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Protected Areas for a Living Planet

delivering on CBD commitments

Caucasus Ecoregion Project



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The Caucasus ecoregion is a biological 'crossroads', where animal and plant species from Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa mingle with a large number of endemic species. The region runs from the subtropical forests of the southeast Black Sea coast to the high peaks of the Greater Caucasus and the steppes and semi-deserts of the lowland east. Over 6,500 species of vascular plants are found here, at least a quarter of them unique to the region — the highest level of endemism in the temperate world. The relict forests of the Colchic and Hyrcanic regions are particularly valuable, harbouring species dating back more than one million years. Leopards roam forests in search of wild goats, boar, and deer, although the population is very small and fragmented. Two species of endemic goats, or turs, live in the higher elevations of the Greater Caucasus, while the rare and endemic Gmelins (or Armenian) mouflon, a subspecies of wild sheep, lives on dry, open mountain slopes in the south of the ecoregion. The Caspian, Azov, and Black Seas host the world's highest diversity of sturgeons, with seven different species.

The Caucasus is also a globally significant centre of cultural diversity, where a multitude of ethnic groups, languages, and religions intermingle over a relatively small area. The economy of the region is still largely dependent on agriculture and traditional rural land use, with the transition to a market economy providing a new challenge but also new opportunities. Political conflicts followed the collapse of the Soviet Union; however the new geopolitical importance of the Caucasus for the EU (the European Neighbourhood Policy) and the US will hopefully provide new opportunities for finding more lasting solutions, especially in the the Southern Caucasus. A shared

Endemic treefrog (Hyla arborea schelkownikowi) in lowland forest, Babeneuri Nature Reserve, Georgia.

concern for the environment and the need for finding transboundary solutions to many existing problems could potentially serve as a political bridge-builder.

Work to date

WWF has been active in the region since 1992, primarily focusing on the development of the protected areas system and the conservation of endangered species. Major achievements include more than doubling the area under protection in Georgia as well as the establishment of the



Map of the Caucasus ecoregion. The ecoregion runs through Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Russian Federation, Turkey, and Iran, covering an area of 580,000km².

country's first national park, Borjomi-Kharagauli. WWF has also helped with the planning and establishment of new protected areas in Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Russian Federation, and Turkey, and provided financial and technical support for improving management effectiveness to about 20 protected areas.

An Ecoregional Conservation Plan for the Caucasus was finalized in 2006 in collaboration with many partners. The development of the plan in itself is an achievement in view of the difficult country relationships in the region. Its implementation will be supported by a Caucasus Biodiversity Council. A special Trust Fund for the South Caucasus Protected Areas (Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan) has been established with the support of the German government, Conservation International, and WWF. Local and international partnerships have been a hallmark of WWF's work in the Caucasus since the beginning.

Caucasus Ecoregion Project

WWF's *Protected Areas for a Living Planet* programme initiated the Caucasus Ecoregion Project in 2006 in consultation with stakeholders. The project will begin in mid-2007 and will run until the end of 2011.

Stakeholder consultation

The programme organized a series of national workshops in February and April 2006 in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russia, and Turkey. The workshops brought together 145 participants including representatives of national governments, non-governmental organizations, academia, and civil society groups, as well as regional organizations such as the Regional Environmental Center for the Caucasus and multilateral organizations including the United Nations Office for Project Services, UNDP, and the World Bank.

Developing an Action Plan for the ecoregion

WWF presented the CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas (PoWPA) and participants worked through its goals, targets, and activities to identify the status of implementation in the ecoregion. This exercise looked at the activities of both government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and allowed participants to identify gaps in the implementation of the PoWPA. Based on this assessment, priority activities were identified and elaborated into an Action Plan. The Action Plan highlighted the relevant stakeholders that should be involved in each activity and estimated the financial and human capacity needs. The Action Plan formed the basis for the Ecoregion Project activities outlined below.

Multi-Stakeholder Process: Caucasus Biodiversity Council

The Caucasus Biodiversity Council (CBC) will oversee implementation of the PoWPA in the ecoregion. Members include one government and one NGO representative from each of the six countries of the ecoregion, as well as an independent international expert acting as Chair and six associate members representing scientific institutions. WWF has been nominated as Secretary. National Coordination Committees (NCCs) will also be established in five countries to oversee and support PoWPA implementation at the national

Caucasus Ecoregion Project Goal

Parties to the CBD from the Caucasus ecoregion are enabled to achieve the 2010/2012 targets of the Programme of Work on Protected Areas, including scientifically based and representative systems of protected areas, well managed protected areas, sustainable financing, and effective participation of local communities.

level in coordination with the CBC. The National Committees will be made up of representatives from key stakeholder groups: government, NGOs, and scientific institutions.

Caucasus Ecoregion Project activities

- 1. National Coordination Committees:** The project will establish five NCCs which will coordinate with the Caucasus Biodiversity Council.
- 2. Protected Area establishment:** At least three new protected areas critically important for the development of the protected areas system in the ecoregion will be gazetted.
- 3. Monitoring:** A regional database will gather data on PoWPA implementation and annual reports will be produced and distributed among stakeholders.
- 4. Communications:** Regional and national communications will focus on raising the awareness of selected target groups on the importance of protected areas. A website on protected areas in the Caucasus will be established and maintained and information materials, such as the translation of the PoWPA Action Guide into national languages, will be produced and distributed.
- 5. Capacity building:** Capacity needs assessments will be undertaken in each of the countries and Ecoregion and National Action Plans for capacity building will be developed and implemented in at least three countries. Staff from relevant agencies will be trained in Conservation Action Planning.
- 6. Management effectiveness:** In collaboration with IUCN/WCPA, the project will assess the management effectiveness of protected area systems in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Russia.
- 7. Sustainable financing:** Financial needs for establishing and effectively managing protected areas systems will be assessed and sustainable financing plans will be elaborated and implemented in at least three countries of the ecoregion.
- 8. Threats and legislative & institutional gaps and barriers:** The key threats to protected areas in the ecoregion will be assessed. Legislative and institutional gaps and barriers that impede the effective establishment and management of protected areas will be identified and addressed.

For more information

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