

# New chiefs to supervise forests, grassland

Implementation of mechanism expected to bolster environmental protection, experts and officials say

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China's decision to enable the nationwide implementation of a forest chief mechanism will bolster the long-term protection of forest and grassland resources and ensure that the nation's boundaries of environmental security will not be transgressed, officials and experts have said.

A guideline published by the general offices of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council on Jan 12 outlined policy measures to promote the mechanism, in which top Party or government officials at provincial, city, county or township levels will assume the role of forest chief in their areas of administration.

Forest chiefs at all levels will be charged with the protection and development of forest and grassland resources and must come up with targets in aspects such as forest coverage, forest stock volume and treatment of land desertification.

The guideline mapped out key tasks in six aspects, including steps to boost the protection of forest and grassland resources and ramp up ecological restoration.

Guan Zhi'ou, head of the National Forestry and Grassland Administration, said the across-the-board implementation of the forest chief mechanism will help coordinate the protection of forests and grassland from a long-term perspective.

"Through the establishment of the mechanism, the government can further clarify regional spaces and the roles of individuals undertaking the principal responsibilities, and promote solutions to issues regarding regional and cross-regional ecological restoration," he said.

He added that new measures will be a crucial step in the enhancement of local responsibilities in ecological protection as they will further cement the foundation of primary-level governance in this regard.

The policy document stressed the need to prohibit the reclamation of farmland in ways that destroy forests and grassland, as well as the need to carry out the ban on commercial logging across the board.

The country will move forward with its large-scale afforestation initiative and boost efforts to prevent and control biohazards, including pests, that could affect forest and grassland resources, the document said.

Data from the National Forestry and Grassland Administration showed that China led the world in its total area of afforestation, which reached 78.6 million hectares as of 2019. Meanwhile, the country has also set a goal to increase its percentage of forest cover from 22.96 percent in 2020 to 26 percent by 2035.



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China started implementing the forest chief position on a trial basis in 2017. So far, 23 provincial regions, including Anhui and Jiangxi provinces, have already carried out the trial program, providing the foundation for nationwide implementation.

Experts have pointed out the significance of the forest chief initiative in contributing to China's commitment to hit peak carbon emissions before 2030 and attain carbon neutrality before 2060.

"There is no doubt that the full implementation of the forest chief

system at various levels will certainly enhance the ecological protection and restoration efforts of China, and will reduce carbon emissions in the environment," said Arshad Ali, a professor of forest ecology and management at Nanjing Forestry University in Jiangsu province.

"The new policies will greatly support the forest and grassland scientists in their research of forest and global climate change issues," he said.

The full implementation of the mechanism will "greatly strengthen the relationship between forest and

government leadership, and hence, it will certainly lead to the improved working mechanism, which will, in turn, strengthen the monitoring procedure of government and forest leadership as well as local societies", he explained.

Cheng Xiaoqin, an associate professor of forest ecology with Beijing Forestry University, said the forest chief system is an effective measure to pursue the concept that "green mountains and lucid waters are invaluable assets", part of the thought on ecological civilization long

emphasized by President Xi Jinping.

She explained that the new policy will enable governments and officials at various levels to put more emphasis on the protection of forest resources.

"The across-the-board implementation of the forest chief system will help further increase forest stock volume and cover and thus lay an institutional foundation for the nation's sustainable development and transitioning to a healthier, more ecologically friendly growth model," she said.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

## Policy Digest

### State Council urges help during holidays



A State Council executive meeting presided over by Premier Li Keqiang on Friday underlined the importance of guaranteeing the well-being of people affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and those living in hardship during the Spring Festival holidays.

The meeting urged that people's basic living needs be ensured by guaranteeing sufficient market supplies of products such as rice, vegetables, eggs and meat, while enhancing epidemic prevention and control.

Local governments are required to make arrangements for migrant workers staying at their workplaces and students staying on campus during the holidays, while caring for left-behind elderly people and children, the meeting said.

To better guarantee people's well-being, the meeting stressed efforts to strengthen supervision and to prevent the misappropriation of 100 billion yuan (\$15.47 billion) in aid allocated by the central government.

The meeting also called for monitoring people who have just been lifted out of poverty or are living around the poverty line to make sure that those who need social relief and assistance are not left out.

Authorities should also help resolve the difficulties of vulnerable groups, including orphans and the disabled, while providing targeted assistance to people temporarily facing difficulties in life, the meeting said.

