

IMPLEMENTING THE METHODOLOGY

BACKGROUND

Each of the protected sites has its own advantages and disadvantages in terms of its institutional and biological background, development trends, and current status. This point is very important especially in the context of the country's 2001 Statement On the Occasion of the WWF's Forest for Life Campaign. The statement is a step in the right direction towards thinking, planning, and acting in a way best suited for successful conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, which will help to more effectively address the broader socio-economic and policy issues essential for long-term success.

Currently, there is no unified applicable strategy for the protected areas management system on a national level. The protected areas management system is impeded by a lack of an integrated vision for conservation and sustainable use of biological resources in the country. Government financing for protected areas is insignificant and managers of protected areas do not have adequate incentives to protect and use resources in a sustainable manner. In addition, the knowledge and technologies available to managers in Georgia usually do not correspond to modern principles and methods accepted worldwide.

Thus, there is a need to analyze the gaps in the protected areas management system on a national level. This required a methodology which could be used to define a level of effectiveness and determine the need for improvement in management of protected areas.

In order to provide a consistent approach to assessing protected area management effectiveness worldwide, the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) has developed an overall assessment framework. In turn, WWF has developed a Rapid Assessment and Prioritization Methodology (RAPPAM) which was one of several instrumental efforts to develop assessment tools consistent with WCPA's framework.

WWF's Rapid Assessment and Prioritization Methodology was designed to be a broad, comparative assessment of the effectiveness of a protected area system. It can answer the following questions: What are the threats facing a number of protected areas and how serious are these threats? How do protected areas compare with one another in terms of infrastructure and management capacity? What is the level of urgency for taking action in

each protected area? What is the overall level of integrity and degradation of each protected area? How well do national and local policies support the effective management of protected areas? It also provides data for each protected area in a system, and can be used as a baseline for future monitoring and evaluation.

WWF's Rapid Assessment and Prioritization Methodology could be used as an instrument to promote better management practices of protected areas by providing analyses, measurable data and recommendations on overall effectiveness of the protected area management system for Georgia and later it could be used for the whole Caucasus ecoregion as well.

Analyses and recommendations on the overall effectiveness of the protected area management system for Georgia could be directly integrated into the ecoregional planning process adjusted for the Caucasus Ecoregion that is currently being undertaken. These also may be used by donor organizations (e.g. WB, GEF) involved in identifying future interventions in Georgia and in the ecoregion as a whole.

In order to facilitate an assessment of the overall effectiveness of the protected area management system in Georgia, WWF decided to implement the project aimed at conducting a special study on the subject. Other bodies collaborating with the WWF included the DPA, MoE, SDF, protected areas administrations, NGOs, and academic organizations.

The main goal of the assessment was:

- To promote improved management for protected areas through WWF's Rapid Assessment and Prioritization of Protected Areas Management methodology in Georgia.

Specific objectives included:

- Providing measurable data and analyses on overall effectiveness of the protected area management system of Georgia;
- Determining priorities and recommendations according to the vulnerability and urgency of each protected area in Georgia; and
- Identifying ecoregional priorities and

recommendations for the protected areas of Georgia.

Within the framework of the assessment, 48 national and international PA specialists, high-level decision-makers, field managers, NGO representatives and scientists took part in the First National Participatory Workshop on the rapid assessment and prioritization of the protected areas management system. The workshop was organized on July 9-11, 2003 in Bakuriani, Georgia. The three-day workshop included a 1-day training site visit to selected areas of the Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park.

The workshop was conducted in a very

constructive and open atmosphere and concluded with the identification of important priorities for future improvements. A number of conclusions, recommendations, and follow-up steps were formulated by the workshop participants at the end of the workshop. Participants approved the idea of a continuous application of the RAPPAM methodology at the national, regional and individual PA levels. Participants pointed to the applied value of the workshop outcomes and expressed hope that the workshop and the whole process of assessment would reflect well on the variety of challenges for the improvement of the management effectiveness of Georgia's protected areas system.



Plenary Session / National Participatory Workshop; / Photo WWF Caucasus

IMPLEMENTATION

Selection of protected areas

The purpose of the assessment was to cover a broad variety of representative protected areas in Georgia. For this purpose, 19 protected areas were selected for the assessment (see annex) from a formal list of PAs. The PAs located in areas outside of the control of the Georgian government due to political conflicts were excluded from the assessment because there was no information or data available for those PAs. Also, PAs still in the early stages of creation (land transfer and establishment of an administration) were excluded (e.g. newly declared PAs in eastern Georgia being implemented under the GEF/WB Georgia

Protected Areas Development Project).

From the selected 19 protected areas, two were assessed together (Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park and Borjomi State Nature Reserve) as they are both managed by one administration, have a joint staff and share a management plan. This reduced the number of PAs to 18.

