

# News digest

The big environmental stories in the Chinese media (April 30-6 May)

## Kunming blasted for development in protected area

The Ministry of Ecology and Environment (MEE) has released the findings of its latest round of environmental inspections, publishing eight [“representative cases”](#) on its official WeChat account on 6 May.

One of the most egregious breaches of regulations occurred in Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province and host of the upcoming UN Convention on Biodiversity talks. The inspection team [found](#) a development on the shores of the city’s famous Dianchi Lake had encroached the “redlines” of the lake’s protection zones.

Naming and shaming local authorities, the team criticised the Kunming Party Committee and city government for putting quick profits ahead of “the long-term costs” of ecological destruction and for “failing to correctly manage the connection between development and conservation.”

A journalist from The Paper who travelled with the inspection team found numerous property developer advertisements that exploited a loophole in regulations on building in protected zones by labelling projects “retirement homes” and “health facilities”.

A MEE inspection team first pointed out problems with the development in 2016. But local government continued to turn a blind eye. By the time the team returned in 2018, 167 villas had been completed within the second-tier section of the protected area.

The case demonstrates the difficulty of implementing national-level protection measures such as the “ecological redlines” policy, which [legally protects](#) as

much as 25% of China's land and sea areas.

Other “representative cases” found by the MEE inspection teams included illegal mining, polluted water releases into the Yangtze River, and mishandling of industrial waste.

*Read more about China's “ecological redlines” policy and the enforcement challenge on China Dialogue [here](#).*

## **Plan for valuing ‘ecological products’ released**

At the end of April, the Party released [guidelines](#) on establishing “value-realisation mechanisms for ecological products”, something proposed in China's [14th Five Year Plan](#).

The document says the system's goals are to “completely renounce the practices of sacrificing the environment and ecosystems in exchange for economic growth”, to “multiply natural capital”, and to allow providers of “ecological products” to enjoy living standards comparable with providers of food, industrial products and services.

The guidelines don't define “ecological products” but the phrase can be understood to include sustainably grown food as well as less tangible (service products) such as conserving the environment to keep water clean.

The document provides for comprehensive surveys to confirm ownership of eco products across the country, and the establishment of a Gross Ecosystem Product (GEP) accounting system, to measure their value. Markets for trading eco products will then be established based on these. Existing markets for carbon emissions, pollution rights and water rights will be improved and new ones will be established for carbon sinks, forest coverage and others.

Ecological compensation, so important for conserving large areas equitably, also features prominently in the document. It proposes improving the existing “vertical” mechanisms (from higher to lower governments) for ecological compensation, and establishing a “horizontal” one (from the providers of ecological products to the beneficiaries). This mirrors [a plan](#) released on Wednesday by multiple government ministries on establishing such a system for the entire Yangtze river basin.

The document designates 2035 as the year the system will be fully established and perfected, calling it a pillar for the “ecological civilisation with Chinese characteristics”.