It also required that the basic quality of life of people affected by flood disasters, especially those relocated to temporary settlements, be guaranteed.

### Utility fees to be standardized by 2025

Fees for water, electricity, gas and heat supplies should be standardized and regulated in order to promote the sectors' high-quality development, said a guideline published by the General Office of the State Council on Jan 6.

The guideline, jointly issued by the National Development and Reform Commission and other departments, said that public utilities play an important role in guaranteeing the economic operations and social development of cities and towns. They also directly concern public interests and the quality of people's lives.

However, the guideline noted that in recent years, utility services in some areas are charging for too many items with higher fees, while some enterprises responsible for the supplies of water, electricity, gas and heat are providing poor-quality services with low efficiency.

The regulation and standardization of utility fees will help to improve companies' efficiency and market competitiveness, create a better business environment, attract social capital to invest in these sectors to reduce costs, and alleviate the social burden, the guideline said.

According to the guideline, any unreasonable fees charged before the supply of water, electricity, gas and heat will be canceled. All fees charged without a legal and valid policy basis will also be canceled.

Other measures to be taken include beefing up efforts to improve the pricing mechanism for utility services, strictly regulating the items that should be charged, providing better services, creating a better development environment and earnestly implementing relevant policies, it said.

The guideline, which takes effect on March 1, aims for a scientific, standardized and transparent pricing mechanism for the supply of water, electricity, gas and heat by 2025.

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## POLICY RESPONSE

# Issues related to bank deposits, social security cards addressed

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A number of ministry-level departments, including those responsible for banking, social security, agriculture and health have responded recently to matters of public concern.

### Further regulation of banks' online deposits in works

China will further regulate commercial banks' handling of services concerning personal savings through the internet, according to a notice jointly issued by China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission and People's Bank of China.

Such efforts aim to maintain market order, prevent and control financial risks and protect the legitimate rights and interests of consumers, the notice said.

According to the notice, commercial banks should carry out deposit services through the internet according to laws and regulations. They are not allowed to carry out fixed-term deposit and time-demand deposit services through internet platforms

that they do not operate.

The notice also required regulatory authorities at all levels to intensify regulation and take regulatory measures or impose administrative penalty on violations of laws and regulations.

### Enhanced social security card services coming soon

Residents in China will be able to apply for, enable, replace and report temporary losses of their social security cards through interprovincial government services before the end of this year, according to the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security.

The social security card, which integrates a resident's identification, employment, medical insurance information, is used for the on-the-spot settlement of medical bills through basic medical insurance accounts in any designated hospital across the country.

By the end of October, the number of Chinese residents holding social security cards and electronic social security certificates had exceeded

1.32 billion, covering 94.9 percent of the country's whole population, the ministry said.

So far, key information such as the names and numbers of social security cardholders are recognized by the national network. Other services such as the interprovincial settlement of outpatient expenditure will be available before the end of this year.

### Ministry looks to safeguard agricultural activities

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs has rolled out several measures to safeguard the country's agricultural activities as the upcoming cold spell will impact most parts of China.

The latest drop in temperatures combined with the previous rounds of cold spells will affect fruits and vegetables grown outdoors, the ministry said in a notice issued on Friday.

The ministry said it has required local authorities to use scientific measures to minimize losses caused by the cold spells, safeguard agricultural activities and ensure the stable

supply of agricultural products.

It has strengthened communications with the meteorological department to closely follow changes in the weather, release early warning information and launch contingency plans at appropriate times.

The ministry will also enhance coordination with traffic and railway departments to improve the efficiency of transportation and reduce transportation costs to promote the fast, orderly distribution of fresh agricultural products.

### Guideline aims to improve day care services for kids

The National Health Commission on Jan 12 published a trial guideline on the care of children under age 3 for day care centers to help them provide services in a scientific and standard way.

The guideline provides targets, key points and instructions to institutions caring for children in three age groups — 7-12 months, 13-24 months and 25-36 months.

The content of the guideline covers seven aspects: nutrition and feed-



ing; sleep; health habits; movement; language; cognition; and emotional and social development.

The guideline said that infant care institutions should create a favorable environment and reasonably arrange life and activities each day for the children. They should also provide care, a balanced diet and early learning opportunities to facilitate the children's all-around development both physically and mentally.

The guideline also requires the institutions to set up systems to manage information and health, prevent disasters and monitor children's safety. Moreover, the institutions should also make contingency plans for safety and take measures to prevent and control contagious diseases.