

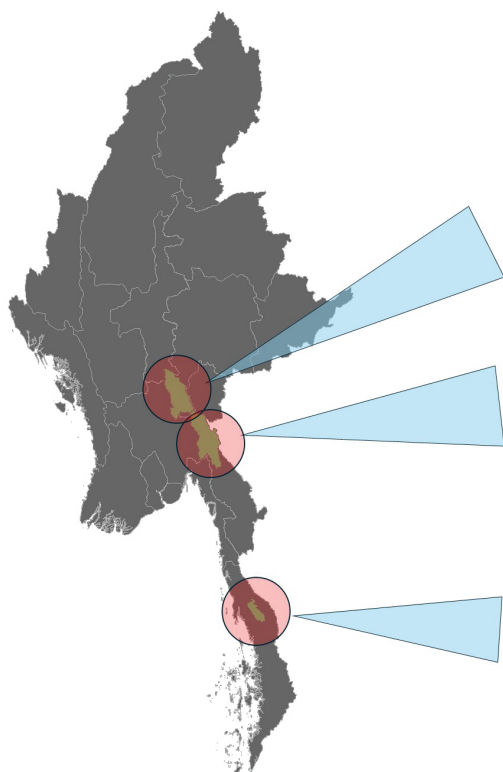
Karen Indigenous Community Conserved Territories

We live in a changing climate. Unpredictable and extreme weather patterns, massive fluctuations in temperatures, and a growing number of natural disasters are affecting people across the planet. In Burma, where Karen communities have long been on the front lines of Climate Change, the 2021 military coup has amplified one of the world's longest ongoing armed conflicts. More than one million people in Kawthoolei have been recorded as displaced by the Burmese Military's violence.

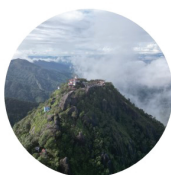
Faced with these challenges, Karen communities have been building their own responses to

conflict and Climate Change. Founded on generations of Indigenous Knowledge and local traditions, Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities are combining their skills and experience to build their own Indigenous Community Conserved Territories. These ICCTs weave together contemporary scientific approaches to nature conservation with long-held traditional practices and taboos to create a landscape that protects both Nature and invaluable local culture. This report takes a look at three of the largest Karen ICCTs in Kawthoolei, and highlights the path that local communities and leaders are taking towards a sustainable and peaceful future.





Karen Indigenous Community Conserved Territories



Thawthi Taw-Oo Indigenous Park

Geographical landscape area **1,421,967** Acres
Indigenous Karen Villages **318**
Indigenous Population **113,427**





Salween Peace Park

Geographical landscape area **1,667,355** Acres
Indigenous Karen Villages **443**
Indigenous Population **111,697**



Paw Khlo Indigenous Land Management and Conservation Area

Geographical landscape area **356,943** Acres
Indigenous Karen Villages **19**
Indigenous Population **10,639**

-  Map of Burma/Myanmar
-  Karen Indigenous Community Conserved Territories in Kawthoolei



The Thawthi Taw-Oo Indigenous Park

The Thawthi Taw-Oo Indigenous Park (TTIP) is a 5,754 km² Indigenous Karen nature and culture conservation area located in Taw Oo District (Toungoo District), Burma/Myanmar. Declared in December 2024 through the collective efforts of local communities, Karen civil society, and the Karen National Union, the TTIP represents the collective vision of local communities for a just and peaceful future. Spanning Taw-Oo's mountainous landscapes, and fed by the Day Hlo, Yaw Hlo, Klay Hlo, P'Reh Hlo (Kaw Hlo), Play Hlo, P'Shaw Hlo, and Kay Chaw Hlo rivers, the TTIP is a diverse and healthy ecosystem that has been stewarded by local communities for generations. Populations of rare wildlife including tigers, gaur, long-tailed goral, and banteng live in harmony with local communities, who continue to practice their traditional forest-based Kaw governance systems. To the south the TTIP borders the Salween Peace Park, another Karen Indigenous conserved landscape, and its eastern border is defined by

the Thawthi Karenni Indigenous Park, these three indigenous lands linked by the mutually significant and powerful spiritual mountain Thawthi Kho which sits at their confluence.



