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### **Endangered Elephants of the Nakai Plateau**

#### ***Nam Theun 2 Dam Threatens Large Population of Asian Elephants in Lao PDR***

Asian elephants are globally endangered. A large population of wild Asian elephants lives on the Nakai Plateau in central Laos. The reservoir of the proposed Nam Theun 2 Hydroelectric Project would flood 450 square kilometres – 40 per cent – of the Nakai Plateau and, according to project documents, would “degrade” another 500 square kilometres of the plateau, together accounting for the destruction or severe degradation of 80 per cent of the Nakai Plateau.

Proponents of the proposed Nam Theun 2 project, including the Nam Theun 2 Power Company and the World Bank, claim that it is one of the most studied large dam projects in the world. So, how many elephants have their range in the 950 square kilometre area of the Nakai Plateau that would be flooded or degraded by the reservoir of the Nam Theun 2 dam?

No one knows. According to the most recent estimate, at least 120 elephants – approximately ten per cent of the total elephant population in Laos -- live in one of the sub-populations inhabiting the Nakai Plateau. Another large sub-population living on the plateau has never been surveyed, thus the total number of elephants living on the Nakai Plateau is unknown.

According to the IUCN-World Conservation Union, “The two largest and/or most viable populations [of Asian elephant] known in Lao PDR are those in (i) Xaignabouli Province (west of the Mekong, including Nam Phoui NBCA); and (ii) centred on the Nakai Plateau...Serious threats to individual populations include fragmentation of herd seasonal ranges (notably by large hydropower projects and infrastructural developments) and poaching from ivory; the Nakai Plateau population is particularly at risk from both.”  
(*Wildlife in Lao PDR: 1999 Status Report*)

The inundation and degradation of a large part of the Nakai Plateau would eliminate 95 per cent of the wetlands, almost all mineral licks, and large areas of forests and grasslands that are essential habitat for the Nakai elephants.

If built, the Nam Theun 2 Hydroelectric Project would result in severe, negative impacts on the endangered Asian elephant population of the Nakai Plateau.

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