

Eco campaign propels prosperity in Shuozhou

By YUAN SHENGGAO

In many people's impression, the city of Shuozhou, located in the northwest of Shanxi and featuring one of the driest climates in the province, should be an arid land with one of the worst ecosystems in the province.

But an actual visit to the city gives quite a different impression. People are welcomed by lush vegetation, fresh air, blue sky and clear water.

Local statistics show that the forest coverage in the city's urban area has reached 24.48 percent, higher than the provincial rate of 23.57 percent. As the central area of the city is surrounded by a 100-kilometer forest belt, Shuozhou is now known as a "green city along the Great Wall".

Local officials said the achievement in ecosystem protection is a result of the authorities highlighting environmental protection and sustainable development.

The county of Youyu, located in the northwestern tip of Shuozhou, as well as the entire Shanxi province, is a prime example of successful environmental improvement made possible by the efforts of the local government and residents.

Once plagued by drought, Youyu is now an eco-friendly county with forest coverage of more than 56 percent, thanks to greening efforts by generations of residents. More than 70 years ago, the rate was less than 0.3 percent.

Zhao Shouzhong, who has been working as a forestry technician for 38 years in Youyu, said he feels incredible joy when thinking how much the county has changed during the past few decades.

"When we were young, we had to light up the house even during the daytime because the county was always clouded with sandstorms," Zhao said. "Thanks to the hard work of officials and the people over the decades, Youyu is now one of the greenest counties in Shuozhou."

Greening the land is only one part of the local government's efforts in environmental protection. Its endeavors also include developing cleaner industries and promoting the use of clean energy resources.

Shuozhou is a pioneering city in Shanxi for developing wind power into a local pillar. About 10 years ago, the city successfully integrated its wind power electricity into the provincial grid.

In 2018, it began offering a stable supply of wind-generated elec-

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Zhao Shouzhong, a forestry technician in Youyu county, Shuozhou

tricity to local industrial parks according to long-term agreements inked between electricity enterprises and electricity-consuming companies. A total of 500 million kilowatt-hours of wind electricity were supplied to clients in the first year, helping enterprises cut costs worth a combined 65 million yuan (\$9.42 million), thanks to State subsidies for clean electricity.

A campaign to upgrade the local mining industry with digital and smart technology will also help promote higher efficiency, better safety and lower emissions.

As coal mining is one of the traditional pillars in Shuozhou, local authorities said the digital upgrades can provide significant environmental and economic benefits.

It is reported that 14 mining shafts in Shuozhou have been turned into smart facilities. The number is expected to hit 100 by the end of 2025.

While upgrading its coal industry, Shuozhou is also trying to diversify its economy. Emerging sectors like ceramics, new energy, new materials, biomedicine, and deep processing of farm produce have become new growth drivers. The emerging industries' combined added value was 4.7 percent higher than that of the coal industry, according to local statistics.

Local residents' livelihoods are also improving with economic development and environmental improvement.

The government has dedicated more than 80 percent of its expenditures to improving people's livelihood over the past 10 years and the city announced the elimination of absolute poverty in 2021, marking its entrance into a moderately well-off society.

Ren Yongliang and Yuan Zhaohui contributed to this story.



The scenic Sanggan River wetland is an example of Shuozhou's efforts to rehabilitate its natural assets.

REN YONGLIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY



Flocks of white egrets and other rare birds are being spotted at the Yellow River wetland in the county of Pinglu. LIU WENLI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Rare birds flocking back to Yellow River

Efforts to clean up the environment behind biodiversity revival

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Tourists and photographers alike were glad to see that thousands of white egrets had gathered at the Yellow River wetland in the county of Pinglu, Shanxi province, in August.

While impressed with this rare and spectacular sight, tourists agreed that the arrival of so many white egrets, which are said to be extremely sensitive to the environment, is a sign of a substantial improvement in the local ecosystem.

The Pinglu wetland is not alone. Local media reports said that rare bird species have been spotted in many sections of the Yellow River, which runs nearly 1,000 kilometers through Shanxi, as well as in the river's tributaries in the province.

Local wildlife researchers said the new arrivals include swans, white egrets and black storks.

