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Regional Council for Biodiversity Conservation and  
Sustainable Resource Use in the Caucasus



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*Ecoregions are subjected to increasing pressure from overuse, land degradation and fragmentation. Remaining patches of wilderness and other natural area are increasingly vulnerable due to people's increasing demands for food, water and natural resources. One way to address these challenges is planning for conservation at the ecoregional or bioregional level across political boundaries. This approach seeks to maintain biological diversity across entire ecoregions by zoning land and protected areas for conservation and sustainable use to help meet people's needs.*

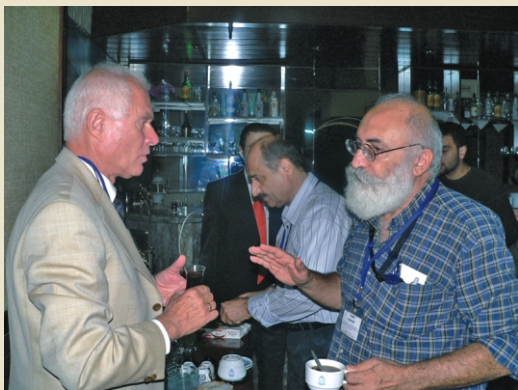
*Addressing issues of nature conservation across political borders in the Caucasus is particularly challenging due to the different political and cultural settings there. This was taken into consideration when preparing the conservation plan for this ecoregion. Interdisciplinary working groups with specialists representing governments, NGOs and the scientific community from all six Caucasian countries worked together for many months analyzing threats and formulating recommendations and priorities for conservation action with regional perspective. One of the main tasks of the Regional Council for Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Resource Use in the Caucasus is to maintain and promote this regional approach to conservation.*

*This Annual Report presents the mission and history of the Regional Council. It also highlights the regional programs and projects monitored and assisted by this body.*



Hartmut Jungius  
Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "H. Jungius".



## History and Mission

### History

The Caucasus ecoregion, historically interpreted as the isthmus between the Black and Caspian seas, includes the nations of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, the North Caucasus portion of the Russian Federation, northeastern Turkey, and part of northwestern Iran. The lack of coordination among these six countries has seriously hampered biodiversity conservation efforts of the governments, the donor society and NGOs.

From 1999-2000, during the preparation of the first conservation strategy for the Caucasus ecoregion, the stakeholders agreed on the urgent need to establish a coordinating body to improve collaboration in the field of biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of natural resources in the Caucasus. This suggestion was formulated as a separate project proposal in which WWF was asked to coordinate the implementation of such a body (the Coordination Council), in close collaboration with the stakeholders from the Caucasus region.

In 2001, following the request of stakeholders from the region, the MacArthur Foundation made funds available to establish an independent regional body: "The Regional Council for Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Resource Use in the Caucasus." The Council was established by the stakeholders involved in the preparation of the conservation plan for the ecoregion and is made up of stakeholders actively involved in the implementation of regional conservation strategies and action plans.

### Mission

The Regional Council promotes and monitors the implementation of the Ecoregional Conservation Plan (ECP), facilitates the implementation of regional programs and projects, and provides a forum for exchange of opinion and promotion of transborder activities.

### Membership

Each country presents two participants to the Council: one from a government institution and one from civil society. This is an appropriate work format for the Council, as not only nations, but civil society and governments cooperate to realize a single conservation goal.

### Regional Approach

Working at the ecoregional level implies working in large areas, ensuring the function of ecological processes and the dynamics of wildlife populations at all seasons of the year and under different climatic conditions. This includes conservation of critical habitats such as summer and winter areas, places for raising offspring, and corridors to ensure safe migrations over large distances. Thus, conservation measures are not limited to protected areas, but extended to zoning areas for different kind of use.

## Main Directions and Initiatives

- ▶ To reduce environmental impact, our members regularly assess the strengths and weaknesses of existing problems, determine the roles of all stakeholders, and develop the abilities of all those working to improve participation and local capacity.
- ▶ Our members also aim to support sustainable environmental and the latest wildlife management practices; to share and collaborate in understanding inputs, management and stewardship practices whereby stakeholders can best minimize environmental harm and come to a consensus.
- ▶ They work to maintain strong links with research institutions, making every effort to tap into cutting edge research and information relevant to sustainable environmental use and resource management.
- ▶ They also strive to strengthen coordinated intervention for joint responsible use of natural resources, regardless of international borders or nation states.
- ▶ Members hold stakeholders meetings at least twice a year to discuss issues and programming direction.