The TTIP is culturally diverse, home to Kanyaw Wah (white Karen), Kay Bah, Paku, Maw Nay Pwa, Bwe, and Mo Pwa communities, and other Ethnic nationalities. While their cultural traditions and taboos are distinct, local communities have long been connected through their shared holistic worldview in which humanity and nature are deeply intertwined. The health and prosperity of a community mirrors that of the natural world, and local cultural practices are built on reciprocal relationships with the land, forests, rivers, plants, animals, and spirits.

Rooted in these long-held traditions, the TTIP holds four key aims: (1) to revitalize and protect Taw-Oo Indigenous Peoples' traditions, culture and unique worldview, (2) to strengthen Indigenous Peoples' governance and management of their ancestral territories and natural resources, (3) to preserve the biocultural diversity of Taw-Oo so that its rich ecological system can continue to thrive and benefit both present and future generations, and (4) to enable the Indigenous Peoples of Taw-Oo to determine their own sustainable development path.

Developing the TTIP

Over a span of six years the 34-member Steering Committee, composed of local leaders, knowledgeable elders, Karen civil society, and representatives from the Karen National Union, laid the foundations for the TTIP. Two TTIP Forums were held, where representatives from across Taw-Oo came together to collectively design the TTIP, agree on outer boundaries, and identify key governing principles. A large number of local community consultations were also held across Taw-Oo's landscape to ensure that the TTIP would meet community needs and aspirations, and to follow principles of Free Prior and Informed Consent.

Sub-groups were formed from these consultations, taking on key tasks that would form the building blocks of the TTIP. A key aspect of this was the demarcation of the TTIP's outer boundary, conducted by local community members trained in GIS Mapping techniques in collaboration with the Kawthoolei Forestry, Agriculture, and Livestock and Fishery Departments. These



same groups are now taking on the large task of documenting the TTIP's internal boundaries, including the many ancestral Kaw territories, Community Forests, Reserve Forests, Wildlife Sanctuaries, and many other land uses within. Other groups have been working to document local culture and history, strengthen local communities' awareness about their rights and entitlements, and document local rules, regulations, and taboos around land and natural resource governance.

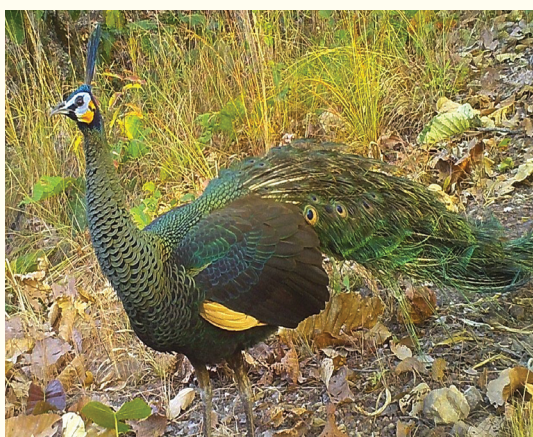
One of these sub groups is the Charter Drafting Working Group, which brought together information from all of the other groups into the Thawthi Taw-Oo Indigenous Park Charter. After developing the Charter through and extensive process of local research, interviews, and consultations, the Charter Drafting Working Group oversaw a Taw-Oo wide public referendum where every village was given the right to vote on whether to adopt the Charter. After receiving approval from 92% of community members aged 18 and above, the Charter was ratified in December 2024, formally marking the launch of the TTIP.



Governing the TTIP

The TTIP Charter is based upon the principles of democracy, peace and justice, environmental integrity, and cultural preservation. It seeks to establish governance throughout the TTIP that is decentralized, strongly supports the equal rights of women and men to political participation and representation, and ensures the continuous and ongoing involvement of local communities in all decision-making procedures.

