

River chiefs keeping watch over liquid assets



Officials designated across all bodies of water in Shanxi help improve environment and local economy

By YUAN SHENGGAO

With a river chief system in place across the province of Shanxi, even a small river like Wenhe has dedicated officials to taking care of it.

Wenhe, a river of about 80 kilometers in length through the city of Yangquan, is now under the custody of dozens of officials at the village, township, county and city levels.

Gao Haizhu, secretary of Podi village subcommittee of the Communist Party of China and head of the local villagers' committee, is one such river chief.

Inspecting the village's section of the river is now part of his daily routine. Gao usually gets up early in the morning and walks along the river to see if any trash has been dumped or sewage illegally discharged.

"Random littering was commonplace along the river in the past, which had made the Wenhe an unpleasant place," Gao said. "But now the environment is changing for the better after officials like me were appointed river chiefs (in 2018)."

He said the river chiefs' tasks are ensuring the river's environment is

protected and helping to improve the local residents' awareness of environmental protection.

Gao said he is happy to see the river becoming cleaner. And the improving environment has brought benefits to residents with a more prosperous rural tourism industry.

Podi is close to Niangziguan, a major tourist attraction in Yangquan. The locale is known as a significant pass on China's Great Wall.

"Many families in Podi are engaged in tourism-related operations like bed-and-breakfast accommodations and the retail of specialty produce and souvenirs," Gao said. "The improved environment, the scenic river valley and mountains and our proximity to the Niangziguan Pass, make Podi an increasingly appealing destination for tourists."

Shanxi began to implement a river chief system in 2017. A river chief is usually the chief of the local CPC committee and head of the local government, responsible for a section of the river. The system is also applicable for lakes and other water bodies throughout the province.

Shanxi's water bodies are now taken care of by more than 16,500 river and lake chiefs at the village, township, county, city and provincial levels.

In recent years, governments in Shanxi have renewed their efforts to enhance and improve the river chief system.

The force for watercourse monitoring and protection has now been strengthened with the recent addition of such posts of assistants to river or lake chiefs and river or lake inspectors.

It is worth mentioning that law enforcement officials, like police offi-



The Fenhe River in Xiangfen county has a visibly better environment and ecosystem compared with previous years. YAN RUIPENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

cers and prosecutors, have been added to the watercourse monitoring force, laying a solid basis for watercourse protection in the framework of rule of law.

Du Xiaoyun, chief of the water resources bureau in the central Shanxi city of Jiexiu, said he saw substantially improved efficiency when police officers and prosecutors were added to the watercourse protection team.

He cited the removal of an illegally built facility on the flood passage of the Ciyao River in Jiexiu.

"The facility, constructed by a local company, had been there for several years, despite our repeated persuasion," Du said. "It had posed a

severe threat to the river during floods."

With the intervention of the prosecutors, the problem was solved immediately. The company demolished the illegal facility and returned the land to the river in May 2022.

"We told the company's executives it could be a subject of public interest litigation according to related laws," said Zhao Taotao, a Jiexiu prosecutor. He said the company responded quickly because its executives realized it could be a serious problem from a legal point of view.

It is reported that nearly 2,700 police officers and prosecutors throughout Shanxi have joined the watercourse protection missions.

Shanxi is also encouraging the engagement of public volunteers in the monitoring and protection of rivers and lakes.

Wang Jin, 50, is a resident in Yangquan. She joined a 51-strong volunteers' team for monitoring and protecting the Taohu, another river in the city, in May 2022.

Wang said it was the first volunteering team for river inspection in Shanxi province. Consisting of civil servants, residents and retirees, the team's members fulfill their river-monitoring missions in their spare time and on an irregular basis.

"Our tasks include reporting the discharge of untreated sewage and other pollutants, picking up garbage

on the riverbed and holding events to lift residents' awareness and enthusiasm in river protection.

"It's quite often that we take our children to these actions. These are good opportunities for them to learn from good social practices and norms," Wang said.

Shanxi is also promoting the use of digital technologies in the protection of rivers and lakes.

In Qixian county, which is a part of the central Shanxi city of Jinzhong, river inspector Hao Jinzhen was doing his daily inspection work along the Wuma River.

