

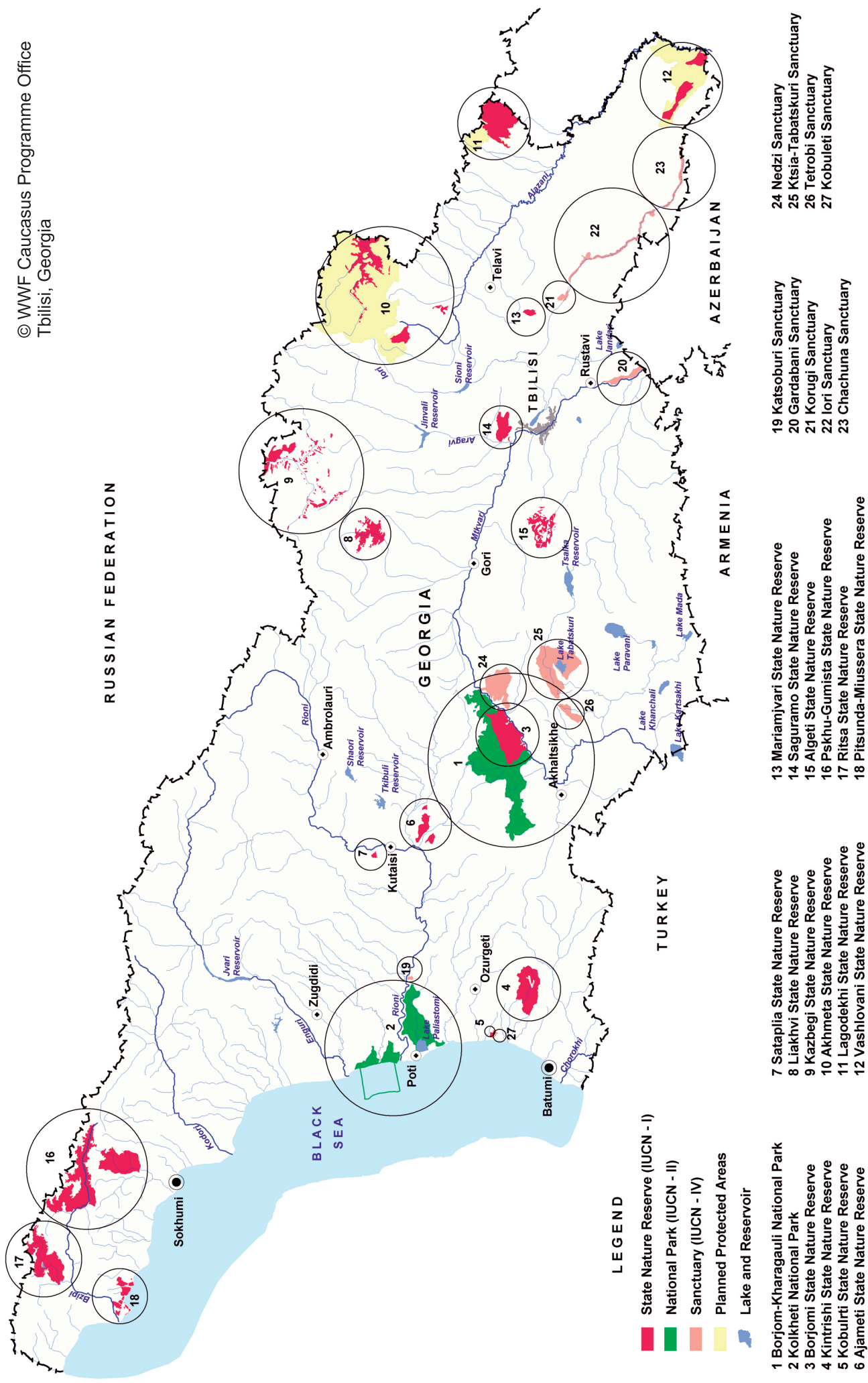


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REPORT

Georgia

**Management Effectiveness Assessment of
Protected Areas using WWF's RAPPAM
Methodology**



RUSSIAN FEDERATION

GEORGIA

ARMENIA

AZERBAIJAN

TURKEY

BLACK SEA

LEGEND

- State Nature Reserve (IUCN - I)
- National Park (IUCN - II)
- Sanctuary (IUCN - IV)
- Planned Protected Areas
- Lake and Reservoir

