



LEGEND
Ecoregion Border

CAUCASUS ECOREGION 2007-2008

The Caucasus is a unique mountain landscape that has traditionally been a crossroad where biological resources and civilizations mingle from Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East. This has not only shaped an exceptionally rich biodiversity of plants and animals but also of different cultures, empires and political systems. The geostrategic importance of the region has led to increasing international focus and challenges for the nations to find their political identity, creating stable societies and managing their natural resources wisely.

A regional plan for conservation of the region's unique biological resources, and for providing optimal environmental conditions for sustainable development and use of natural resources, was developed by more than 140 regional experts as a response to the rapid rate of socio-economic development. Increasing pressure on the Caucasus environment, with particular impacts on the spectacular mountain environment and their inhabitants, escalates environmental deterioration and disappearance of the region's unique fauna and flora and is depleting the life-support systems for people.

The creation of an effective ecological network of protected areas is a significant step forward in improving protection and sustainable use of the region's biological resources. This scheme calls for optimizing the region's transborder system of protected areas, which is becoming a major tool for conservation of the region's high biodiversity and improving of living conditions for the local population. Promotion of the ecological network for the Caucasus with particular emphasis on trans-boundary conservation and helping governments meet their obligations within the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity has become one of the main focus for the Caucasus Biodiversity Council (CBC).



Hartmut Jungius
CBC Chair

Acknowledgements

We offer special gratitude to the Governments of the Caucasus Ecoregion and to the donors who have stood with us and believe that regional cooperation is extremely important for Caucasus biodiversity conservation and environmental integrity; that by protecting the nature of the Caucasus, this will provide the conditions to bridge gaps and bring countries of the Ecoregion that much closer one to another.



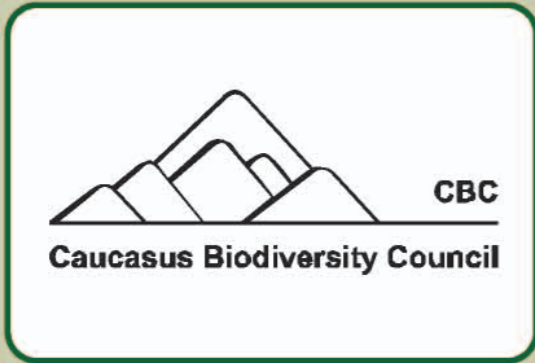
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CAUCASUS ECOREGION 2007-2008



CBC

Caucasus Biodiversity Council

The Caucasus Ecoregion, historically interpreted as the isthmus between the Black and Caspian Seas, includes Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, the North Caucasus portion of the Russian Federation, north-eastern Turkey, and part of north-western Iran. Insufficient coordination among these six countries used to hamper nature conservation efforts taken by governments, donor agencies and nongovernmental organizations.

In 1999-2000, during the preparation of the first Conservation Strategy for the Caucasus Ecoregion the stakeholders agreed on the urgent need to establish a coordination body to improve cooperation in the field of biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of natural resources in the Caucasus and requested WWF to coordinate the establishment of a coordination body, in close partnership with the stakeholders from the Region.

In 2001, following the request from WWF, the MacArthur Foundation provided funds for creating the "**Caucasus Biodiversity Council**" which joined representatives from governments, NGOs and the scientific community for all 6 countries, which are, actively involved in implementation of the regional conservation strategies and action plans.

Since then the Council proved itself indispensable for conservation in the region, not only by promoting and monitoring the implementation of the Ecoregion Conservation Plan (ECP) but also by facilitating implementation of projects, providing a forum for exchange of opinion and promotion of transborder activities. CBC has a central role in:

- Strengthening coordination of conservation action among partner countries, by developing and agreeing on joint strategies
- Building consensus between stakeholders on implementing regional strategies and projects.
- Providing credibility of the conservation movement in the region to donor agencies by coordinating and representing views and positions of Governments, NGOs, and the Scientific Community.
- Promoting conservation programmes according to policies and standards required by donor agencies, based on objectives and targets of the CBC.
- Monitoring implementation of the CBC
- Coordinating and implementing urgent activities for fulfillment of the CBC Programme of Work on Protected Areas.

Thanks to the successful implementation of these activities during the past 8 years, CBC has become an important mechanism for promoting conservation in the region, for building confidence vis a vis donor agencies and the conservation community, including Governments and NGOs in the region. This role will become more and more important in the years to come, in view of the growing pressure from development in the region, e.g. from the energy sector. The process of Globalization has also reached the Caucasus. This requires that nature conservation and issues of natural resource management will have to be addressed to an increasing extent on a multilateral or even regional basis. The Council is an appropriate tool the help addressing these issues and building consensus between all relevant players in this process.