"If I find any area of illegal dumping and pollutant discharge, I would take pictures and report to the authorities through a smartphone app called 'Jinzhong smart water resources'," Hao said. "The app allows a swift response from the authorities."

The findings of inspectors like Hao are transmitted to the control room of the Jinzhong water resources bureau in real time. A huge screen in the room displays the data and images from 111 major rivers and 63 reservoirs and lakes in the city.

"In addition to reports from inspectors, we have a monitoring network of field cameras, drones and even satellites," said Liu Jian, an official at the bureau.

"In addition to monitoring the ecological environment of rivers and lakes, the network is a comprehensive system that highlights flood control and rationalizing water use among various areas based on the collected data of water resource distribution," Liu added.

Kang Meixiang and Fan Zhen contributed to this story.

City's natural resources attract wellness tourists

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Jincheng, a city in the southeast of Shanxi province, is capitalizing on its advantages including its pleasant climate, enjoyable food offerings and rich cultural and natural resources to boost the development of its wellness tourism industry.

Wellness tourism is an emerging sector in the wider picture of traveling. It features travels associated with the pursuit of enhancing one's personal well-being. Wellness trips include a variety of activities such as thermal springs, spas, exercise, recreation, relaxation and recuperation.

As Jincheng is located in the southern part of the Taihang Mountains, it features forest coverage of more than 42 percent. This has won it a fame as a "natural oxygen bar". The rich content of oxygen makes it an ideal destination for recuperation tours.

Building on the beneficial conditions, Jincheng is aiming to develop itself into a high-level wellness destination with both a national and international reputation.

The city is now the permanent host city of the China National Conference on Wellness Industrial Development. It was also recognized by the International Federation on Ageing as China's first demonstrative city for the wellness industry.

As Jincheng strides to become a national demonstrative city for the



Baimasi Mountain High-end Wellness Resort is a large, upmarket project for the wellness industry in Jincheng. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

wellness industry, local operators are contributing their best practices that can be replicated in other regions.

Songmiao village, for example, has raised itself up as a role model in the wellness industry by integrating tourism with healthcare.

In 2021, the village cooperated with Xuanwu Hospital in Beijing to set up a convalescent facility for relieving sleep disorders. It has developed "sleep-aiding" tours by providing herbal baths, and building facilities for hiking and cycling.

Tang Hongping from Chengdu, Sichuan province, has suffered from sleep disorders for many years.

"I was told that there is a 'sleep-aiding' village in Shanxi, so I decided to have a try there," Tang said. "Once I arrived, I was reluctant to leave."

She stayed in one of the recuperative resorts in the village. The resort had offered her tailored recuperative solutions, which include practicing tai chi in the courtyard, hiking or cycling on the forest trails during the daytime; enjoying a herbal spa and massage at night; and a diet consisting of such local delicacies as millet, nuts, fruits and vegetables.

"It proves that adequate exercise, a rationally prescribed diet and an environment with a rich oxygen content are good for sleep," Tang said.

It is reported that Jincheng has a total of 53 villages for wellness tourism. And the figure is expected to grow to 100 by 2025, according to the city's latest plan for the industry.

Huge investments have also flowed into Jincheng for developing large-sized wellness facilities.

The Baimasi Mountain High-end Wellness Resort is such a project.

The resort is adjacent to a forest park and a scenic lake. Central to its development plan is a high-end hotel called Fengcheng International, which is now operational; and the Fengcheng Wellness Center with floor space totaling 100,000 square meters, which is under construction.

According to Yang Hua, an executive of the resort, the facility is expected to receive 5 million visits annually by 2025.

Officials in Jincheng predicted that the city's tourism industry, with the wellness sector at its core, is expected to develop into a cluster with annual revenue surpassing 100 billion yuan (\$13.71 billion) by 2025.

Zhang Ting contributed to this story.

Market confidence and spending make recovery

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Shanxi's service industry is showing steady growth for the first half of this year, which reflects improving confidence in the consumer market.

According to the Shanxi Statistics Bureau, the incremental value of the service industry increased 5.7 percent year-on-year in the first six months of this year. The rate represented a 0.8 percentage point increase from the first quarter.

