

GEORGIA

NATIONAL REPORT ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

Executive Summary

Ministry of Environment

1999

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1. INTRODUCTION

The ratification of the Convention on Biological Diversity by Georgia on April 1994 was a formal recognition of the new opportunities offered by the Convention for the conservation and sustainable use of significantly rich biodiversity, for closer international co-operation, and for pursuing the integration of biodiversity objectives within national sectoral policies.

The Countries, Parties for the Convention are obliged:

- 1) To develop National Strategy, Plans and Programs for the Conservation and Sustainable use of Biodiversity, Integrate them into relevant Sectoral and Intersectoral Plans, Programs, Policy;
 - 2) To identify and provide monitoring on biodiversity important Components, particularly:
 - a) Untouched Ecosystems and Habitats rich with biodiversity, endemic and endangered species, with great value from social, economic, scientific and cultural point of view;
 - b) Species and co-associations under threat, wild ancestors of present cultural species; an important from medical, agricultural and economic point of view;
 - c) Existing genomes and genes with social, scientific and economic importance.
 - 3) To create protected areas and ensure their sustainable development, To restore degraded ecosystems and endangered species; To establish proper legal basis for biodiversity conservation, to regulate and control of risk with genetically modified organisms.
- Implementation of the Biodiversity Convention on the National level as well as other relevant International Conventions should be ensured by the national legislation.

Since the Convention was ratified Biodiversity issues became an important part of National Environmental Policy. Step by step Georgia elaborated and adopted new legal requirements, signed or ratified Biodiversity important International Conventions (CITES, Ramsar, Bonn), following to modern standards established two new National Parks, completed “Biodiversity Country Study” and “Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan”, is implementing of different national and international projects.

2. BASIC DATA ON BIODIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Georgia is a mountainous country, covering 70,000 Km² with a population of 5,5 million people and is situated between the south slope of the Caucasus Mountains, the east coast of the Black Sea and the northern edge of the Turkish Anatolia plain. Forests cover 40% of the country (2,8 million ha). The varied terrain and climatic conditions contribute to diversity of ecosystems and species. The principal landscapes of the Caucasus include foothill and mountain forests and subalpine meadows of Greater and Lesser Caucasus, humid lowland forests of Western Georgia, and the arid steppe and deserts of eastern Georgia.

The flora and fauna of at least three biogeographic provinces converge and mix, resulting in high levels of biodiversity. In this region, species typical of Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East regions are found; many of these species are threatened elsewhere in the ranges. The region has been identified by the World Wide Fund for Nature as one of the Global 200 Ecoregions using selection criteria of species richness, levels of endemism, taxonomic uniqueness, unusual evolutionary phenomena, and global rarity of major habitat types. The Caucasus region also has several wild close relatives of domestic food plants such as rye, wheat, and barley and over 200 varieties of grapes, as well as at least nine important domestic animal breeds.

The most important threats to Georgian biodiversity beside of management and planing skill are habitat loss and fragmentation; unsustainable forest management practices and illegal logging; poor rangeland management, overstocking and overgrazing; and overhunting and illegal hunting of key mammal species.

Rare and Endangered Species of Georgia

Flora of Georgia is very rich, about 4100 vascular species with high endemism (400 species endemic for Georgia and 600 for Caucasus). Among them fern plants – 74; gymnospermous plants – 17; angiospermous plants – 4009.

The Red Data Book (issued in 1982) contains 161 plant species. However, Red list of plant species should be revised and fulfilled following to IUCN categories.

Concerning of Fauna it should be mentioned that invertebrates are less studied. Status of most of them by IUCN is probably DD (Data Deficient). There are some endemic species (*Dendrobaena faucium*, *Eophila pseudonematogena*, *Eiseniella colchidica*, *Oxychilus mingrelicus*). In the Red Data Book of USSR was included *Helix buchi*.

No conservation status for most of fishes is identified. Two of them Black Sea Salmon (*Salmo trutta*) and Sturgeon (*Acipenser sturio*) are included in IUCN Red List. Sturgeon is also presented in II appendix of CITES.

The number of reptiles (throughout Georgia at least 52 species) is reducing due to degradation or lost of their habitats.

There are about 300 bird species in Georgia, a remarkably high diversity for such a small country, half of which are migratory species included in the I and II appendix of the Bonn Convention. 12 species are included in IUCN Red List, 52 are endangered.