While the TTIP's many ancestral Kaw territories will remain the primary point of governance and decision-making, the Charter also sets the precedent for the establishment of a TTIP General Assembly. This 99-member Assembly will comprise of 36 Indigenous community representatives - one woman and one man from each of the TTIP's Village Tracts - 14 representatives from Karen civil society, and 37 representatives from the Karen National Union. Taking into account TTIP's cultural diversity, 12 Ethnic Group Representatives will

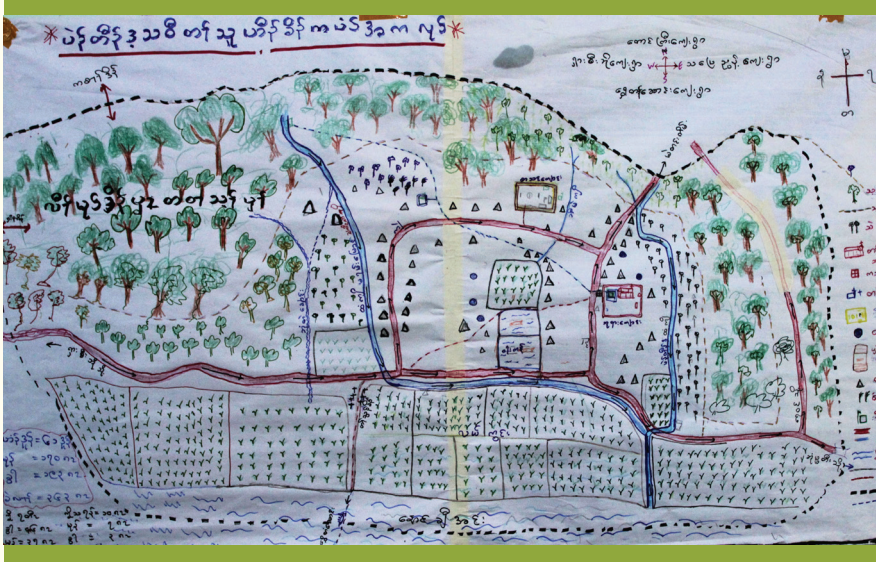




also be elected from communities to serve on the Assembly, with one woman and one man from each of TTIP's six largest Ethnic communities. These delegates, elected to a four-year term through popular vote, will then select a 11-member Governing Committee that will act as the Executive Body of the General Assembly. Members of the General Assembly may step down from their position before the end of their term, or be removed from their post through popular consensus.

The General Assembly will meet annually to discuss key strategic goals of the TTIP, share

information and success stories, and identify pressing local needs from across the Park. The Governing Committee will hold quarterly meetings, collecting key information from across the TTIP and sharing to members of the General Assembly. The General Assembly will also be supported by 8 Working Groups responsible for different sectors of the TTIP, and made up both of members of the Assembly and local community experts. These Working Groups will operate at all levels within the TTIP, and carry out the Assembly's day to day functions.





The Salween Peace Park

Founded in December 2018 in Day Bu Noh Village, Mutraw District, the Salween Peace Park (SPP) is the first formally recognized Karen Indigenous Community Conserved Territory. The SPP covers 6,747 km², and comprises 295 ancestral Kaw territories, 9 reserve forest areas, 44 community forests, and 6 wildlife sanctuaries. Communities across the SPP work together within and across

the many Kaw to promote food sovereignty through a network of 127 rice banks and 42 fish conservation zones. The SPP's residents are also blazing the trail towards Customary Tenure rights in Myanmar, with Kaw Thay Ghu, the largest recorded Kaw in Mutraw District, being one of the first recipients of a Kaw Land Certificate under the Kawthoolei Land Policy. These achievements have strongly





supported communities in maintaining their sustainable livelihoods in the face of returned armed conflict following the military coup of February 1st 2021, which has seen regular airstrikes and targeted shelling of villages by the Junta's military forces.