## Rundown of Semi-Annual Meetings (Highlights)

### The First Meeting (Tbilisi, Georgia, May 2004)

The main goal of the first meeting was the approval of the terms of reference for the Regional Council, definition of the procedures for appointment of the Chairman, and discussion of the Ecoregional Conservation Plan (ECP). The Council Members also discussed the CEPF Ecosystem Profile, which outlines CEPF contribution to the conservation of biodiversity and strengthening civil society in this globally significant hotspot in the coming years.

### The Second Meeting (Tbilisi, Georgia, March 2005)

The second meeting was more down to business, with a review of some of the successes achieved, including an announcement about the opening of two new national parks in the Turkish Caucasus, as well as two national parks and one nature reserve in Azerbaijan. The role of the Chairman of the Regional Council was reviewed, as were the functions and responsibilities of the Council Members. Key to this meeting was the election of Dr. Hartmut Jungius as Chairman for a term of three years.

### The Third Meeting (Khopa, Turkey, October 2005)

The Council members reviewed the tasks and recommendations from the previous meeting. The Chairman noted that most of the tasks had been fulfilled on schedule. The Council discussed the issues that had been raised at the last meeting during the country representatives' presentations: the idea of national programs becoming part of the regional conservation effort; the importance of involving local communities in ECP implementation; the delivery of Regional Council decisions to the decision makers and the strengthening of cooperation between governmental agencies and NGOs. Regional programs and projects monitored and assisted by the Regional Council were presented by the Secretary.





The Regional Council for Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Resource Use in the Caucasus is a significantly active agency that coordinates the efforts of Caucasus countries to protect nature. With its ecosystems and biological diversity the Caucasus cannot be divided into separately protected parts. Only a joint regional approach to the issue with a boundary-free attitude to the entire hotspot will support the balance and stability of the ecosystems, guaranteeing the development of the region and the welfare of the population.

Tatyana Danelian  
 Head of the Biodiversity Conservation Division  
 The Ministry of Nature Protection of Armenia  
 CBD National Focal Point for Armenia

The creation of the Regional Council is a serious step forward in the development of nature protection in the Caucasus. This body, which unites experienced environment experts and managers from all of the Caucasus countries, helps to coordinate conservation at a level higher than ever before. Key activities of the Regional Council include developing a wider understanding of the Caucasus Ecoregion and completing the first ever deep research of endemism and protection status for all main groups of flora and fauna, as well as identifying priority directions for nature protection in the region. I am sure that this work will facilitate important new achievements in the conservation of Caucasus biodiversity.

Elchin Sultanov  
 Chairman  
 Azerbaijan Ornithological Society



I find the work of the Regional Council quite important. The current state of nature conservation in the Caucasus ecoregion, and Georgia in particular, is critical. I am a field biologist, and what I see going on concerning the natural landscapes in the country is tragic. If deforestation and other negative trends continue for ten more years, Georgia will become a uniform wasteland. Given this background, the development of the Ecoregional Conservation Plan outlines at least a general picture: which wild landscapes and habitats, which species of animals and plants we should protect from extinction first and foremost. Only international efforts can bring results, because landscapes are diverse and animals disperse across the boundaries, and because threats like international trade are not fully understood. As a member of the Council I hope to be able to make a modest contribution to softening the negative human impact on nature in the Caucasus. In the course of time we'll see whether these efforts lead to a real outcome.

David Tarkhnishvili  
 Chairman of the Georgian Commission for Threatened Species

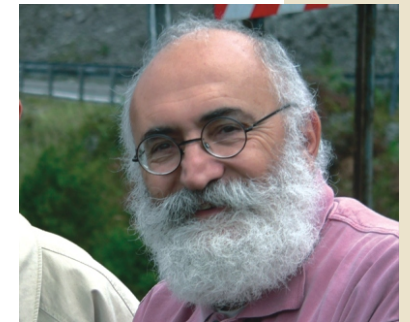


At present, the Regional Council is the only active mechanism for transborder cooperation between Russia and Georgia in the field of Caucasus biodiversity conservation. I hope that in the foreseeable future the Regional Council's work will lead to the signing of relevant international agreements among Caucasus countries for the protection of the region's unique nature.

Olga Krever  
Department of Protected Areas and Biodiversity Conservation  
The Ministry of Natural Resources, Russia

Biodiversity conservation in the Caucasus is more than the individual programs executed in individual countries. That's why joint programs executed across borders are of great importance, and the role of the Regional Council is to bring Iran into nature conservation in this ecoregion.