Finally, 18 selected PAs were grouped according to their geographical location into 3 groups as shown in scheme 2:

GROUP 1	GROUP 2	GROUP 3
Eastern Georgia PA's	Central Georgia PA's	Western/South Georgia PA's
1. Lagodekhi SNR	1. Saguramo SNR	1. Kintrishi SNR
2. Vashlovani SNR	2. Algeti ANR	2. Ajameti SNR
3. Akhmeta SNR	3. Kazbegi SNR	3. Sataplia SNR
4. Mariamjvari SNR	4. Liakhvi SNR	4. Borjomi-Kharagauli NP & Borjomi SNR
5. Iori S	5. Gardabani S	5. Kolkheti NP
6. Koguri S		6. Katsoburi S
7. Chachuna S		

Scheme 2. PA groups according to their geographical location.

The range of selected protected areas subject to rapid assessment and prioritization was identified.

It has to be noted that “protected area category” is not equivalent to the “protected area administration”. The protected area category refers to “land” and its “special protective regime and status”, while the protected area administration refers to a “legal body (organization).” Consequently, any protected area management plans are prepared not for organizations, but for protected area categories and these management plans, in turn, are used by the organizations to plan, inter alia, its administrative, enforcement, financial, budgetary, etc., activities.



Floodplain forest area / Chachuna S
Photo WWF Caucasus

REVIEW OF EXISTING BACKGROUND DATA

Prior to the adoption and dissemination of the RAPPAM questionnaire, all background data was collected by the assessment working group (project group), which consisted of the representatives of WWF Caucasus, MoE, DPA and scientists from academic institutions. The collection and assessment of the background information covered existing data and reports

on protected areas, including specific information and maps, needs assessments, annual reviews and scientific studies reflecting present conditions of protected areas management - including all available data on rare, threatened, endangered species, key species, endemism, critical landscapes, levels of biodiversity, etc.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSES

The questionnaire was adapted to Georgian conditions on the premises of previously collected and assessed background data and information. After completion of preliminary analysis, in order to ensure consistent interpretation of questions and to foster discussion and analysis, WWF's rapid assessment methodology and questionnaires for the national participatory workshop were adopted and translated into the Georgian language.

The next step was to analyze the data, both for each protected area, as well as for a comparative analysis across the system. Analysis included the vulnerability, biological and social urgency, and the overall management effectiveness of the protected areas management system. The final step was the identification of recommendations (next steps) and prioritization of actions based on the findings on a national level.

ADAPTION OF QUESTIONNAIRES AND CONSISTENT INTERPRETATION OF QUESTIONS

Questionnaires were translated into the Georgian language with consideration given to Georgian commonly-used management practices and specific terminology. The Georgian version of the questionnaire contained many comments, descriptions, and even practical examples to allow experts to fully understand the sense of the terms used in the questionnaire.

The following pressures/threats specific to Georgian conditions were added to the

questionnaire:

- Pressure/threat caused by the construction and operation of infrastructure sites (e.g., main pipelines, high electric voltage lines, roads, railways, etc.) in areas neighboring the PAs.
- Pressure/threat caused by transportation (with or without motor vehicles) to and from the settlements, agricultural land plots or any other lands which are located within the boundaries of the PA, but at the same time are not the part of the PA lands.



Colchic Forests / Kintrishi SNR / Photo WWF Caucasus

The list of pressures and threats are shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1. List of Pressures and Threats used in the Evaluation of the Protected Areas In Georgia

Index according to the RAPPAM questionnaire	Pressure/ Threat Source	Pressure/ Threat Description
2.1	logging	according to the RAPPAM methodology
2.2	conversion of land use	according to the RAPPAM methodology
2.3	mining	including extraction of surface and ground waters
2.4	grazing	includes haymaking and pressure/threat caused by livestock crossing routes
2.5	dams	includes dams and any other hydrological constructions and their operation
2.6	hunting	includes both legal and illegal fisheries
2.7	collection of NTFP	according to the RAPPAM methodology
2.8	tourism and recreation	according to the RAPPAM methodology
2.9	waste disposal	including waste generated by the PA activities and visitors
2.10	semi-natural processes	according to the RAPPAM methodology
2.11	cross-boundary influences	according to the RAPPAM methodology
2.12	Invasive alien species	according to the RAPPAM methodology
2.13	construction and operation of infrastructure sites	includes main pipelines, high electric voltage lines, roads, railways etc) in neighboring lands to the PA areas
2.14	transportation	includes transportation (with or without motor vehicles) to and from the settlements, agricultural land plots or any other lands which are located within the boundaries of the PA, but at the same time are not the part of the PA lands

Additional questions related to mapping, land registration, etc., were added to the questionnaires.