Governance in the SPP

As with the TTIP, the SPP is guided by a Charter adopted through a popular referendum. The SPP's 137-member General Assembly has entered its second Session following elections held in December 2023. These elections also saw the expansion of the SPP's outer boundary, with 9 additional Village Tracts formally joining the SPP after ratifying the Charter through popular referendum in 2023, and the subsequent expansion of the General Assembly to add seats for two new representatives (1W,1M) from each of the newly joined Village Tracts.

Since its establishment in 2019, the General Assembly has played an increasingly important role in local governance and community empowerment. Especially in response to the 2020 Coronavirus Pandemic, massively upscaled attacks by the Burmese army after the 2021 military coup, a recent wave of widespread flooding, and an outbreak of agricultural pests, the General Assembly and its 6 Working Groups have played a crucial role in providing logistical support and communicating vital information to local communities, and participating as a key member of Karen alliances around the provision of aid and shelter to IDPs.

Its impact on local power dynamics is also notable. While general administrative functions remain the purview of the Karen National Union (maintenance of education, healthcare, infrastructure, etc.) the General Assembly has greatly increased community



involvement in broader decision making. By elevating the voices of community members, the General Assembly establishes a level playing field, allowing members of the KNU greater access to community voices, and enabling community members much greater participation in landscape-scale and administrative decisions. This has increased transparency and accountability in local governance.

Protecting Nature, Enhancing Lives

For all Indigenous Karen Peoples nature and culture are deeply interlinked, one cannot survive without the other. Building on Indigenous Knowledge, and enabled by the SPP's institutional structure, communities across the SPP are tackling threats to Nature head-on. The Waklay Hta Declaration, passed by representatives of the General Assembly and the Kawthoolei Forest Department in July 2022, sets out a roadmap for the protection of vital ecosystems and wildlife through upscaling and teaching about traditional practices, training Community Forest Rangers, documenting and reinforcing local taboos, and documenting Sacred Sites across the SPP. Alongside this, the General Assembly





has identified forest fires and the resulting haze as a pressing issue to be addressed for the health of the SPP's Nature and peoples. Approaches blending Indigenous Knowledge and technological solutions are also being explored, including Forest Cover Analysis, Remote Sensing, and the development of apps that will aid wildlife conservation and biocultural documentation.

At local level these activities have been matched with tree planting activities in forest areas degraded by conflict, and the establishment of an ethnobotanic nursery. This is further supplemented by the ongoing sustainable management of Kaw and Community Forests, as has been practiced for generations.



Preserving Knowledge for the Future

A Cultural Curriculum - developed by community leaders, Karen educators from across the spectrum, students, and civil society – has begun to be taught more broadly in the SPP, with intentions to expand it throughout the KNU schooling system. This will allow Karen youth, especially those who have grown up displaced from their ancestral territories, to connect more closely with their cultural roots. Alongside this the Women Research Group continues to document plant and animal species, sharing their findings with communities across Kawthoolei and strengthening Karen peoples' sovereignty over our Indigenous Knowledge. Alongside releasing a book about mushroom species in 2024, the Women Research Group also participated in CoP-16 in Colombia, where they shared the importance of their ongoing work with Global Leaders.