Taghi Mohammad Farvar  
NGO CENESTA, Iran  
IUCN, Chair of Commission of Environmental, Economic and Social Policy



Turkey ascribes great importance to the conservation of the Caucasus ecoregion, which is one of the world's 25 hotspots. In coordination with the neighboring countries, Turkey supports sustainable development methods that decrease the impact of local people on the environment. With the support of the World Bank, the Turkish government is successfully implementing the GEF-II project for regional conservation and sustainable development in the Camili microbasin, which is one of four important bio-ecological sites in Turkey. In this framework, this project should be considered a start for the development of new joint projects among partner countries for better conservation of the region. The Turkish government believes that each member country and NGO in the Council will share the responsibility of ensuring a better future for our children.

Mustafa Akincioglu  
Deputy General Director  
General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks  
The Ministry of Environment and Forestry, Turkey



## An Ecoregional Conservation Plan for the Caucasus

Coordinated planning and cooperation for the Ecoregional Conservation Plan (ECP), which is continuously refined and updated, is paying off. Policies and interventions are long-term with specific objectives. These can be for as long as 50 years, employing a combination of approaches. Many issues need to be addressed in preventing and solving the many problems that the region faces in maintaining environmental integrity. Natural ecosystems with their diverse fauna and flora are rapidly disappearing in the Caucasus, but now for the first time, something can be done to stop the neglect, establishing a comprehensive long-term strategy to protect, manage and the restore the ecoregion's natural resources. This work also reflects the policy of many regional governments. This operational document has evolved in recent years as the mission statement of stakeholders, identifying priority conservation areas and strategies regardless of political differences or national borders. The first and second plans have already been revised in this direction, and are more realistic than earlier efforts. The overall plan is to provide a working template and document for continued regional conservation, prioritizing immediate and long-term actions.

However, it is still too early to celebrate. Program development and conservation intervention must be prioritized and implemented over the long term. It is impossible to address such difficult problems with stopgap or short-term or measures. With this in mind, more than 160 experts from a variety of scientific, governmental, and non-governmental organizations have joined forces to draft the ECP.

Of course, no plan is good unless put into action, and unfortunately, limited resources make it necessary to rank conservation projects. The ECP is the framework for governments, NGOs, donor agencies and environmental experts to combine their best efforts towards truly solving problems.

### 1. Protected area network across the eco-region

The ECP seeks to create an "Econet" of protected areas, including existing protected areas and environmentally important and/or vulnerable areas, linked by "corridors" that will allow for the free movement of a variety of animals, including large mammals, migratory birds and fish.

### 2. Collaborative management through involvement of all stakeholders, including national governments, NGOs and local communities

Local groups need to participate in designing management programs for the resources on which they depend. Empowerment through participation is key to long-term success. This includes working together to define problems, and subsequently cooperating with NGOs and other stakeholders to solve these problems.



### 3. Protection and restoration of endangered species

The survival of any species depends on the state of its habitat, and interactions with its competitors, including man. Conservation must therefore take a comprehensive approach to wildlife and rangeland management. 26 species in the region have been identified as on the verge of extinction and in need of urgent conservation: carnivores (Caucasian leopard, brown bear, striped hyena); ungulates (East and West Caucasian turs, bezoar goat, Caucasian red deer, Caucasian chamois, goitered gazelle, Gmelin's mouflon, European bison); birds (Caucasian black grouse, imperial eagle, cinereous vulture, marbled duck, white-headed duck, pygmy cormorant); amphibians (Syrian spadefoot, Caucasian salamander); and seven species of sturgeon fish.

### 4. Trans-border cooperation

Many of these environmentally threatened species live in habitats that cross international borders. Regional cooperation is essential for conserving habitats and establishing safe migration corridors. International agreements are needed for areas where illegal logging and timber trade or trade in endangered species across borders cause problems.

### 5. Restoration of damaged ecosystems

Habitats, ecological functions and species have been damaged throughout the region. The ECP has identified a number of measures to restore habitats and wildlife populations. These can be implemented jointly with the local communities, which will also contribute to the prosperity of these communities.

### 6. Harmonizing legislation and policy frameworks

There are gaps, redundancies, and inherent contradictions in many laws in the region, and this makes it difficult to understand which agencies are responsible for enforcement. Harmony in legislative and policy frameworks will effectively address one of the root causes of biodiversity depletion.