CPAF

Caucasus Protected Areas Fund

The Caucasus Protected Areas Fund (CPAF) is a charitable foundation that promotes sustainable environmental conservation in the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia). Fundamentally, it acts as a financing mechanism that is designed largely to support the objectives of the Eco-regional Conservation Plan (ECP) in these three countries.

The CPAF was designed to provide grants to cover the operating costs of protected areas (PAs) that are designated as priorities under the ECP which can, potentially, match the budgetary contributions made to PAs from the three regional governments. CPAF will seek to work with the PAs and respective ministries to ensure that funds are properly spent. In order for the PA networks to make a contribution to regional biodiversity conservation in the context of sustainable development, they must be financially sustainable - ensuring that is the mission of the CPAF.

Funding and Fundraising

The CPAF's initial endowment capital of € 8 million has been funded by the German government (through BMZ and KfW), WWF, and Conservation International (CI). In addition, the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) and WWF will support CPAF's operating costs during its start-up phase. A € 50 million endowment would be required in order to enable the CPAF to be able to offer grants totally more than € 1.7 million annually. Consequently fundraising will continue to be one of the primary focuses of the CPAF. In order to provide for maximum flexibility in fundraising, CPAF was structured in a manner where it can accommodate gifts, and those that have not only been designated to its main endowment fund. Allocations can also be made to so-called 'sinking funds' that must be spent over a defined period of time. Such a mechanism will allow for the expenditure for main project funds as well as individually designated country funds, which means that the € 50 million target amount is a flexible amount and its allocation depends on the type of funding received.

Current Activities

Since commencing its operations in 2008, the CPAF has developed a Framework Agreement that sets forth the principles which will govern provided grants to all the recipient countries. The Agreement with Georgia was finalised and signed in December 2008, and agreements with Armenia and Azerbaijan are expected to be completed in 2009.

The CPAF provided its first grant to Georgia's Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park (BKNP) at the beginning of this year. BKNP is one of the region's most important PAs, and will be the object of CPAF's pilot project for Georgia. Discussions on the pilot projects in furtherance of the CPAF's core mission - to support the region's PAs on a longer term basis - have also been a significant part of the CPAF's current work. Proposal submissions from Armenia and Georgia are expected during the first half of 2009, which will be probably focused on BKNP in Georgia and the Khosrov Nature Reserve in Armenia. The CPAF foundation also hopes that Azerbaijan will present a pilot project sometime this year.

A key element of the CPAF's fundraising approach is outreach and increasing the level of awareness of its activities. The CPAF's website (www.caucasus-naturefund.org) offers an in-depth look at the activities of the organisation for this very purpose. CPAF aims to further ensure a high level of transparency in all of its operations. A brochure was published and distributed during the June 2008 conference of the UN Convention on Biodiversity that was held in Bonn Germany. The CPAF will soon be putting together a mailing list, with a newsletter service to keep interested parties up-to-date, and this is an essential part of the effort to better communicate its message.

A Bright Future

Although the CPAF has only recently commenced its activities, its impact is already beginning to be felt. 2009 promises to be an eventful and productive year, building on an already solid foundation that the CPAF has constructed. Despite a worldwide atmosphere of economic crisis, the CPAF looks forward to positive prospects for fundraising and grant making efforts. Long-term sustainable funding for PA operating costs requires long-term solutions that look beyond current difficulties. In short, the CPAF continues to be confident that its business model will enable it to be able to support a bright future for conservation in the Caucasus.



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CEPF

CEPF Investment for the Caucasus Hotspot

The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) is a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, the Global Environment Facility, the Government of Japan, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the World Bank.

One of CEPF's fundamental goals is to ensure that civil society is actively engaged in biodiversity conservation efforts. CEPF aims to provide strategic assistance for non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community groups and other civil society partners in safeguarding the earth's biodiversity hotspots.

CEPF commenced its work in the Caucasus Hotspot in 2003 with a preliminary phase and developed the Caucasus Ecosystem Profile, which is also known as the CEPF Investment Portfolio for the Caucasus. WWF Caucasus Programme Office brought together more than 130 experts from the six Caucasian countries to consider how CEPF could best add value to the region's conservation needs and define conservation targets at species, sites and corridors levels. The Profile focus is to conserve the hotspot's 50 globally threatened species, most of which are found in key sites within the following five corridors:

- Greater Caucasus Corridor
- Caspian Corridor
- West Lesser Caucasus Corridor
- East Lesser Caucasus Corridor
- Hyrcan Corridor

The following four strategic directions guide CEPF's approach and the range of projects financed by CEPF are linked to one or more priority directions:

- Support civil society efforts that promote transboundary cooperation and improve protected area systems in five target corridors;
- Strengthen mechanisms to conserve biodiversity of the Caucasus Hotspot with emphasis on species, site and corridor outcomes;
- Implement models demonstrating sustainable resource use in five target corridors;
- Increase the awareness and commitment of decision-makers to biodiversity conservation in five targeted corridors.