In Georgia 79 species of small mammals are distributed. 7 are endangered, 5 – vulnerable, 22-lower Risk. For other species additional research is required.

There are 30 species of large mammals, which includes carnivores, ungulates and cetaceans. Until the beginning of present century these species were widely distributed in Georgia. For the present time because of increased anthropogenic pressure from 1930s number of large mammals is significantly reduced.

3. EXISTING LEGAL BASES FOR BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION (National Laws, International Conventions and Agreements)

According to article 37 of the Constitution of Georgia: “Each person has a right to live in healthy environment.. (para3) and for present and future generations State is responsible to ensure environmental protection and Sustainable use of Natural resources” (para4)

Georgia has ratified several of Environmental Conventions , which have an advantages to National legislation by the Constitution.

No	Convention	Date of Ratification (Signatories)
1	Convention on Biological diversity	31, August 1994
2	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora	12, August, 1996
3	Convention on Wetlands	30, April 1996
4	Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals	11, February, 2000
5	Convention on Combat on Desertification	23, June 1999

At the same time Georgia has an agreements in the field of Environmental Protection with different Countries:

- Agreement between Government of Armenia and Government of Georgia, Erevan, 19 May, 1997.
- Agreement between Government of Azerbaijan and Government of Georgia, Baku, 18 February, 1997.
- Agreement between Government of Turkey and Government of Georgia, Tbilisi, 14 July, 1997.
- Agreement between Government of Ukraine and Government of Georgia, Tbilisi, 31 August, 1996.
- Agreement between Government of Greece and Government of Georgia, Athene, 16 September, 1997.
- Memorandum of Understanding between Government of Uzbekistan and Government of Georgia, Tashkent, 4 September 1995.
- Memorandum of Understanding between Government of Kazakhstan and Government of Georgia, Amaaty, 17 September, 1996.

For the implementation of the above mentioned provisions of the Constitution, International Conventions and Agreements Parliament of Georgia in 1996 has adopted “Law on Environmental Protection” which is the bases for the preparation of different Environmental Laws and Regulations.

Within years of 1995-99 Georgia’s Parliament has adopted 22 environmental laws and regulations:

Georgian Laws relating to the Environment

No	Law	Date of Adoption
1	Administrative Violation Code	1984
2	Law on Soil Protection	1994
3	Law on Plant Protection	1994
4	Law on Transit and Import of Hazardous Waste	1995
5	Law on Protected Areas System	1996
6	Law on Mineral Resources	1996
7	Law on State Environmental Assessment	1996
8	Law on Environmental Permit	1996
9	Law on Environmental Protection	1996
10	Wildlife Act	1996
11	Marine Code	1997
12	Tax Code	1997
13	Civil Code	1997
14	Law on Local self-government	1997
15	Law on Water	1997
16	Law on Hazardous Chemical Substances	1998
17	Law on Nuclear and Radiation Safety	1998
18	Law on sea Area of Georgia	1998
19	Law on pesticides and Chemicals	1998
20	Law on Creation and Management of Kolkheti Protected Areas	1998
21	Law on Compensation of Damage from Hazardous Substances	1999
22	Forest Code	1999

23	Criminal Code	1999
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The main advantage of new laws is that state is obliged in decision making process widely involve public and stakeholders.

Law on Protected Areas System

Adopted in 1996 and is basic law for the Development of PA in our Country.

According to international standarts. Law considers following categories of PA (IUCN Category in brackets).

1. State Reserve (IV)
2. National Park (II)
3. Nature Monument (III)
4. Habitat/Management Species Area (I)
5. Protected Landscape (V)
6. Multiple Use Territory (VI)

Beside of National categories it is possible to establish international categories like Biosphere reserve, International Ramsar Site.

Planning of PA is considered as part of Country Development strategy. Management Plans for PA's must be approved by President.

According to law Ministry of Environment is responsible for global Policy and Control on PA. Department of Protected Areas is directly responsible for the management of the PA. After 5 years since law was adopted it is clear that some changes are necessary, particularly:

- It is desirable to clearly distinguish the categories of Protected Areas as general, "taxonomical" phenomena and the Protected Areas as the managing institutions of specific area.
- It is not expedient to strictly specify managing, central institution to which corresponding units of the Protected Areas categories are subordinated, since the Protected Areas category is in abstract, general notion and the nature protection organizations and regional/district administrative units should be given an opportunity (at least theoretical) to establish Protected Areas according to the international criteria and the legislation existing in Georgia.
- Law does not provide evaluation criterias for new Protected Areas; also no guidelines or general principles for the preparation of Management Plans are considered.