### 7. Research and scientific monitoring coordinated across the eco-region, including local knowledge

Research focuses on management of natural resources and interactions between people and the environment. It helps to develop innovative methods for managing natural resources and for monitoring the impact of management intervention. The ECP's frameworks for monitoring and coordinating research throughout the region helps pinpoint problems before they reach the crisis stage, and will help determine what must be done to halt and reverse biodiversity depletion.

### 8. Education and public awareness of the need for biodiversity conservation

To support environmental management, the ECP provides educational programming for stakeholders, particularly in rural areas. NGOs offer public outreach programs, including environmental education in schools as part of this agenda, which includes but is not limited to the establishment of "environmental camps" and community-based ecology groups.





### Strengthening Conservation Alliances through CEPF Coordination in the Caucasus

The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) is a joint initiative of Conservation International, the Global Environment Facility, the Government of Japan, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the World Bank. It is designed to safeguard the world's biodiversity in developing countries, and provides strategic assistance to NGOs, community groups and other civil society partners. One of CEPF's fundamental goals is to ensure that civil society is engaged in biodiversity conservation.

A total of 205 priority sites have been identified in the Caucasus.

With the help of its ever-expanding network of partners, CEPF provides funding and technical assistance to civil society groups, awarding grants to help implement region-specific strategies developed together with stakeholders, ensuring action toward a common vision. It also creates strategic working alliances among diverse groups, combining unique capacities and eliminating duplication of efforts.



There are four main funding priorities of the CEPF in the Caucasus:

1. To support civil society efforts that promote transboundary cooperation and improve protected area systems in five target corridors;
2. To strengthen mechanisms to conserve biodiversity of the Caucasus hotspot with emphasis on species, site and corridor outcomes;
3. To implement models demonstrating sustainable resource use in five target corridors;
4. To increase the awareness and commitment of decision-makers to biodiversity conservation in five target corridors.



## After one year after grant-making process started we can report on first successes:

### Conserving Adjara-Shavsheti Flora

Establishing the current conservation status of indigenous flora in Adjara-Shavsheti is one of NGO Mta-Bari's main objectives in a project financed by the WWF/CEPF's Small Grants Fund. Initial expeditions were made to study Adjara-Shavsheti flora in July 2005. The habitats of 15 endemic species were photographed and studied. Four indigenous natural plant species (*Epigaea gaulterioides* [Boiss. Et Bal] Takht., *Galanthus krasnovii* Khokhr., *Muscari alexandrae* Khokhr., *Rhododendron ungeronii* Trautv) were brought to the Batumi Botanical Garden at the Georgian Academy of Science.

Scientists identified International Union for the Protection of Nature (IUCN) categories for each endemic plant and developed plans to save vulnerable and threatened species based on ecological and demographic risk assessment. Recommendations will be made for updates to the IUCN Red List, later to be presented to IUCN for consideration. A seed and natural plant collection will be established at the Batumi Botanical Garden as part of the in situ conservation component.

### Alternative Route for Shikahogh Reserve Highway

Environmental NGOs have successfully lobbied the Armenian government in efforts to find an alternative highway route through the Shikahogh Forest Reserve. This was an incredibly important example of effective cooperation of different civil society groups and public officials to save the protected territory from the real danger it faced. 80 articles in print and electronic media supported the initiative to stop the construction of a highway which would have destroyed 30 hectares of oak trees (approximately 14,000), damaging the habitat of a number of endemic plants and endangered species such as the leopard, the bezoar goat, and the moufflon.

A documentary film was made that brought the matter to attention and was shown both in Armenia and internationally. As a result, a compromise was reached among the Ministry of Nature Protection, the regional authorities in the Syunik region, and local NGOs. The Diaspora played a key role in securing this agreement together with Armenian NGO Khustup, which is funded in part by the WWF/ CEPF Small Grants Fund.

### Conservation priorities set for large herbivores

Major threats to the large herbivore (*caprinae*) sub-family in the Caucasus hotspot were discussed and conservation priorities agreed upon at a workshop held in Tbilisi by Georgian NGO Tskhratskaro from May 17-19, 2005. Species under threat include the bezoar goat (*capra aegagrus*), the moufflon (*ovis orientalis ssp. gmelinii*) and the West Caucasian tur (*capra Caucasia*). Sixteen experts from Georgia, Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia attended and worked through the whole spectrum of existing problems. It was agreed that it would be effective for NGOs and activists to focus on the threats and address the conservation priorities identified during the meeting. A document adopted by the participants will work as a guideline for immediate actions for the conservation of large herbivores in the Caucasus hotspot.