- | | | | |
|------------------------------------|--|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park | 13 Mariamjvari State Nature Reserve | 19 Katsoburi Sanctuary | 24 Nedzi Sanctuary |
| 2 Kolkheti National Park | 14 Saguramo State Nature Reserve | 20 Gardabani Sanctuary | 25 Ktsia-Tabatskuri Sanctuary |
| 3 Borjomi State Nature Reserve | 15 Algeti State Nature Reserve | 21 Korugi Sanctuary | 26 Tetrobi Sanctuary |
| 4 Kintrishi State Nature Reserve | 16 Pskhu-Gumista State Nature Reserve | 22 Iori Sanctuary | 27 Kobuleti Sanctuary |
| 5 Kintrishi State Nature Reserve | 17 Ritsa State Nature Reserve | 23 Chachuna Sanctuary | |
| 6 Ajameti State Nature Reserve | 18 Pitsunda-Miusera State Nature Reserve | | |
| 7 Sataplia State Nature Reserve | | | |
| 8 Liakhvi State Nature Reserve | | | |
| 9 Kazbegi State Nature Reserve | | | |
| 10 Akhmeta State Nature Reserve | | | |
| 11 Lagodekhi State Nature Reserve | | | |
| 12 Vashlovani State Nature Reserve | | | |

Protected Areas System of Georgia 2003



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Georgia

Management Effectiveness Assessment of Protected Areas using WWF's RAPPAM Methodology

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The completion of this case study coincided with Georgia's substantial political transformation and the resulting socioeconomic upheaval. Changes brought about by this transformation affected, inter alia, nature conservation institutions, which is reflected by the ongoing reorganization of the Georgia's protected areas service.

The lessons learned, results and recommendations of this case study, which is based on the WWF's RAPPAM methodology, may serve as a useful guide and productive pathfinder on the way to making the national protected areas system more rational, effective and socially attractive.

SYSTEM OF PROTECTED AREAS OF GEORGIA

Development of protected areas in Georgia began in the early 1910s with the establishment of the first Nature Reserve in Lagodekhi. By the time Georgia declared its independence (1991), it already had network of protected areas (approximately 168,8 thousand hectares in total area, which was 2,4 percent of the country's territory) and relevant legislation (the Law on Nature Protection of 1958). At the same time, the system of protected areas was directly incorporated into the forestry sector. This situation resulted in permanent conflicts between nature conservation and forestry interests at all levels (administrative, legal, management, planning, etc.).

Efforts in Georgia to adhere to international criteria for its protected areas network were directly connected with WWF activities in the country when the WWF Georgia Project Office (called the WWF Caucasus Programme Office since 2002) was established in 1991.

In Georgia, it was necessary to substantially change the old system of protected areas which existed until the 1990s. Until the 1990s, in Georgia, as in all post-soviet countries, the main form of nature protection was strict conservation. Strict conservation was an ideal device for nature conservation, but at the same time, there were at least two significant arguments in favor of setting up a new system:

Considering the relatively small size of Georgia, it was very difficult to "remove" large areas from the socio-economic space of the country. In other words, successful protection of the ecosystem balance, including high mountains and forests, and the representative diversity of communities could not be achieved only through strict nature reserves;

■ At the end of 20th century, with regard to the scarcity of nature areas comparatively untouched by human activities, there should be opportunities to establish direct contact with virgin nature. Thus, it was necessary to establish a "milder" protection regime for protected areas, where recreation and

tourism are permitted, which, in turn, stimulates socio-economic development of the country/region.

A relatively mild protection regime, which simultaneously ensures the protection of wilderness areas and moderate tourism activities, first of all is characteristic of the National Park (IUCN Cat. II). However, combined application of different categories of protected areas guarantees the complete protection of nature or its separate components in a country.

In 1990-1991, the first plan for developing the spatial structure of National Parks in Georgia was elaborated by the WWF. It laid the foundation for further activities, leading scientists and specialists from Georgia and other countries to participate in improving the strategy. The first major objective of this plan was to help establish seven National Parks in Georgia, nevertheless the exact boundaries and buffer zones of the parks were not defined. According to the first plan, the parks were to cover approximately 15 percent of the country's territory. During these years, the project proposal on the establishment of National Parks in Georgia was prepared according to intentional criteria. Stakeholder organizations evaluated the project and on May 12, 1992, the Georgian government adopted the plan on establishment of seven National Parks in Georgia. A relevant development scheme was later developed in 1993-1995. By this time, the term "Protected Areas Planning Region" had already been defined and it could be considered as a contextually correct definition of the development scheme. However, the applied value of this notion was arguable, because total area of such regions defined in the scheme, covered almost half of Georgia's territory.