Wildlife Act of Georgia

Adopted in December 1996. Valid from September 1997. This law regulates different conservation measures (ex-situ and in-situ) habitat and migratory ways protection, relations between state and private sector, hunting issues, etc. Hunting is allowed only on the special territories called Hunting Reserves (Game Management Area). MoE is responsible for the implementation and management. There were 33 sublaw regulations, some them still are not completed which is barrier for full implementation.

Law on Environmental Permit and Law on State Ecological Assessment

Considers species and habitats conservation outside of PA. According to laws each activities need prior EIA and State Ecological Assessment, which will include possible affect and relevant mitigation measures on Biological Diversity. EIA also includes chapter for "Environment restoration measures" like land recultivation, plantrestoration, remediation of polluted areas etc.

Law on Creation and Management of Kolkheti Protected Areas

Adopted in 1999. The main purpose of Law is creation of the Next categories of Kolkheti PA: Kolkheti National Park (4313 ha), Kobuleti National Park (331,25 ha) Kobuleti Habitat/Management Species Area (438,75 ha). Law clearly identifies status, management structure, use of NP, and other aspects related with general management issues of PA's. The problem of the real implementation of KPA is that Law immediately after adoption establishes strict measures (regimes) or even bans on use of NP within PA. It has a strong opposite reaction from local population for which the different NP of the PA territories still is only one source for survival. It seems to us that transition period for each new PA in Georgia is necessary. Transition period will ensure Common solution social and Conservation measures.

Forest Code of Georgia

After independence Forest sector in Georgia was under the strong pressure due to overall energy crisis and permanently increasing demand for industrial timber from neighbour countries. That is why within years of 1995-99 Georgia has adopted several laws and President's Decrees to reduce somehow negative affect on the Forests.

The last important document in this field is Forest Code adopted in 1999, June. The important innovation of the Law is that it allows private ownership on forests. The Law clearly identifies obligations and responsibilities of the local Governments and General Public in the field of planning and management of Forest Sector. The Law has changed definitions of different Forest Fund categories. However, by the opinion of different NGO's and experts Law is mainly focused of forest utilization issues and is not relevant to sustainable development principles which will cause biodiversity loss.

Administration Violation Code, Criminal Code

These laws identify Responsibilities for different violation of environmental legislation.

Conclusion

For the present time Georgia developed an important national and international environmental legal base, however so far is very difficult to ensure of full implementation of them.

There are still important issues which also should be covered by national legislation, like CITES National Law, Law on Red List and Red Data Book, Law on Plant Resources etc.

Main problem for successful development and enforcement of environmental legislation is that in process of preparation and adoption of laws and regulations in different sectors (agriculture, land use, transport, health, etc.) environmental legislation is sometimes ignored. There are misunderstanding between environmental legislation as well. So, harmonization of existing legal bases in the all sectors of Country and in the field of environment is urgent measure.

4. INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE

For last years in Georgia in the field of environmental protection institutional structure happened some significant reorganization. **Ministry of Environment Protection and Nature Resources** is the State Body, which is responsible for environment and sustainable use regulation of nature resources. Ministry leads the coordination in this sphere for the international relations, cooperation, and also for the activity of State, scientific and public organizations. In Georgia, in accordance with Environment Law in force, Ministry:

- Establish quota on nature resources use;

- Confirms the license rights and issues them;
- Provides in sphere of nature resources use the creation of DataBase of information Bank and functioning of information system;
- Works out the organization of State Cadastr;
- Prepares “Red Data Book” and “Red list”
- Works out the organization of environmental monitoring system;
- Provides State control on the environment.

