to boost data security, targeting data leaks and misuse by businesses.

The campaign will include checks on data security at all telecom companies, 50 major internet companies and 200 popular online applications by the end of October, the ministry said.

The plan calls for the establishment of an industry data security protection mechanism, with measures to develop data protection catalogs and formulate security standards in more than 15 industries.

Policy digest

More support pledged for e-commerce

China will scale up measures to support the growth of cross-border e-commerce in a bid to spur the upgrading of domestic industries and boost employment, the State Council decided at an executive meeting on Wednesday.

More cities will be encouraged to launch cross-border e-commerce pilot zones on top of the 35 existing zones nationwide, according to a statement released after the meeting. Retail goods exported from the pilot zones will be exempted from value-added tax, it said, adding that the authorities will introduce simpler methods for verifying and collecting corporate income tax.

Supporting the growth of cross-border e-commerce is an important move in keeping with the new industrial revolution and the upgrading of exports and imports, it said. Those at the meeting also recognized the role of e-commerce in promoting growth of the express delivery industry, creating jobs and boosting innovation and entrepreneurship.

China's imports and exports from cross-border e-commerce were worth 134 billion yuan (\$19.5 billion) last year, up 50 percent year-on-year, according to the General Administration of Customs.

The government will offer incentives for the building of platforms that serve the development of cross-border e-commerce and logistics services, the statement said. More work will be done to establish, improve and expand overseas warehouses, it added. The meeting also pledged to introduce measures to guide e-commerce platforms to step up the protection of intellectual property rights. Meanwhile, more educational institutions will be encouraged to open related majors to provide the talent needed for the development of e-commerce and logistics services.

The government will continue to make its oversight prudent and accommodating and step up crackdowns on fake products to protect the rights of businesses and consumers. International cooperation will be boosted, and the country will play an active role in the framing of related international regulations, the statement said.

Pilot FTZs urged to expand access



Measures to further widen market access in China's pilot free trade zones, especially for the services sector, are being considered, according to a decision taken at the cabinet's executive meeting on Wednesday.

The meeting urged greater strides in opening up pilot FTZs so they can implement more measures that could be promoted in other areas.

Authorities at the provincial, regional and municipal level have been urged to delegate more administrative authority to the pilot free trade zones, especially in investment approval and market access. The reform of separating business licenses and operation permits will be fully implemented in all pilot zones, a statement released after the meeting said.

The meeting also called for full implementation of this year's edition of the negative list for foreign investment applicable to the pilot free trade zones and necessary adjustments to related laws and regulations.

It also proposed concrete measures to promote innovation in trade facilitation and integration between different means of transportation. Pilot programs focused on competition policy will be launched in the zones as part of efforts to level the playing field. The meeting also called for the role of pilot FTZs in reform and innovation to be further leveraged to facilitate development of their host cities and surrounding regions.