



Caring for our Lake our Future

The Management Plan for
Lake Shkodra Nature Park
A Summary

Photo © Tonin Macaj



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Lake Shkodra: plentiful nature, long human history

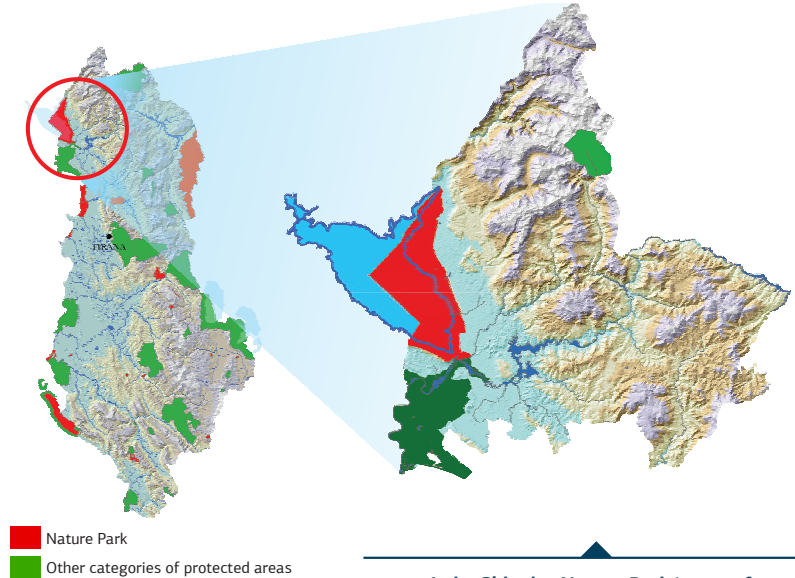
Lake Shkodra is the largest lake in the Balkan Peninsula, traversing the border between Albania and Montenegro. The lake's ecosystem and the associated wetlands, floodplains and karstic formations support a rich and unique flora and fauna, making it a hotspot for biodiversity in Europe.

The abundant archaeological, historical and cultural sites testify to the rich cultural heritage of the Lake Shkodra region dating from prehistoric times. Currently there are about 600,000 inhabitants in the Lake Shkodra basin, 170,000 of which live in the Albanian part.

The economic activities in the region, in particular agriculture, fisheries, forestry, tourism and recreation are closely dependent

Protected Areas Network in Albania

Nature Park "Lake Shkodra"



Lake Shkodra Nature Park is one of the 23 protected areas of this category in Albania.



Photo © Edoardo Scepi

on the use of the region's natural resources which in turn affects the lake ecosystem. To ensure the protection and sustainable use of the lake's ecosystem and natural resources, Albanian and Montenegrin authorities have established protected areas covering the lake and part of its watershed.

A complex and dynamic freshwater ecosystem

► The ecosystem of Lake Shkodra critically depends on its watershed, the surrounding land area that drains into the lake. Lake Shkodra's watershed covers an area of about 5,500 km² of which 1,030 km² is within Albania. Additionally, through the Buna River, the lake is part of the wider Drin-Buna river basin, covering some 19,000 km². The ecological connection with the downstream ecosystems of Buna and the Adriatic Sea is of vital importance for many migratory and marine fishes, such as sturgeon, eel, flathead grey mullet, seabass and others.

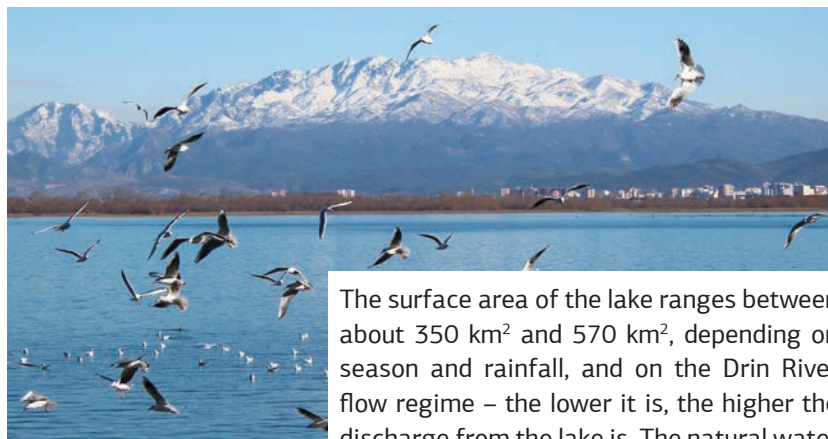


Photo © Tonin Macaj

The surface area of the lake ranges between about 350 km² and 570 km², depending on season and rainfall, and on the Drin River flow regime – the lower it is, the higher the discharge from the lake is. The natural water level fluctuation increases the diversity of habitats and ensures the survival of many plant and animal species that depend on them for breeding or feeding.