### Azerbaijan's Center for Biodiversity Protects the tur in the Zakatala Reserve

Azeri NGO "Center for Biodiversity" is implementing a new project to better protect the East Caucasian tur (*capra cylindricornis*) in the Eastern region of Azerbaijan, an endangered species of mountain goat found in the Zakatala Nature Reserve, which is one of the oldest reserves in the Caucasus that was first established in 1929. It borders the Lagodekhi Reserve in Georgia and the Tlyarata sanctuary in Russia and has an incredible wealth of flora and fauna, including 816 species of vascular plants and a number of threatened animals, such as the otter (*lutra lutra*), 3 bat species including the small horseshoe bat (*rhinolophus hipposideros*), the European barbastelle (*barbastella barbastellus*), Geoffroy's bat (*myotis emarginatus*), the Mediterranean turtle (*testudo graeca*), the Caucasian toad (*bufo verrucosissimus*) and the Caucasian parsley frog (*pelodytes caucasicus*).

### South Caucasus Environmental NGOs for European Neighborhood Policy joint effort

Caucasus environmental NGOs are working together within the framework of the WWF Caucasus PO and REC Caucasus to determine the European Neighborhood Policy and other relevant processes. This cooperation offers many opportunities for involvement, development and implementation of EU Neighborhood Policy Action Plans for Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in the field of environmental protection and sustainable development.



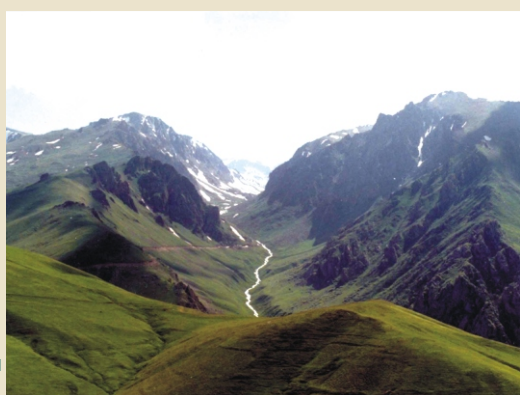
The first conference, called "Building a Regional NGO Platform in the South Caucasus for Involvement of Civil Society in the Formulation and Implementation of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) Process," was held in Tbilisi, Georgia in the middle of October 2005.

Two important initiatives developed by REC Caucasus and WWF Caucasus laid the foundation for cooperation: The meeting aimed to develop new models of regional cooperation and networking among stakeholders within the framework of ENP, and as a result, participants agreed to finalize and submit joint NGO Regional Vision on ENP to their respective governments and the EU by the end of October 2005. Environmental NGOs also committed to cooperating for further development and implementation of the ENP process in the field of environmental protection and sustainable development.

In December 2005, a publication summarizing the efforts was printed in two languages and was presented at the Europe Neighborhood Policy conference in Brussels.

### Arevik Nature Reserve in Armenia

NGO Ecotourism Association has been working to establish a new specially protected natural reserve called "Arevik" in Meghri, southern Armenia. The site is located at an important corridor-wide conservation crossway and much work has gone into its implementation. Research and inventory is completed of the biological resources (including endemic, rare and endangered species) in the area and surroundings, focusing on the following outcomes: clarification of boundaries, development of a management plan, preparation of necessary documents and completion of procedures to obtain a governmental decision to establish new protected area, provision of professional development and training for protected area staff, and establishment of infrastructure and logistical support for the protected area.



### Transboundary Cooperation for Protection of Tugai Forest in the Caucasus

The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is working closely with the WWF on an initiative to develop a model for transboundary cooperation in the Caucasus and to support regional efforts for addressing common biodiversity challenges. The Georgian-Azerbaijani transborder area in the Iori region includes one of the last remnants of a tugai forest in the Caucasus.

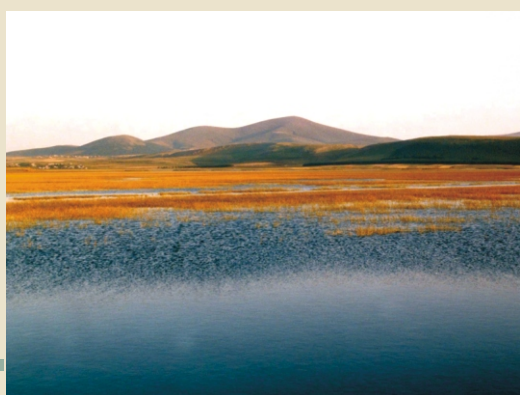
Tugai forests and ecosystems are found throughout the Caucasus and include estuaries and river deltas, marshes, swamps, lakes and streams. The corridor includes intact arid plateau and foothill habitats with pistachio-juniper woodlands, as well as a significant portion of the tugai forests in the hotspot.