In the service industry, the retail of consumer goods is something highlighted by governments and residents because of its crucial role in driving local growth.

In the first six months, the retail volume of consumer goods rose 5.7 percent to 308.78 billion yuan (\$42.21 billion), showing residents' spending power is recovering.

In terms of market segments, retail sales of intelligent wearable devices showed the highest increase



A commercial district in the city of Taiyuan is packed with traffic in the evening. RUAN YANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

with a rate of 63.3 percent. This is followed by sales of new energy vehicles, which increased 55.7 percent.

An official at the Shanxi Department of Commerce said the growth in the retail sector can be partially attributed to the government's stimulus measures.

The incentives include offering

subsidies to consumers when buying large-sized commodities like automobiles, as well as organizing promotional events for suppliers and dealers.

Tourism is the fastest-growing sector in the service industry. The Shanxi Statistic Bureau's data showed that the province's major tourist destinations received more than 38.53 million visits during the first six months, an increase of 1.8 times from the same period of 2022. Their business revenue reached 2.12 billion yuan, multiplying 2.9 times.

An official at the Shanxi Department of Culture and Tourism said such an increase was associated with the deep integration of culture and tourism sectors in Shanxi.

"This year, we have created a great number of shows and events to promote the millennia-long history and culture of Shanxi, telling the vivid stories behind many attractions," the official said.

The events were broadcast through nationwide TV networks and livestreaming platforms, helping to win customers' recognition.

Yan Jie and Zhang Ting contributed to this story.

Lyuliang offers a taste of China at fair

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The city of Lyuliang is making headway for its white liquor producers to enter the Italian market and its neighboring regions by holding a promotional event late last month.

Ten white liquor, or *baijiu*, producers from the western Shanxi city attended the promotional fair on June 28 in the country's capital city of Rome.

Among the participating enterprises, Xinghuacun Fenjiu Group based in the township of Xinghuacun is the most renowned company for the production and export of *baijiu* products. It was one of the pioneering Chinese *baijiu* producers to go global on a large scale about 100 years ago and is now among the top three white liquor exporters in the country.

The event also aims to present the millennial-long history and culture associated with alcoholic beverage production in Lyuliang.

Fu Peng, an executive of Xinghuacun Fenjiu, told guests at the event that the township of Xinghuacun has a history of more than 6,000 years of alcoholic beverage production and there is material evidence for this long history.

He said Chinese archaeologists started an excavation of ancient ruins at a site in his company's premises in the 1980s.

One of the remarkable findings was a waving spindle-shaped bottle with a distinctive feature of Yangshao Culture, an ancient civilization in the middle reaches of the Yellow River between 5,000 and 7,000 years ago. Researchers identified the bottle as a utensil for brewing alcoholic beverages, and surmised that Xinghuacun township was one of the sources for the industry in China.

At the event, guests also tasted white liquor products from Lyuliang city. Xinghuacun Fenjiu presented a special edition tailored to

the taste of Westerners but still featuring unique Chinese cultural elements. It was contained in blue-and-white porcelain bottles decorated with Chinese calligraphy and traditional painting patterns.

The Chinese delegation was headed by Zhang Guangyong, mayor of Lyuliang.

At the event, he said he expects more Italians to visit Lyuliang, finding business opportunities while enjoying the local liquor and scenic attractions.

He also said he hopes there will be more exchanges between alcoholic beverage producers from Italy and Lyuliang.

At the event, Zhang witnessed the signing of cooperative agreements between Italy's wine suppliers and dealers in Lyuliang, paving the way for more Italian wines to access the market in Lyuliang and its neighboring regions.

Wu Jia contributed to this story.

Champion effort



Kicking off on Aug 8, the 16th Shanxi Provincial Games are set to close on Friday in the city of Datong. The 11-day event is seen by local officials, athletes and audiences as a gala to showcase the province's recent achievements in athletics and as a promoter of mass sports. The 16th provincial games consist of two categories of athletic sports and mass sports. Professional and amateur athletes are attending 719 contests for 26 athletic sports and 248 competitions for 22 mass sports.