

Active Forest-Management by Local Non-Foresters: a Mongolia field experience

Andy Inglis

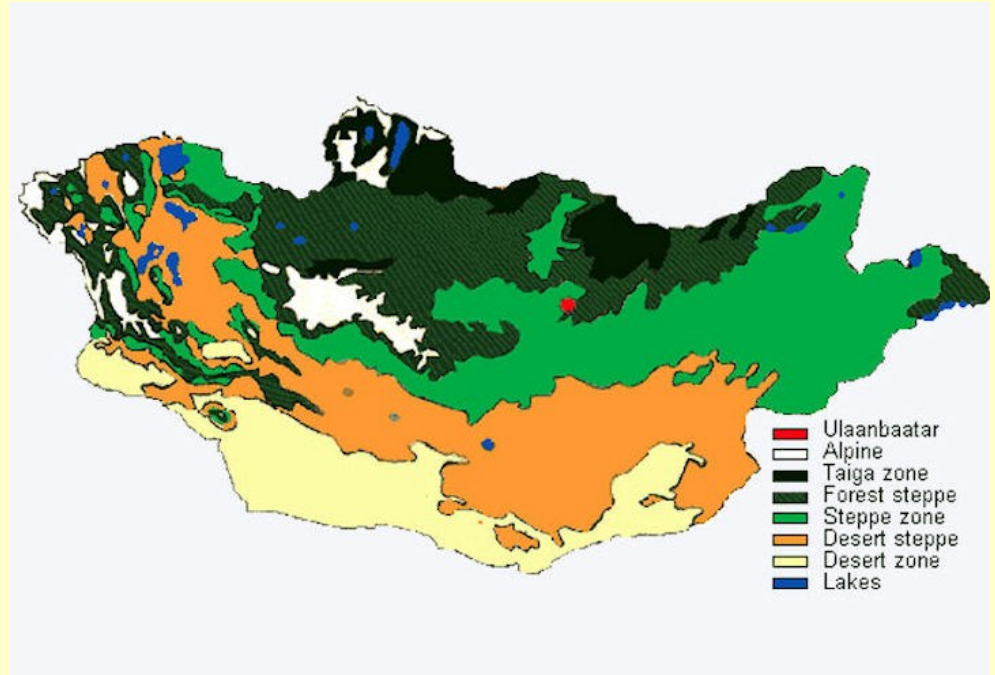
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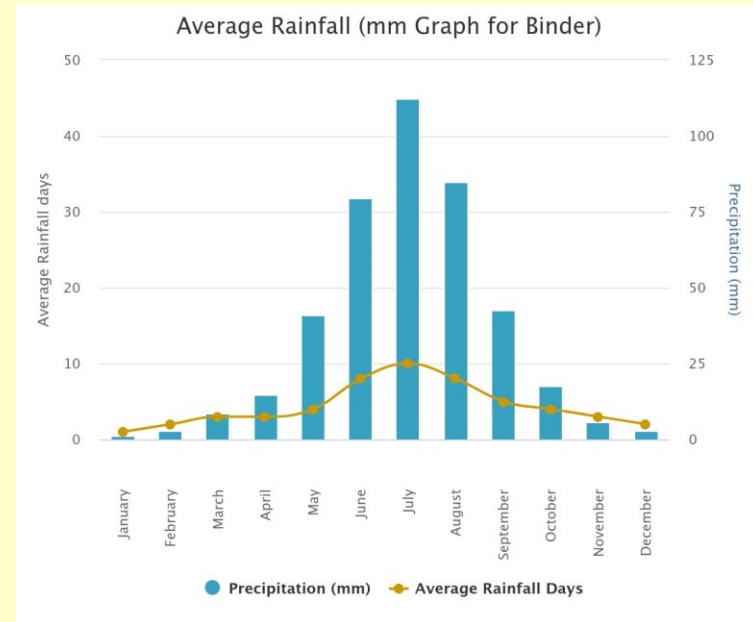
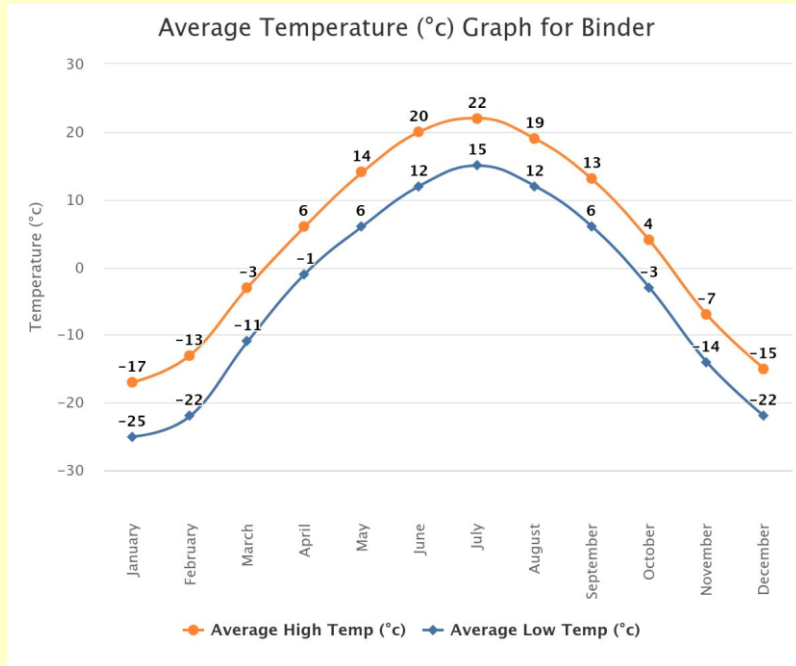
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Geographic Basics North Mongolia