The arrival of such birds is evidence of Shanxi's efforts to protect its ecological system, they said, especially in the Yellow River drainage basin, which aim to create a pleasant habitat for both humans and wildlife.

China has recently carried out a campaign to promote the protection of the Yellow River drainage basin, targeting the sustainable development of regions along the river.

Shanxi is an important link of this national campaign. To respond to related strategic decisions made by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council, Shanxi has established a leaders' group. Members include the Party secretary of Shanxi, the provincial governor and other senior officials. The group's mission is to propose plans and regulations for protecting the Yellow River basin.

Under the guidance of the leaders' group, the Shanxi provincial government released a plan for the ecological protection and high-quality development of the Yellow River drainage basin in June. Another seven documents were released to assist the plan's implementation in the two months that followed. At the same time, 11 cities in the province released their regional plans for implementing the wider provincial plan.

According to the provincial plan, Shanxi's efforts in protecting the Yel-



China Shanxi

low River drainage basin include building projects for ecological restoration, pollution prevention, flood control and water resource utilization. It says a total of 300 billion yuan (\$43.41 billion) will be invested in 90 large projects in these regards during the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25).

Shanxi has witnessed steady improvement of water quality in the Yellow River basin over recent years.

During the first six months of this year, 44 monitoring stations, or 75.9 percent of the total number of stations in the Yellow River basin, reported good or excellent levels of water quality. This is 11.5 percent higher than the figure in the same period of 2021.

Among all the Yellow River tributaries in Shanxi, Fenhe River is the largest. It has received almost the same level of attention as the Yellow River. Over the past few years, local governments have channeled huge amounts of investment into restoring 245 flood-destroyed reservoirs. They have repaired six reservoirs with hidden risks and enhanced 34 sections of embankment. These efforts are targeted at controlling floods and increasing water supply to the river, according to local officials.

The decadeslong campaigns in afforestation and soil erosion control have also contributed to the environmental improvement of the Yellow River drainage basin.

A part of the Loess Plateau, Shanxi has suffered soil erosion for centuries. Soil washed away by the rain has been eventually made its way to the Yellow River, making it the No 1 silted large river in the world.

The province's efforts in planting trees and grasses have greatly improved the environment of the Yellow River drainage basin. The increased vegetation coverage has contained soil erosion and increased the runoff of rivers, according to the Shanxi Forestry and Grassland Administration.

Its statistics show that the province has planted 2.78 million hectares of trees since 2012. Forest coverage reached 23.57 percent by the end of 2020, higher than the national average.

Another effort to protect the Yellow River's environment is the promotion of clean industrial production and the development of clean energy resources, with the aim of preventing water and air pollution.

This is in line with the Chinese government's plan for cutting carbon emissions, which aims to achieve carbon peak in 2030 and carbon neutrality in 2060, according to local officials.

While promoting coal mining, coking, steelmaking and other heavy industries toward clean production and higher efficiency, the province is now highlighting the development of solar and wind power, as well as hydrogen used as vehicle fuel.

The capacity of power plants based on clean energy resources now accounts for 34.3 percent of Shanxi's total, local statistics show.

Shanxi witnessed rapid growth in the development of solar and wind power industries during the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-20). Wind-power generation capacity increased at an average annual rate of 24.16 percent during the period. Meanwhile, the growth rate for solar-power generation was 63.22 percent. It ranked Shanxi among the fastest-growing provinces in the two sectors.

Another area that Shanxi wants to highlight is using the river to develop the cultural tourism industry. The Yellow River is seen as the mother river of China and a tour of it is a dream that many Chinese people want to realize.

In Shanxi, the Yellow River is one of the top three signature attractions along with the Great Wall and the Taihang Mountains.

There are a total of 39 scenic sites along the river rated above A class, including 22 4A and 5A sites. The highest rank for scenic areas rated by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism is 5A.

Zhang Liyuan contributed to this story.

National diving star started in local team

By YUAN SHENGGAO

After a series of stunning, difficult actions, Chinese diver Li Yajie grabbed 69.00 points, the highest of the women's 1m springboard final in the fifth round, helping the 19-year-old woman win a gold at the FINA World Championships on June 29 in Budapest, Hungary.