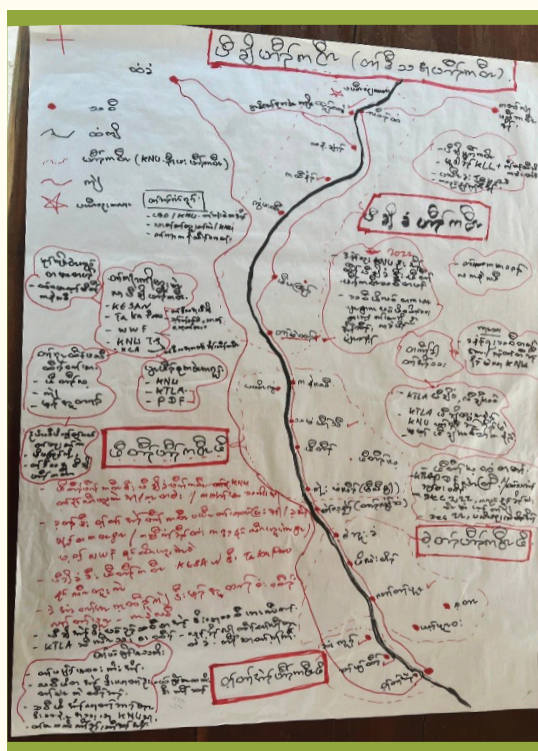


Paw Khlo Indigenous Land Management and Conservation Area

Following the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in 2015, a number of detrimental development projects, including road construction and gold/coal mining initiatives, were initiated without the consent of local community members. These projects threaten the livelihoods of community members from 19 Karen villages, as well as compromising the

Paw Klo River Basin ecosystems in the Mergui-Tavoy District of Kawthoolei. This landscape contains rich and expansive biodiversity, and is home to some of the Indo-Burma Region's largest remaining intact evergreen forests, which serve as a critical stronghold for a range of vulnerable and endangered species.





A Community-Led Landscape

Beginning in 2017, the Indigenous communities of the Paw Kilo River Basin, KNU district and township leaders, and local Karen civil society groups agreed to cooperate to establish the Paw Khlo Indigenous Land Management and Conservation Area (PKILMCA). This initiative prioritises environmental conservation by combatting deforestation, documents local rules and regulations for sustainable natural resource use and management, and empowers community members to participate in the demarcation and registration of both communal and family-owned lands. The following year, the Paw Khlo Implementation Committee was formed (consisting of community, KNU and CSO representatives) to carry out the necessary steps for the development of the formal administration for their initiative, overseeing the progress of the 6 PKILMCA working groups, and the rolling out of locally-led conservation and small-scale development projects in their lands. Over the next six years, a series of awareness-raising community meetings were eagerly attended, resulting in





more Paw Khlo residents becoming familiar with the PKILMCA concept, its long-term vision, and Indigenous communities' roles in environmental conservation, encouraging forest protection and agroecological practices.

During the intensified armed conflict between 2020-2021, the Paw Khlo Implementation Committee had to slow down its work and many community members were forced to flee,

but, ultimately, the people returned and the PKILMCA establishment work was resumed. Thanks to the collective efforts of Paw Khlo residents, demarcation work moved ahead, and the outer boundaries of the PKILMCA were measured and mapped, along with land use zoning planning, and the mapping of community forests, wildlife sanctuary zones, herbal forests, fish conservation zones, sacred





forests and community agroforestry areas. These actions will lead to a greater formal recognition of land tenure rights, as well as the promotion of sustainable Indigenous-led natural resource management systems.

Drafting the Future

During 2024, two comprehensive studies were conducted by local researchers focusing on culture, history, customary rules, and regulations in PKILMCA that were used to feed into a collaborative drafting of the PKILMCA Charter. Most recently, a series of Charter Consultations have been taking place within each PKILMCA community to collect feedback and suggestions from all stakeholder groups

and incorporate these into the final version of the PKILMCA Charter. In the meantime, the PKILMCA Implementation Committee has been receiving inputs and drafting the PKILMCA governance structure, with plans to hold some final rounds of consultations with district and township leaders, village representatives, and Karen CSOs at the beginning of 2025, and incorporating the feedback in to the final draft of the Charter. If all goes according to plans, the PKILMCA Official Launch Event will take place at the end of 2026, providing the 10,639 Paw Khlo residents with an opportunity to actively participate in and make decisions about their ancestral lands and its natural resources.