These forest types are a known stopover-site for migratory birds and its management demonstrates an excellent case study of cooperation between two countries. Many problems which would otherwise have been very difficult for either country to solve on its own can now be addressed jointly. This project also involves local communities and a range of stakeholders in decision making and implementing processes and has great potential for transborder cooperation among nature reserves, including other areas that are suitable for sustaining high levels of biodiversity.

Human activities on both sides of the border – namely, uncontrolled livestock grazing, illegal logging, poaching, illegal fishing and badly managed structural development – have negatively altered the floodplains of the South Caucasus. A good example of this is the Dali Dam on the Georgian side, which was constructed during the Soviet times, and which has caused serious problems to the dynamics of flooding.

The project aims at triggering the development of a model for transboundary cooperation and strives to support regional efforts to address common biodiversity challenges in an ecoregional manner by improving the governance of protected areas on both sides of the border. At the same time, the project is about people and local community development in the transboundary area. For the first time locals, Georgian and Azeri, will be able to meet, talk, decide and work together for the future of their shared natural heritage.





### Establishment of Protected Areas on Javakheti Plateau

The Javakheti-Shirak transboundary priority conservation area straddles the international borders between Armenia, Georgia and Turkey. This area is well known for its ecosystem diversity, which includes mountain lakes, wetlands and bogs. Grasslands divide these wet areas. This ecosystem is internationally significant as a staging area and breeding ground for migratory and indigenous bird species.

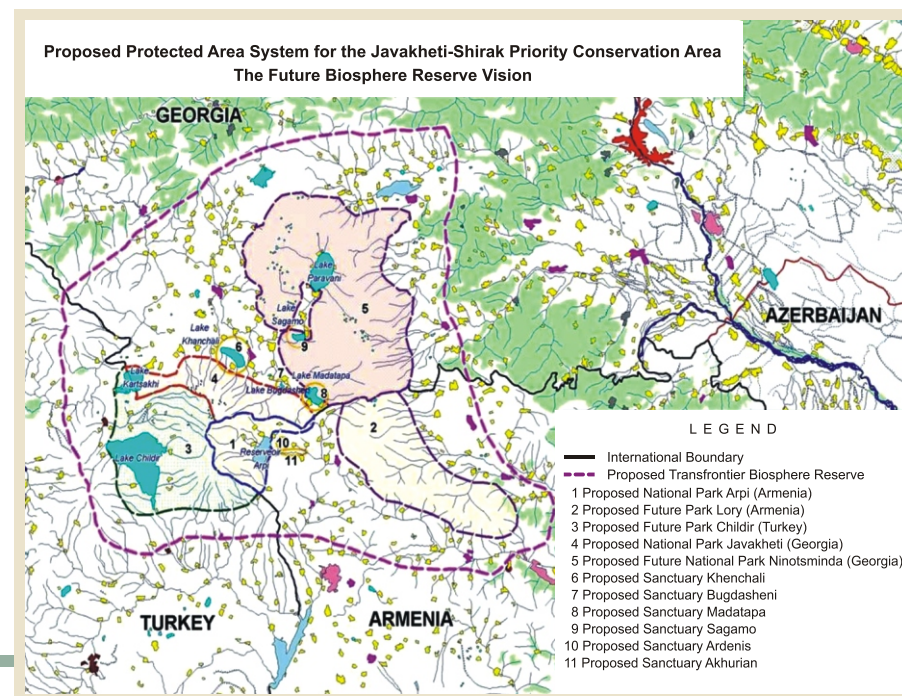
The overall conservation objective for the project implemented within the framework of the BMZ Caucasus Initiative is the sustainable protection of fragile high elevation wetlands, including mountain lakes with their respective watersheds in Armenia and Georgia. The best way to accomplish this is by creating networks of protected areas within a properly managed zone of support. This mechanism is based upon participatory methods of land use and management.

These countries share equally from watersheds that feed five lakes and key wetlands for migratory waterfowl on the Javakheti Plateau.

Although Lake Arpi in Georgia and the neighboring wetlands in Armenia were designated as a Ramsar site in 1993, the protected areas are not yet legally safeguarded in either country.