Biodiversity Conservation Department within the structure of the Ministry of Environment is responsible for the formulation and implementation of national policy in the field of Biodiversity and for the organization of sustainable use of natural resources, and also for the implementation of international obligations related to biodiversity. Biodiversity Conservation Department is the structural subdivision of the Ministry. Biodiversity Conservation Department:

- On the bases of adopted decisions by intergovernmental expert Council is issuing of permits for the use of Natural Resources.
- Is responsible for the implementation of the provisions of Biodiversity, CITES, Ramsar and Bonn Conventions.
- Render the coordination on the reproduction of Endangered and Threatened Species of Fauna and Flora.
- Supervising the development of the Protected Areas System in country.
- In the frame of its competence take part in elaboration of different laws, acts and regulations.
- Take part in consideration of Forestry Management Plans.

In accordance with above-mentioned aims there are some divisions in the Department: Plant Resources Protection Division, Forestry Division, Animal and Fish Protection Division, Protected Areas Division and International Conventions Division. Head of Department controls the Department’s activity. There are also other organizations within the Ministry of Environment In relation to biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of natural resources:

Department for the Environmental Permission and State-Ecological Expertise, responsible for the issuing of permits for environmental activities and organization of state ecological expertise processes.

Institute of Environmental Protection, responsible for scientific research in the field of biodiversity.

Center for Environment Monitoring, responsible for the organization of environment monitoring.

Marine Ecology and Fisheries Research Institute, responsible for the Black Sea biodiversity research activities.

Conventional Inspection for the Black Sea Protection, provides control for Georgian continental shelf, territory water and nature resources use in special economic zone.

State Forestry Department is the Main State agency in Forestry field. It is funded by State Budget. The Head of Department is under the subordination of the President of the State. Before the adoption of new Forestry Code (1999) State Forestry Department was responsible both for industrial forestry and for the forest protection and control for forest resources use. According to new law farm activity rights were separated from the Forestry Department and now it is the prerogative of commercial (private) structures. Besides of forest protection activities Forestry Department is responsible for national forestry policy elaboration and implementation, for the preparation of forestry management plans, for forest inventory and cadastr, for the state control of forests, forest restoration/rehabilitation.

In subordination of State Forestry Department is Forestry Department of Abkhazia Autonomous Republic and Adjara Autonomous Republic.

State Department for the Protected Areas has the same levels as Forestry Department. Department governs the Protected Areas Territory and is responsible for the managing, control and monitoring of that.

Functions of *Ministry of Agriculture* are land protection and rational use, soil reconstruction, domestic animal and plant genetic resources protection, renewal and control on seeds and seedlings quality.

There are also other Governmental agencies with different functions on bioresources use, such as: *Ministry of Internal Affairs, State Custom Department, State Department for the State Board Protection.*

Duplication of functions in country leads to uneffective use of financial, technical and human resources. Because of the least budget financing, lack of specialist and material-technical base, above listed state structure doesn't effectively implement the charge functions. It also does not support successful intersectoral coordination of activities.

5. PROTECTED AREAS SYSTEM

169,000 ha of the territory of Georgia (2,4 of the total territory) is covered by Nature Reserves (I category of IUCN) coming from Soviet time. There was also 5 hunting Reserves (58000 ha-0,8%) which recently have been recalled as Habitat/Species Management Area (IV IUCN) State Department of Protected Areas (DPA) is responsible to manage them.

Nature Reserves-Strictly protected and isolated from social environment territories were mostly used during Soviet period to keep wild nature. Definitely, they made an important role, but presently it is clear that, much of the significant habitat and corridors are not protected under a reserve system. In addition, few of the reserves are kept in good condition.

Georgia needs new System of PA's integrated with social and economic development of the regions. It is stipulated at least by two factors:

- firstly, considering the small area of Georgia, at present it is already very difficult to "remove" areas (relatively large) from the socio-economic space of the country; in other words - successful protection of the ecosystem balance and the representative biodiversity of high mountain, mountain forest or plain ecosystems cannot be achieved only by the means of strict protection (IUCN Category I);
- and secondly, at the end of XX Century, in the light of the deficit of nature areas relatively untouched by human activities, those, who are willing should be given an opportunity to establish direct contact with wilderness areas; i.e. it is necessary to establish such more or less "mild" protected areas, where tourism is permitted; which in its turn, gives an incentive to the socio-economic development of the country/region.

A relatively mild protection regime, which simultaneously ensures protection of wilderness areas and to moderate tourism activities, first of all is characteristic of the National Park Category (IUCN Category II). In 1990-1991 the first scheme of developing the spatial structure of National parks in Georgia was elaborated, which laid foundation of further planning activities. The first major objective of this program was the assistance to the establishment of 7 National Parks in Georgia.