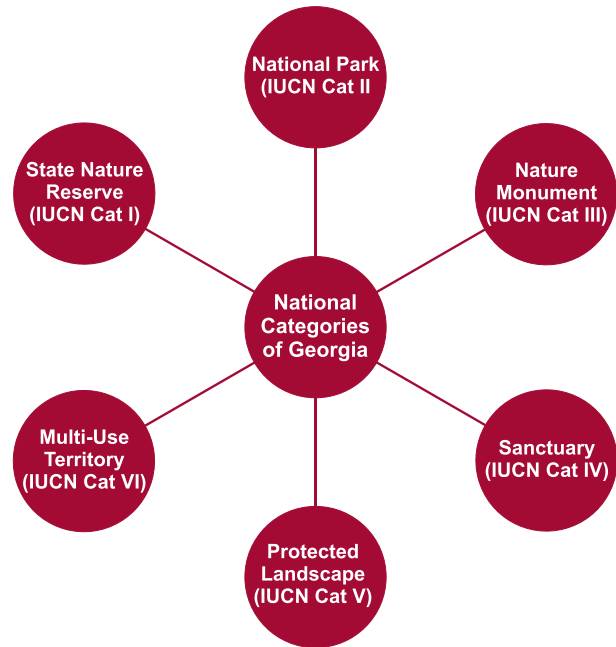
On March 7, 1996 the Law on Protected Areas System was passed. More than eight years have passed since the adoption of the law, a certain amount of practical experience has been accumulated and some drawbacks of the law have become clear. This law has played an

important role in garnering legislative support for the development of the protected areas system. For the first time in Georgia, protected area categories were adapted to correspond to internationally accepted criteria, mainly to the categories regulated by the IUCN. In addition, the categories of UNESCO - biosphere reserve and world heritage site were indicated in the law. According to the above law, establishment of the system of protected areas aims to preserve the original, natural and cultural environment for future generations; protect conditions for spiritual and physical health of human being; and create a major basis for society's stipulates development. The law stipulates that the protected areas in Georgia shall be set up for the protection and restoration of the most important national heritage the unique, rare and characteristic ecosystems, species of flora and fauna, natural formations and cultural areas and providing their use for scientific, educational, recreational and nature-sparing economic development purposes. The law sets up the following categories of protected areas (see also scheme 1):

- State nature reserve (IUCN Cat. I - Strict Nature Reserve / Wilderness Area)
- National park (IUCN Cat. II - National Park)
- Natural monument (IUCN Cat. III - Natural Monument)
- Sanctuary (IUCN Cat. IV - Habitat / Species Management Area)
- Protected landscape (IUCN Cat. V - Protected Landscape), and
- Multiple-use territory [support/buffer zone] (IUCN Cat. VI - Managed Resource Protected Area)
- The Law provides the following general definition of protected areas: "Land territory and/or aquatic area of special importance based on the preservation of biological diversity, natural resources and cultural phenomena involved in natural environment, the protection and management of which is implemented in the long-term and firm legislative basis. Protected territory is created for the protection and restoration of the most important national inheritance - unique, rare and typical ecosystems, plant and animal species, natural formations and cultural areas - for ensuring their use for the development of scientific, educational, recreational and nature-related economic development purposes".

The law contains a provision which states that approval of a protected area management plan is prerogative of the President of Georgia.

According to the Law, only the Parliament of Georgia can establish the categories of protected areas. The first precedent for this was set in 1998 when the Law on Establishment and Management of Kolkheti Protected Areas was passed. Also, the enlargement, withdrawal or changing of



Scheme 1. PA categories according to national legislation and IUCN

existing categories of protected areas is exclusive right of the Parliament.

As mentioned above, during the early 1990s, the protected areas system of Georgia included mainly Nature Reserves, (approximately 168,8 thousand hectares or 2,4 per cent of the Georgia's territory.). On April 3, 1997, the President of Georgia released a statement on "WWF 2000 - The Living Planet Campaign" expressing the willingness of Georgia to present 20 percent of the country's territory, as various categories of protected areas. This statement played an important role in developing the protected areas system. Some of the more technocratic scientists and experts believed that protecting 20 percent of the country's land was disputable. However, international donors made concrete steps towards financing the establishment of the protected areas in Georgia only after this statement. As a result Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park was established and funds were allocated for establishment of Kolkheti National Park, etc.

The development scheme of protected areas in the Kolkheti lowland was prepared with the technical support of WWF and the financial assistance of the World Bank. In 1995, the Cabinet of Ministers of Georgia adopted a

Decree on the establishment of the Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park. In 1998, appropriate governmental agreements were signed between Georgia and Germany. The Government of Germany through the German based financial institution - KfW granted funding for the development of Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park infrastructure and to carry out projects of sustainable development in the support zone. This was followed by the financing of a special program for training purposes and the environmental education of the park.