- Big sky country – largely flat – pastoral societies!!
- Trees and forests: riverine (poplar, willow, elm); and mountain slopes, north and west facing on steeper slopes (pine, larch, birch) - all slow growing



Temperature & Rainfall



High elevation, extremely continental climate, large temperature range -35°C winter to $+35^{\circ}\text{C}$ summer
Rainfall 300 – 400mm, highly variable, summer maximum, dry winters, spring and autumn snow
Fires and browsing are main other influences

Project setting

- \$4m 3 year GEF SFM project implemented by FAO
- Supporting 100 FUGs in 5 northern provinces to conserve & manage forests assigned/designated to them
- Working with/through provincial and district forest offices with usually one professional forester plus technicians
- Trying to collaborate with private forest companies & deal with individuals with political connections
- Sporadic international donor activity/support (mainly GIZ)

Key points on forest ecology

- Riverine trees often regenerate by suckering
- Elsewhere, fire climax ecology, moist on N&W slopes
- Natural regeneration succeeds on 8 to 10+ year cycles, when major fire damage and good seed years coincide. Tree planting largely unsuccessful
- Natural regeneration profuse, 20,000+sph, costly to thin, produce has no commercial value
- Dense stands, natural mortality, pests and diseases, little ground and shrub vegetation. Dead standing trees → crown fires

Socio-economic structure

- Extensive summer grazing, small semi- permanent winter settlements
- Forest used for fuel, fruit, fodder medicinal plants
- Herders required to protect forests for free, only allowed to collect dead wood on ground; 10 to 15 families but ca 3,000 (up to 5,000) ha of forest. (Cf. Africa!)
- Combing this with forest structure, it is clearly not sustainable and forest is in slow retreat, hastened by global warming (2° since 1940)

Legal & Policy context (2016)

- 'Common/accepted knowledge' (even amongst senior forestry officials) that it was illegal for non-foresters to cut a live/'green' tree
- Pushed by NGOs and media, with an additional 'unpatriotic' narrative
- Grants provided by central government to professional forest companies to do early/'uncommercial' thinnings – no checking, typically not done – marking (not} done by officials

Project solution

- Employ/task national legal experts to establish true position
- Train herders to do two (pre-commercial) thinnings using simple stick-thinning and hand tools
- Give them the produce free for fuel, fences and animal shelters, *etc.*
- Commercial forest value improved, risk of pests, diseases and fires reduced
- Biodiversity value increased, including shrub and ground layers → more fruit, fodder, *etc.*
- Herders' livelihoods improved

FUGs thinning training

- Programme
 - Science
 - Legal
 - Health and safety
 - Practical: marking & removals
 - Test/certificate
- Trainers
- Participation

One week FUG training course

Training Purpose:	Training specific objective:
1 Conducting Forest Thinning & Cleaning	Make the preparation for forest thinning and cleaning operation
	Choose the type of forest thinning and cleaning
	Selection of the methodology of forest thinning and cleaning
2 Defining Forest Thinning Intensity	Defining the Forest Thinning Intensity
	Marking cutting trees
	Demarcation for forest thinning
	Conducting variety type of forest thinning
	Conducting forest thinning treatment for younger \ young growth\ trees
3 Adhere law & policy	Conduct assessment for artificially planted forest
	Conduct forest inventory with artificially planted forest
	Procedure on Conducting Forest Thinning
	Procedure on Conducting Forest Cleaning





2016 & 2024 photos



2016-2024 changes/observations

- Light – sunlight penetrates to soil surface
- Production – increment increases and also ultimate value
- Biodiversity – richer within former over dense stands
- Pests – predator populations increase
- Fires – fuel load decreased, dead tree removal reduces risk of crown fires
- Materials -> benefits for FUGs for fuel, fencing and animal shelters

Current situation

- FUGs now getting pre-commercial-thinning contracts & grants -now increased:
 - Was 35 US\$ equiv. per hectare
 - Now 140 US\$ per hectare
 - Thinning – ‘cutting to care’ increasingly being explained in media & understood/accepted
 - Thinning training being mainstreamed
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mj1iCLT5hc4>

Wider relevance...

- The situation we faced in Mongolia not unusual – in fact the norm?
 - Community/local entities being given/gaining ownership and/or management and/or protection responsibilities for areas of forest – but unable to do some basic required forest management activities themselves because nobody in community has necessary qualification/certificate
 - Policies around the world (finally) recognising local communities as often being best-bet stewards of forests has resulted in huge transfers in terms of areas of forests, management rights and responsibilities...
 - ..without being legally able themselves to do basic forest management operations (such as thinning and controlled burning) which are required in order to fulfil original/bigger picture policy objectives!

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