The project envisions various activities to assist rural improvised living in the support zone of the proposed protected areas, with the ultimate goal of promoting biodiversity conservation and protection efforts around lakes Arpi, Khanchali, Sagamo, Bugdasheni and Madatapa.

A Transboundary Coordination Board is of great importance for the implementation of this project. The Board, consisting of members from Armenia and Georgia, will seek to harmonize conservation objectives, policies and strategies targeted at achieving the defined conservation goals.



## Leopard Initiative

Today the leopard is not thought of as merely a dangerous animal, but rather as a species that needs protection and a suitable habitat. Only about 40 Caucasian leopards still live in the forests of the South Caucasus Mountains; the species is struggling against poaching, and destruction of habitat due to illegal logging and conversion to pasture. Moreover, its prey species is being hunted to extinction. WWF works to protect the Caucasian Leopard chiefly by supporting local protected area networks and by providing education and awareness programs.

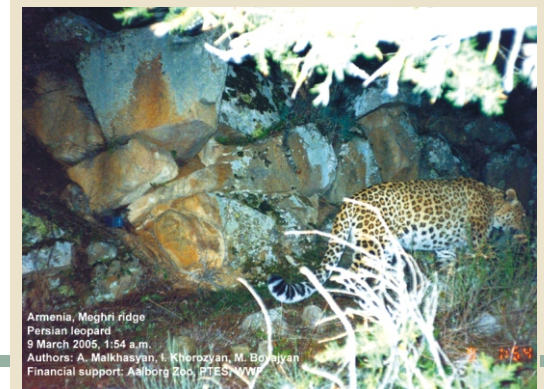
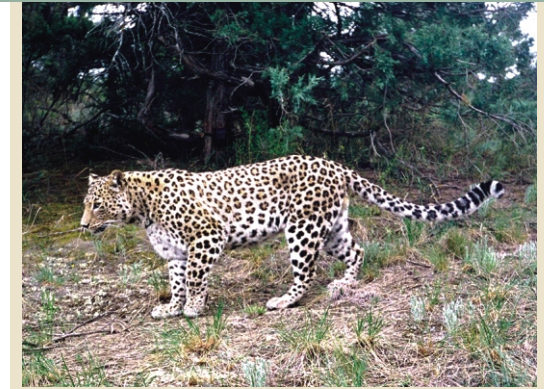
The leopard (*panthera pardus ciscaucasica*, *P.p. saxicolor*) is the most critically endangered species in the Caucasus ecoregion. The leopard is included in the Red Data Book of Rare and Endangered Species in all countries of the ecoregion, and in the Red List of IUCN and UNEP-WCMC Database of Threatened Animals of the World. The leopard was thought to have disappeared from the region in the 1960s, but the absence of special surveys until the end of the 20th Century did not accurately document the presence of the leopard in the ecoregion.

Research supported by WWF in 2001-2005 demonstrated that approximately 40 leopards remained in the South Caucasus, in the Lesser Caucasus Mountain Chain, the Talysh-Western Alborz Mountains and Iori-Mingechaur areas (South Armenia, South and Western Azerbaijan and Iran). A group of 8-10 leopards has survived in the Eastern Greater Caucasus, but the assessment of specific conditions of leopard population in certain parts of the ecoregion demands additional fieldwork.

The long-term goal is the conservation of the leopard and its prey species in its historical range in the Caucasus Ecoregion. During the initial phase of project implementation concrete results have been achieved. Attitudes towards the species and towards leopard conservation have been changed positively among local populations as well. Public perception of the leopard has shifted: instead of being thought of as a dangerous and harmful species it is now considered a threatened and strictly protected animal. The importance of leopard conservation is widely accepted today. In some regions the leopard has even become a symbol for a healthy environment. The leopard population has stabilized in the Talysh Mountains, including the newly established Hirkan National Park. Here the leopard has become more visible; traces and tracks are found more frequently now.

There have been significant positive results in the southern part of the Zangezur mountain range and the Meghri range as well. Traces of territorial animals have been recorded regularly. In March 2005 a photo of a free-roaming leopard was taken by a camera-trap in the Meghri area. This project will provide for the creation of secure and essential leopard habitat and for the establishment of protected migratory routes. Together with incentive programs to preserve the leopard, it is expected that populations will recover to a sustainable level.

Another benefit to the project, aside from the conservation of the leopard a flagship species for the entire region: cooperation among experts and specialists from politically diverse and sometimes opposing countries can contribute greatly to cross-cultural communication and conflict resolution.