In 1996, state hunting reserves were granted the status of sanctuary (IUCN Cat.IV) according to the new legislation. In 1998, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the Law on Establishment and Management of Kolkheti Protected Areas. As a result, for the period of 1990-2000:

- Protected areas (IUCN Cat. I-IV) were increased and now cover more than 4,5 percent of the country's territory.
- Forests within Georgia's protected areas amount to eight percent of the total forest area of Georgia.

The new objective of the conservation community is to bring 15 percent of Georgia's forests under strict protection. In February 2000, WWF Georgia held a seminar on strategic planning of the next five years of the organization's activity. As a result, WWF Georgia determined that a necessary and an achievable objective in the sphere of nature conservation in Georgia was to include 15 percent of Georgia's forest area in the protected areas (corresponding to IUCN Cat. I-IV) by 2010. In order to achieve this objective, it is necessary to strictly protect more than 150.000 hectares of forest. On the basis of this initiative, on February 8, 2001, the President of Georgia signed a Statement On the Occasion of the World Wide Fund for Nature's Forest for Life Campaign. With this action Georgia officially launched a new initiative in connection of the WWF's Forest for Life Campaign. By the 2010 Georgia accepts the obligation to extend the previously categorized protective regime (strict nature reserves, national parks and habitat species management areas) to 15 percent of Georgia's total forest lands

Overall economic and social situation

Transitional social and economic problems in Georgia have resulted in an increase in poaching, illegal logging of forests, and illegal grazing in protected areas. At the same time, there is no adequate motivation for professionals in this field. Buffer zones are virtually non-existent, so the consequences of resource use and human pressures outside protected areas spill over the borders and have an impact on protected ecosystems.



Vashlovani SNR / Photo WWF Caucasus

Forests as the Largest and Most Significant Biome of Protected Areas

Georgia is rich in forest resources, accounting for approximately 40 percent of the total territory. Georgia also occupies a significant portion of the Caucasus ecoregion. It is included in the list of WWF Global 200 Ecoregions as an area distinguished by its high level of biological and landscape diversity. Georgia is also identified as one of the Earth's 25 biologically richest and most endangered terrestrial ecoregions by the Conservation International and the only such region in the temperate zone of the northern hemisphere.

Forests make up the bulk (up to 90 percent) of Georgia's system of protected areas (IUCN categories I, II and IV), making forests the largest and most significant of any biome on the territories under strict protection. These forests are the refuge of many endemic and relict species of trees and plants, and an important habitat for a number of bird and animal species, many of which are included in the national and International Red Lists. Mountain forests under strict conservation also play a critical role in preventing soil erosion, mud-torrents, floods and landslides, as well as in regulating water flow.

Despite that forest ecosystems are preserved in strict nature reserves, national parks and sanctuaries, the total area of strictly protected forests is not sufficient. Even within protected areas, forests are not guaranteed absolute protection. Due to Georgia's energy crisis and socio-economic depression, forests have become vitally important for local, especially rural populations. Forests are used not only for firewood and cooking, but are a source of sometimes illegal income from timber and non-timber production in the forest. Outside the protected areas, pressure on forest ecosystems is even greater.

The management of wildlife and biodiversity conservation is most effective in strict nature reserves and national parks, and sometimes in sanctuaries. Outside these reserves, the safety of natural ecosystems (in multiple-use areas or protected forests, for example) is more related to their inaccessibility (narrow gorges with steep slopes, etc.) and the lack of infrastructure (absence of roads, etc.) than their protected status. Generally, in these areas, the protected regimes are not sufficient to preserve the ecosystems within.

The most immediate threat to Georgian forests is the harvesting of wood for fuel. Declining GDP, rising poverty and the decline in energy subsidies for fossil fuels has led to a large increase in the use of wood as fuel. At present, it is estimated that substantial amount of the

annual forest harvest is unrecorded fuel wood. The main harvesting is around population centers and is clearly visible. This has led to water run off, gulling, soil erosion and soil degradation.

Illegal fuel wood harvests along with inefficient forest practices in Georgia represent a serious threat to forest sustainability in many areas. The continuing degradation implies substantial environmental costs, which are not estimated due to insufficient information. This ongoing problem results from desperate shortages of alternative energy sources and the lack of an effective control system. Primary fuel wood users are small households in the countryside. Fuel wood is harvested close to villages, which results in local degradation of adjacent forests.



Ranger Station / Borjomi-Kharagauli NP / Photo WWF Caucasus