The transparency of the Ecosystem Profile development process and clearly defined conservation targets are key elements for its successful implementation. Moreover, effective cooperation at regional level and strong partnership among different key stakeholders significantly contributes to the CEPF conservation impact in the Hotspot.

The CEPF Ecosystem Profile for the Caucasus was officially launched in May 2004 with an allocation of \$8.5 million for the entire region over a period of five years and will be concluded in 2009. The CEPF investment is mutually managed through the effort of CEPF and the WWF Caucasus Programme Office. Within the scope of the CEPF Investment, over 120 grants have been officially agreed with wide involvement of non-governmental, governmental, scientific sectors and local communities. The host of grants range from local NGOs and scientific institutions to international organizations. A significant degree of both direct and indirect conservation outcomes have been achieved on the ground through grant-making to civil society:

- Contributions to establishment, extending and strengthening protected areas system;
- Species and sites oriented conservation activities;
- Establishing and strengthening transboundary cooperation;
- Capacity building of civil society to be directly involved in biodiversity conservation activities;
- Initiation establishing of regional biodiversity monitoring network;
- Raising public environmental awareness with a special focus on increasing the value of biodiversity and achieving conservation;
- Application of approaches necessary for sustainable natural resource use;
- Developing alternative livelihoods for local communities;
- Enabling national, regional and international partnerships to support biodiversity conservation.

CEPF investment in the Caucasus Hotspot was the first and unique opportunity for the region to strengthen and coordinate transboundary cooperation and initiate new regional interactions for biodiversity conservation in the Caucasus. The corridor approach provided unprecedented opportunities for promoting transboundary partnership, as each corridor crosses the boundaries of two or more countries of the Hotspot. Caucasus Biodiversity Council promotes effective coordination among CEPF funded conservation projects, initiatives and interactions. Also, the Council contributes to building regional level partnerships among different groups of stakeholders.



Protected Areas For a Living Planet - Caucasus Ecoregion

The Protected Areas for a Living Planet (PA4LP) Caucasus Ecoregion Project represents an integral part of the **WWF's Protected Areas for a Living Planet Programme** that is being implemented in five Ecoregions, with the financial support of **MAVA Fondation pour la Protection de la Nature**.

The Protected Areas for a Living Planet (PA4LP) Caucasus Ecoregion Project contributes to the effective implementation of the Programme of Work on Protected Areas (PoWPA) under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The overall goal of the PA4LP Caucasus Ecoregion Project is to enable parties to CBD from the Caucasus Ecoregion (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russia and Turkey) to achieve the 2010/2012 set targets of PoWPA.

The Protected Areas for a Living Planet Caucasus Ecoregion Project is the only project in the Caucasus Ecoregion that is actively working to build strong partnerships among key stakeholders (GO and NGO representatives, donor institutions & scientists) within the field of protected areas, at both national and regional levels, under the umbrella of CBD PoWPA.

Programme Approaches & Activities

WWF's Protected Areas for a Living Planet Programme has the following approaches and key elements to support the PoWPA implementation in the Caucasus:

- 1. National Coordination Committees:** Coordination Committees consisting of governmental, non-governmental and scientific representatives have been established and they are now successfully functioning in each country of the Ecoregion. The Committees (i) support overall coordination and implementation of the PA4LP Caucasus Ecoregion Project at national level and (ii) ensure favourable conditions for the successful implementation of the Project through setting priorities and engaging key partners and stakeholders in the Project implementation process.
- 2. Legislative and Institutional Gaps and Barriers:** Legislative and institutional gaps and barriers that impede the effective establishment and management of protected areas have been assessed in the Ecoregion, and activities to address urgent gaps and barriers have been initiated.
- 3. Capacity Development:** Capacity development needs of protected area systems have been assessed in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey and the relevant Action Plans prepared in supporting the capacity development process. In addition, staff from relevant governmental agencies will be trained in Conservation Action Planning to further develop capacity.

4. Management Effectiveness: Management effectiveness of protected area systems in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russia and Turkey has been assessed and relevant recommendations on how to improve the management process were developed.

5. Sustainable Financing: Protected areas financial needs will be assessed and sustainable financing plans will be developed in at least three countries of the Ecoregion.

