

# Tibet puts environment at top of agenda

Autonomous region is one of China's most important green protection zones. **Liang Kaiyan** reports

**D**ubbed the "roof of the world", "the Earth's third pole" and "the water tower of Asia", the Tibet autonomous region is one of China's key environmental protection zones, and the region's government has put its shoulder to the wheel to ensure its land is protected.

"Tibet boasts tremendous assets and advantages in environment," said Luo Jie, head of the region's department of ecological environment. "Its ecology is a name card for the region and is the impetus to promote green development."

According to the department's 2018 report, 98.2 per cent of days that year were classified as "good" in terms of air quality, up 0.7 percentage points from 2017. Tibet's capital city Lhasa ranked No 4 of 168 cities in the country in terms of environmental quality.

As a main part of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, Tibet is used as a regulating zone for climate change in Asia and the Eastern Hemisphere.

The autonomous region plays an irreplaceable role in keeping China's climate stable, its freshwater safe and the country's ecological diversity, according to environmental officials in Tibet.

The central government has required the region to attach special importance to ecological protection and the improvement of social welfare.

It also called on the region to protect the environment with the strictest measures and compensation policies.

Tibetan people have the tradition of respecting and protecting the natural environment, and have actively participated in environmental protection, Luo said.

"The beauty and sound ecology of Tibet and its achievements in ecological construction have helped boost locals' livelihoods," Luo said.

In January, Qizhala, chairman of the autonomous region's government, said in a government report that the region has continued to improve ecological compensation.

The government has provided up to 667,000 ecology-related jobs and an ecology-related subsidy for residents of 3,500 yuan (£404) per capita in 2018.

The region's government completed all of its annual tasks for environmental governance, according to the report.

In 2009, the State Council approved the autonomous region's ecological protection and construction plan for 2008-30,



Dubbed "the earth's third pole", Tibet boasts one of the most pristine natural environments in the world. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



More than 11.26 million acres of natural grasslands fall under strict protection in Tibet, creating an ideal environment for animal husbandry. YESHE DANZIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

which promotes the construction of 10 important environmental protection projects.

By the end of 2018, the region had invested 10.7 billion yuan in constructing these projects.

Last year, the autonomous region built seven county-level ecological zones, 40 ecological towns and

449 ecological villages, with a particular focus on atmospheric, water and soil pollution.

The region has also improved its governance in industry, agriculture, finding the sources of

pollution on the water ecosystem. It has carried out environmental management and evaluations in 825 villages in rural areas.

In response to China's afforestation initiative, Tibet has implemented a number of greening programmes.

Trees have been planted in 863 villages that used to have none, and forest coverage has increased to 12.14 per cent of the lofty region's land mass.

In 2018, trees were planted across 185,250 acres, and 37,709 acres of farmland was reclassified as forest.

At present about 560,690 acres of forests, 10.65 million acres of wetlands and more than 11.26 million acres of natural grasslands are under strict protection.

As one of the areas with the most biological diversity in the world, Tibet is also a crucial gene bank.

The region has 47 natural reserves, including 11 at national level. The reserves account for 34.35 per cent of the region's land area and rank Tibet first in the country.

A total of 125 rare species of wild animals and 39 rare species of wild plants are protected in the reserves.

Tibet has one of the purest landscapes on the planet, according to a white paper from the State Council.

"At present, as Tibet has entered a phase of high-speed growth, the courses of environmental protection and ecological construction are not without their risks," Luo said, adding that environmental protection should be prioritised during development.

Compared with other regions in the country, the ecology in Tibet is more sensitive so environmental protection is more critical, he said.

"Ecological protection should be further enhanced through laws and regulations and strengthened supervision for law enforcement," Luo added.

In his government report, Qizhala said the autonomous region would continue to promote environmental protection, improve standards for energy consumption and carbon emissions, to ensure that more than 95 per cent of the year would have good air quality.

Tibet will continue to push forward efforts in building itself into an ecologically sound region through sustained measures, strict supervision and public participation, according to a local plan.

## Eco-tourism brings tourists and revenue to rural towns



Snow-covered mountains and dense forests make Nyingchi a popular destination for tourists. YESHE DANZIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

By CHEN MEILING

From virgin forests to an international tourist resort, Lulang town in Nyingchi city has become a model brand for eco-tourism in the Tibet autonomous region.

Local residents now earn their revenues through tourism.

The story of the town shows how economic development can

go hand in hand with ecological conservation.

The town is also setting an example for China's remote and mountainous regions to make better use of their natural resources.

Descending from the snowy peaks of Segrila Mountain, people can see an almost hidden valley where a modern town is

located. There are family inns, restaurants, hotels and a tourist information centre — all with wooden roofs and white walls. The buildings are encircled by hills and forest.

The idyllic landscape has earned Lulang the nickname "Switzerland of the East".

The development of the town has come a long way in the past two decades. Back then the town had only two or three stores and supplies of commodities were limited.

In 2010, the Nyingchi city government put forward the idea to make Lulang a renowned tourism town.

In 2011, as part of a key poverty alleviation project, Lulang received investment of about 3.5 billion yuan (£404 million) from South China's Guangdong province.

After opening in March 2017, the town's forests, flowers and signature dish of stone pot stewed chicken have won popularity among tourists from home and abroad.

Gao Jun, Party secretary of Norbu village in Lulang, said that "clear waters and green mountains are as valuable as mountains of gold and silver", and ecological protection can not only create an ideal living environment, but also increase incomes for local residents.

As the owner of one of the village's earliest bed-and-breakfast businesses, Gao has made over 200,000 yuan in revenue annually in recent years.

He added they also provide Tibetan costumes and food, as well as horse-riding and archery activities, but what attracts

tourists the most is still the pastoral scenery.

A recent visitor named Liang, from Guangdong, said he chose Lulang town as a destination after seeing its pictures on the internet.

Speaking about his experience, Liang said he was impressed by the beauty of the town. "It reminds me of a Swiss town that I saw on TV," he said.

According to Gao, more than 40 of the 62 families in Norbu village have rooms for tourists.

Liu Kejiang, mayor of the town, said the biggest challenge to developing eco-tourism was changing the local way of life.

The native people used to earn a living by herding, and didn't realise the importance of environmental protection, Liu



With flowers in full bloom, spring is the best season to visit Nyingchi. YESHE DANZIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

said. Now they have learnt to protect ecological and natural resources and made tourism their business, which has also helped protect the forest, he added.

In Lulang, tourism-related businesses include catering, entertainment activities and the selling of local specialties such as *matsutake* mushrooms and

*tianma* orchids. Villagers have also become forest rangers, soil and water monitors, and field and environmental caretakers, according to Liu.

By the end of 2018, the per capita disposable income in Lulang town was about 24,000 yuan, which was among the highest in the Tibet autonomous region.