



# The Demilitarized Zone (DMZ): Life after Reunification

## Science Editorial

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Unification has been a long cherished wish of Koreans since the tragic separation of Korea. Recently, the South Korean government has been attempting to create better relations with the North as a means of moving towards unification. Discussions on unification is good by itself, but what people tend to forget is the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), which divides the Korean peninsula.

The DMZ is an area spanning 250 km across Korea and is 4 km in width. But it usually includes adjacent areas where civilian activities are forbidden. Therefore, with minimal human interference, the ecology in the DMZ has unique natural habitats. It is a home for 67 endangered species, and 2,716 animals and plants, some of which are only found on the Korean Peninsula.

In the 1960's when Korean economy was growing, nature preservation wasn't considered important. So most of the country was developed: wiping out forests, draining wetlands, digging tunnels, and so on. Not many places remained untouched, which makes the ecology of the DMZ even more unique. Also, as global mass extinction of species is becoming a serious problem, preserving

the habitats in the DMZ habitat becomes even more important for species that are found nowhere else on earth.

Because the DMZ is so important ecologically, the Ministry of Environment has announced a plan to make the DMZ an ecological park to attract tourists to enjoy and cherish the unique environment it provides. Although making an ecological park may have good intentions, the project may go south without public scrutiny if companies in charge of the project put profit in front of what is best for the ecology and the wildlife of the DMZ.

Citizens need to be more aware about the unique situation regarding the DMZ as well as any future projects affecting it. If no one cares, then the DMZ might become a victim of thoughtless development. This would be a tragedy for future generations of Koreans as well as for the biodiversity of the planet.

The Korean government—both North and South—needs to put more effort in giving more attention to the DMZ so that more people are aware of the situation and the best option for its future can be implemented.