6. Monitoring of PoWPA implementation: "The Caucasus Biodiversity Monitoring Network – Protected Areas" is being developed, which was co-funded by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund. This network will include key indicators through which the PoWPA implementation will be assessed and monitored in the Caucasus.

7. Communications: PoWPA and its Action Guide have been translated into national languages, and published and shared with key stakeholders in all five countries. The Advocacy and Communications Regional Strategy and corresponding National Advocacy and Communications Action Plans for PoWPA which stress the importance of protected areas have been developed and their implementation initiated.

Caucasus Biodiversity Council promotes, coordinates and monitors the PA4LP Caucasus Ecoregion Project implementation at regional level. The Council members are also members of the relevant National Coordination Committees, and such approach ensures information sharing and coordination between national and regional levels. In addition, the Council identifies and contributes to the implementation of urgent activities of PoWPA.



The IUCN South Caucasus Programme and its support to CBC

The IUCN Programme Office for the Southern Caucasus was established in October 2006, and has been participating in the Caucasus Biodiversity Council since June 2007. IUCN supports the Ecoregional Conservation Plan and CBC because it is believed that biodiversity conservation and sustainable natural resource use in the Caucasus can only be achieved by a broad coalition of all those committed to nature conservation in this region. CBC serves as an important forum for this coalition. IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, remains as the largest and oldest environmental network. Founded in 1948, it is a membership association with more than 1,000 government and NGO members, and almost 11,000 volunteer scientists serving in more than 160 countries. In the Caucasus, there are three IUCN member states (Georgia, Turkey and Russia) and approximately ten active NGO members. IUCN's mission is to influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is done in an equitable fashion, and that it is ecologically sustainable in achieving such a mission.

Important features of IUCN's structure that are particularly relevant to the Caucasus include its six global Commissions, such as the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), and the Species Survival Commission (SSC). For instance, WCPA issues PA Management Planning Guidelines that have been translated into Georgian, and then are utilised for PA planning in Georgia. Currently, there are approximately 50 IUCN Commission Members throughout the Caucasus. IUCN Members meet every four years at the IUCN World Conservation Congress. IUCN convened a workshop at the last Congress that met in Barcelona Spain in October 2008, which focused on finding solutions to support conservation in the Caucasus. Caucasus Biodiversity Council representatives were there to take part in the proceedings.

Activities of IUCN in Caucasus

The IUCN Secretariat has been represented by the IUCN Program Office for the Southern Caucasus (POSC) since 2006 (www.iucn.org/caucasus). IUCN POSC has brought global and European initiatives (such as Countdown 2010), processes and tools to the region. Activities implemented by IUCN POSC include support to the development of a draft strategy and national action plan in support of the protected area system in Georgia, the development of biodiversity indicators for the Southern Caucasus States and a TEMATEA national consultation that includes capacity building processes in Georgia. IUCN POSC closely collaborates with its members and partners in the region through a range of joint projects. With particular relevance to CBC, for instance, IUCN supported the Protected Area Management Effectiveness Assessment within the 2012 Caucasus protected areas project in December 2008.

IUCN's support to CBC

IUCN has communication and collaboration for the benefit of sustainability at the very heart of its mission. We know that it is not enough to promote cooperation verbally. Various partners from all sectors of Society need to be won for effective, regular collaboration. This is why IUCN values the ECP and CBC so highly. CBC acts as an instrument for coordination between Governments and NGOs, and as a forum to further develop our joint vision for conservation. Thereby, CBC also contributes to meeting IUCN's objectives for the Caucasus.



Transboundary Joint Secretariat for the Southern Caucasus

The Transboundary Joint Secretariat for the Southern Caucasus (TJS) promotes cooperation on biodiversity conservation between Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and facilitates implementation of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development's (BMZ) and KfW Entwicklungs Bank's (KfW) Nature Protection Programme for the Southern Caucasus, part of the German Government's Caucasus Initiative. The TJS is funded by KfW and operates within the framework of bilateral agreements between KfW and the respective environment ministries of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The BMZ/KfW Nature Protection Programme for the Southern Caucasus contributes to the fulfilment of the Ecoregional Conservation Plan by financing the creation of new protected areas, contributing to the funding and participating in the management of the Caucasus Protected Areas Fund, and promoting transboundary cooperation between adjacent protected areas located in different countries.

New national parks

BMZ/KfW is jointly financing three new national parks: in the area of Lake Arpi in Armenia, Samur-Yalama in Azerbaijan and Javakheti in Georgia. The projects are being implemented under the supervision of the respective environment ministries. The TJS supported the ministries during the tender process, and it has also developed regional master concepts to guide the preparation of national park management plans. The TJS is currently facilitating the preparation of national guidelines for protected areas management planning in Armenia and Georgia; this activity draws from the regional master concepts.