Armenia, Meghri ridge  
 Persian leopard  
 9 March 2005, 1:54 a.m.  
 Authors: A. Malkhasyan, I. Khorozyan, M. Bolehyan  
 Financial support: Aalborg Zoo, PTES, WWF

**The Caucasus Protected Areas Fund**



The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Conservation International and the German Ministry of Economic Development and Cooperation (BMZ), with the support of the German Entwicklungsbank (KfW), are currently collaborating to establish a trust fund that will provide long-term financial sustainability for priority protected areas in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Together with international consultants, more than 100 scientific experts and protected area managers from the Caucasus countries have collaborated over a 2-year period to identify the most biologically important conservation areas in the Caucasus ecoregion. Additionally, they have calculated the basic operating costs for each of the highest priority protected areas.



The Caucasus ecoregion has the greatest biological diversity of any temperate forest region in the world, and contains large areas of primary “old growth” forests. In order to prevent this threatened and irreplaceable biodiversity from being lost due to lack of funding to protect and conserve it, the Caucasus Protected Areas Fund is being created. It will provide up to 50% of the basic annual operating costs for protected areas which have been identified as having the highest biodiversity, on condition that governments of the three countries provide the other 50% of these annual operating costs.

The Caucasus Protected Areas Fund will be legally established as a tax-exempt charitable foundation in a Western European country. Its Board of Directors will be composed of international donors and international conservation NGOs.



Each of the three countries' Ministries of Environment will submit annual proposals to the trust fund. The “Regional Council for Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Resource Use in the Caucasus,” which has already been operating for several years and is composed of scientists, NGOs and government representatives from all the Caucasus countries, will review and comment on the scientific and technical aspects of each funding proposal. This provides an important form of national stakeholder participation. The fund's board of directors will then decide on whether to fund each proposal, and on what specific terms and conditions.





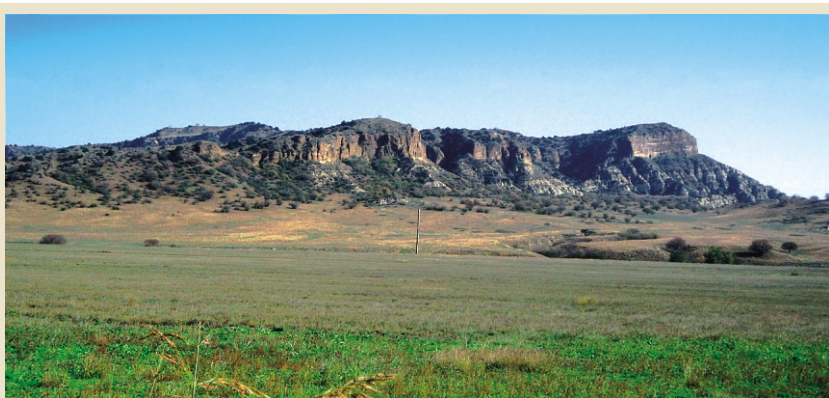
## Regional Monitoring Network

Monitoring and evaluation programs are crucial to the success of projects and policy impacts, and to the overall success of collaborative programs. They provide contractors, host country beneficiaries, and other participating entities with baseline information at the initiation of projects, and subsequently provide consistent feedback as to whether tasks and objectives are being accomplished, ultimately assessing whether any positive change has occurred.

The WWF Caucasus Program Office and Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund, in cooperation with experts from the region, are actively involved in elaborating a framework for biodiversity monitoring in the Caucasus. They work to establish monitoring indicators, effective means for data collection, and ways to best share the information with the public. The model-monitoring plan was established with specific criteria based on what host country stakeholders determined as relevant and essential, with corresponding clear and consistent collection methods.

The biodiversity monitoring team will work closely with recipients and contractors as full scope projects are implemented. Having experienced the challenges of carrying out complex projects, the team members understand that changes in project design or implementation may have to be made, and that monitoring and evaluation components may require adjustment. Collaborating in this way strengthens relationships among all participants, builds cross-border trust, and ensures that tasks and objectives continue to be met. This provides opportunities for mid-stream adjustments, and ensures that information regarding project and policy impact reaches the intended targets and are environmentally sustainable.

In addition to developing standard monitoring and evaluation systems and procedures for environmental, financial, and enterprise development, the level of human and community development should also be tracked. This will provide the project, other donors, recipients, and our group with a clearer, broader picture of project impact.



## Regional Council members contact details

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