

Kazakhstan Land Cover Dynamics Project – KZ LCDP

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Kazakhstan is the ninth largest country in the world, the largest country in Central Asia and, after Russia, the largest of the Independent States formed after the Soviet Union's collapse. The country is mostly rangeland: cattle, sheep, goats, and other livestock graze almost 70% of the land area. Since the abrupt institutional changes surrounding the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the Kazakhstan region has undergone extensive land-cover changes. A recent official study suggests two-fold decreases in agricultural lands and state holdings and a nine-fold increase in settled areas, after 1992. Marked decreases in livestock and meat production accompany increases in productive rangelands, as measured by vegetation indices, suggesting that institutional change and its socio-economic consequences are primary drivers of the region's land-cover change. However, few details are known about the pace or extent of land-cover change, due to the collapse of regional environmental monitoring networks in the early 1990s.

To reconstruct the pace and extent of recent land-cover change in the Kazakhstan region, it is first necessary to place this episode within the larger context of climatic variability and landscape dynamics.

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