Transboundary protected areas

The new Lake Arpi and Javakheti national parks in Armenia and Georgia lie in the Shirak-Javakheti Transboundary Priority Conservation Area; a territory of approximately 3,000 km² with an average altitude of 2,023 metres, and straddling the border area between Turkey, Armenia, and Georgia. The governments of Armenia and Georgia have agreed to establish coordination between the two new national parks with the aim of developing a common vision and objectives and to work together to implement joint programmes. The TJS is facilitating the establishment of a coordination mechanism that will include representatives from the respective environment ministries, local government and the national park administrations.

Creation of biosphere reserves

BMZ/KfW have agreed with the governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia to finance, as part of a further phase of their regional nature protection programme, the creation of biosphere reserves in accordance with the principles of UNESCO's Man and Biosphere Programme. The biosphere reserves, the first in the southern Caucasus, will be established in the southern part of Siunik Marz in Armenia, Zakatala-Balakan in Azerbaijan and Kazbegi in Georgia. Implementation is planned to start in 2010 following the completion of detailed feasibility studies which will provide the basis for the design of the projects. The TJS is facilitating the biosphere reserve programme by providing training for policy holders and other experts, who will be involved in implementation.

Support to the Caucasus Protected Areas Fund

Expansion of the protected areas network will be of limited value if ongoing operations cannot be funded. To address that concern, in 2007 the government of Germany, WWF and Conservation International established the Caucasus Protected Areas Fund (CPAF) with initial endowment funding of about € 7.5 million. The TJS is supporting the CPAF by assisting the environment ministries with the preparation of their first proposals to the fund.



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SPECIES SURVIVAL COMMISSION
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Leopard in the Caucasus

The leopard in the Caucasus is under threat; only some small and isolated population nuclei remain in the whole ecoregion. The most obvious problem facing the leopard in the Caucasus ecoregion is the alarming reduction in its distribution area, resulting in a strongly fragmented population with an unknown, but without any doubt severely reduced number of animals left in the wild. The workshop participants have analysed the threats to the survival of the leopard, the knowledge or capacities lacking for its conservation, and the factors favouring conservation measures.

To save the survival of the species in the Caucasus, urgent conservation actions are needed. Significant investment into the conservation of the leopard is justified as this charismatic large cat is both an umbrella species – its conservation will also include the preservation of the prey species and their habitats – and a flagship species – the leopard is the ideal carrier of the conservation idea to the local population, between the range states, and to the international conservation community.

WWF and national NGOs have made considerable efforts in assessing the status of the leopard in the Caucasus and developed approaches for its conservation in recent years. Considering the high ecological, cultural, and political diversity of the region, the poor economic situation in certain countries, and the fact that the leopard as a large carnivore is a conflicting species, it is obvious that the successful conservation of the species will not only depend on the knowledge and understanding of the experts, but rather on the favourable reception and implementation of conservation strategy and action plan. The present situation of the leopard and its conservation in the Caucasus were summarised in six original papers, compiled as Status and Conservation of the Leopard in the Caucasus.

CBC, WWF and IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group have come together and agreed on a three-step approach to assure the further development of a Caucasus leopard conservation programme:

- Compile the present knowledge in a baseline information report
- Develop a conservation strategy for the leopard in the entire Caucasus ecoregion
- Implement the conservation strategy through the development of National Action Plans

As a result of a Strategic Planning Workshop held in May, 2007 in Tbilisi, Georgia with participation of experts, representatives of governmental organisations, national NGOs and international conservation organisations, including CBC members, the Strategy has been carefully drafted. In 2008 it was reviewed and approved by CBC. CBC members have also supported approval of the Strategy by relevant national agencies and this would initiate the development of national action plans in the majority of the countries of the region.

CBC will further oversee and support the action planning process, as well as co-ordination and implementation of regional-wide conservation projects and actions to further ensure survival of the leopard – a flagship species for the Caucasus.

A long-term vision for the conservation of the leopard in the Caucasus ecoregion was defined as: "Leopards and all wildlife prosper in natural habitats across the Caucasus ecoregion in harmony with people". To achieve the vision, the immediate goal has been formulated as: "Ensure the conservation and sustainable management of viable meta-populations of leopard and wild prey and their habitats and build sustainable coexistence mechanisms with local communities across the Caucasus ecoregion".

CAUCASUS ECOREGION 2007-2008

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Published in June, 2009 by
WWF Caucasus Programme Office
Tbilisi, Georgia



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