Li's victory marked a record-extending seventh world title for the Chinese diving team in this event. This was the 101st gold medal that the Chinese diving team has won in all the FINA World Championships competitions. Li was also the first female world diving champion from Shanxi province.

Li was 7.30 points behind Canada's Mia Vallee after a poor third dive, but managed to deliver two flawless dives in the fourth and fifth rounds to win gold with 300.85 points in total.

"I was a little nervous in the preliminaries this morning since it was my first appearance at the world championships," Li said.

"But my experienced teammates helped me a lot as they taught me how to relax in the competition," she said.

Li was born to a family of athletes in Yanggao county in the northern Shanxi city of Datong. Her father was a gymnast and her mother a judoka. Inheriting athleticism from her parents, Li began her training as a diver at the age of 7 when she joined the Shanxi diving team while studying at a primary school in the provincial capital of Taiyuan.

Versatile in both springboard and platform, Li won her first national gold during the National Youth Games held in Shanxi in 2019 as the champion of the mixed 3m synchro springboard. She then began to focus on 1m and 3m springboards at the age of 16.

Li rose to fame during the 2021 National Diving Championships. She won gold with 318.35, a record for Chinese female athletes in the 1m springboard. She was then qualified for the national team.

Wei Fuchun, a Shanxi provincial sports official, praised Li's performance over the past year.

"Li is an excellent athlete with good physical and psychological strength, which help her finish difficult moves in diving," Wei said. "She has been in the national team for less than a year and now she is one of the shining stars."

Zhou Huifang contributed to this story.



Li Yajie is the first female world diving champion to hail from Shanxi province.

ZHENG HUANSONG / XINHUA

Ancient capital develops reputation as a hub of logistics and industrial sector

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The city of Houma, once the capital of the ancient Jin state (1033-376 BC) for nearly a millennium, has now earned another type of fame. It's known as a modern-day logistics hub and industrial base of Shanxi province.

Located at the junction of Shanxi and the neighboring provinces of Shaanxi and Henan, Houma used to be a trade hub in the province.

When it served as the Jin capital more than 2,300 years ago, the region was called Xintian. It was given the present-day name of Houma — which means horse-replenishing station for caravans — during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), showing it was already a trade hub more than 400 years ago.

Today's Houma is a logistics hub in Shanxi serving the commercial links with regions involved in the Belt and Road Initiative. Its position as a multimodal transportation hub is made possible with highways and railways linking to seaports in China's eastern coasts and freight train routes to Europe and Southeast Asia.

The Houma Highway Logistics Park is one of the local developments that showcase the booming logistics business in the city.

Renowned domestic courier company Deppon Express, for instance, has operated a huge logistics and warehousing base in the park.

"To meet growing demand, we have the capability to load 20 heavy-duty lorries simultaneously," said Wang Xing, head of Dep-



With a per capita green space of 11.16 square meters, Houma is a famed garden-like city in Shanxi. ZHANG ZHIGANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

pon's operations in Houma. He added that the company is planning to add another 3,000 square

meters in warehouses, which is expected to substantially increase its operational capacity.

The city is now applying to the General Administration of Customs for building a comprehensive bonded zone, which is expected to further incentivize and facilitate operations for companies doing foreign trade business.

A large number of export-oriented companies have settled or plan to settle in Houma.

Tangrong Machinery, for example, is an export-oriented automotive component manufacturer in Houma.

"With a majority of our products sold overseas, we chose to base our company in Houma because of its convenient transport links to Europe and Southeast Asia," said Li Ying, deputy general manager of the company. "The local government's profes-

sionalism and efficiency in offering administrative services and a complete industrial chain are among the reasons our company chose Houma as the major base."

The city's solid environment and ever-improving living conditions constitute additional draws for those who plan to do business, work or live in Houma.

With a total green area of 8.36 million square meters and per capita green space of 11.16 sq m in its city center, Houma is a garden-like city with national fame.

The local government has highlighted landscaping in its urban planning, in hopes of turning the city into "a huge garden", a local official said.

Zhang Zhigang contributed to this story.