Due to permanent lack of State budget and existing practices of financing Environmental issues

from State Budget development of Protected Areas is depends generally on willingness on international donor organizations. For the present time there are two funded projects for the establishment of National Parks:

Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park

First National Park legally established in 1995. Follows to International Standards. NP is funded by German Government.

Region has a high potential for tourism and good experience of tourism management.

Total area of BKNP is 68000 ha (1% of total territory of Georgia). It is one of the biggest NP in Europe.

Beside of Management Plan for NP territory itself there is prepared Comprehensive Management Plan for the NP's Support Zone development, which includes maintaining of different economical activities to reduce pressure on NP.

Kolkheti National Park

Established in 1999 by "Law on Creation and Management of Kolkheti Protected Areas" Funded by GEF/World Bank.

KNP consists of territories, which were included by the decision of Georgian Parliament into International Ramsar Sites. These territories represents refugium for very rare and endence Kolkheti flora, also This is a habitat for many species of migratory and waterflow birds. These territories presently are under the threat because of different antropogenic factors (agriculture, illegal cutting and hunting, fishing, mining etc).

There are also Project Preparation Activities for the East Georgia's Protected Areas funded by GEF/World Bank.

6.NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL BIODIVERSITY PROGRAMMES

Restoration of Sturgeons population at the Black Sea coast of Georgia

Project was prepared by the Biodiversity Conservation Department of the Ministry of Environment in 1998. Project was funded by State Budget. There are five species of Sturgeons in Georgia (*Asipenser sturio*, *Asipenser guldenstadti*, *Huso huso*, *Asipenser stellatus*, *Asipenser nudiventris*). *Acipenser sturio* is included in the II appendix of CITES and Red Data Book of Georgia were we can find *Acipenser guldenstadti* as well. All these species are endangered. From the beginning of 1960 fishing of Sturgeons in Georgia was stopped due to extremely reduced population. Project is implemented by the Institute of Environmental Protection of MoE.

TACIS Black Sea Biodiverisy Project

Implementation agency – Batumi Black Sea Biodiversity Regional Center.

Project objectives are 1. To prepare regional strategy for biodiversity conservation; 2. Biodiversity monitoring; 3. Public awareness. Project consultancy is provided by UK Consultancy Group Halkrow.

Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park

Project is funded by German Government according to Georgian-German Intergovernmental Agreement. Implementing agency WWF Georgia.

Project contains three components:

1. Development of infrastructure – 2,261,100 DM;
2. Education and Training – 1,700,000 DM;
3. Support Zone Development – 2,739,000 DM.

Integrated Coastal Zone Management Project

GEF-World Bank and Dutch Government. 7,6 Million USD from which 1,3 million is Grant, 4,4 million is loan. Managed by Local PIU.

Projects has five components:

1. Institutional strengthening for the Integrated Coastal Zone Management;
2. Creation of Kolkheti National Park and Kobuleti State Reserve;
3. Creation of Environmental monitoring and information system;
4. Coastal erosion study;
5. National Oil Spill Contingency planning.

Georgia Protected Area Development Project

GEF-World Bank. About 9 million USD Grant.

Project components are:

1. Planing of possible National Parks system in Georgia;
2. Creation of Protected Areas in East Georgia;
3. Institutional sthrenthening of the State Department for Protected Areas;
4. Biodiversity Monitoring and Research;
5. International Cooperation;

Project is on the beginning level.

Forest Sector Development Project

World Bank, Japan Government. Approximate cost 30 million USD. Partly Grant.

Project aims to improve legal bases, Institutional sthrenthening, Sustainable

Forest management plans preparation, support of private sector involved for forest harvesting activities, etc. Project was ratified by Georgian Parliament.

NGO's Importance for Biodiversity Conservation

Role of NGO's in the field of environment, particularly Biodiversity Conservation in Georgia in last years was significantly increased. Beside of Public Awareness which was one of the main direction of the NGO's activities they started preparation important projects for Biodiversity Monitoring and Conservation. For the present time there are some NGO's focused mainly for Biodiversity issues like WWF Georgia, NACRES, GCCW, and ELKANA. NGO's are involved more and more in the decision-making process.