Photo © picturepartners/Shutterstock.com



The European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*), a globally threatened species.

Photo © Porojinca Stelian/Shutterstock.com



The globally threatened Dalmatian pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*) nests in the Montenegrin part of Lake Shkodra.



- East Atlantic Flyway
- Adriatic Flyway
- Black Sea & Mediterranean Flyway

Water birds from Central, North, and Eastern Europe prefer to migrate to their wintering grounds in the Mediterranean Sea over the Balkans and the Adriatic Sea, the so-called **Adriatic Flyway**



Photo © smishonja/Shutterstock.com

The whiskered tern (*Chlidonias hybrida*), a threatened species in Europe, regularly nests at Lake Shkodra

The lake supports about 50 fish species, 37 of which are native, including a number of endemic species which can only be found in the lake or other waterbodies in the Balkan Peninsula. About 280 species of birds have been recorded at Lake Shkodra so far, including many rare and threatened species, such as the whiskered tern, Dalmatian pelican and squacco heron. With its diverse habitats and abundant fish populations, Lake Shkodra constitutes an important breeding, wintering and resting area for hundreds of thousands of migratory birds on the Adriatic Flyway.

The limits to our use of natural resources

► The rich biodiversity and natural resources of Lake Shkodra are threatened by pollution, unsustainable use practices of natural resources and poor and inappropriate land management. Surface and ground water is affected by organic pollution from untreated sewage from villages and towns around the lake, and also by chemical pollution from industrial operations in Montenegro.

There has been a noticeable decrease in fish catch over the last few decades, both in terms of total quantities and species structure. Fish resources in the lake are being depleted through over-exploitation, use of illegal or unsustainable methods, competition from non-native species and degradation of habitats by pollution and lake shore development and destruction.



Photo © Albanian Ornithological Society

Nesting birds are particularly sensitive to disturbance

The fish stocks of migratory species in the lake have also been impacted by illegal fishing, and unsustainable practices in the Buna river, in particular by the uncontrolled use of fishing traps (weirs). The management of fish resources in the lake is further exacerbated by the lack of effective transboundary management.

Illegal hunting has been a persistent threat to waterfowl over the last two decades which has driven down the number of species and the total number of birds at the lake, in combination with other impacts, such as changes in food availability, water quality, climate, and disturbance from human activities. The decrease in the population of water birds is also related to uncontrolled and unsustainable hunting in adjacent areas, in particular Velipoja and the delta of the Buna River.

Uncontrolled construction along the lake shore degrades natural habitats



Photo © Nicola Gilio

Photo © Trofimov Pavel/Shutterstock.com



The European sea sturgeon (*Acipenser sturio*) has not been recorded in Lake Shkodra for more than 20 years

Towards more effective management of transboundary Lake Shkodra

► The first steps towards the protection of lake’s biodiversity and natural resources were made in Montenegro by the proclamation of the Lake Skadar National Park in 1983. In the 1990s, the whole of Lake Shkodra was designated a Wetland of International Importance (Ramsar site), and in 2005, the Albanian part was proclaimed a Nature Park, covering 26,535 hectares. The Albanian part of Lake Shkodra is also included in the Ramsar site “Lake Shkodra and River Buna,” proclaimed in 2006.

Efforts towards a more effective management of the lake’s biodiversity and natural resources have gained momentum with the development of management plans during the last decade. The Management Plan for Lake Shkodra Nature Park was completed in 2012 for the period 2012-2021.



Photo © Tonin Macaj

The main responsibility for the implementation of the management plan lies with the Regional Administration for Protected Areas (RAPA), based in Shkodra, as part of the National Agency for Protected Areas (NAPA). The work of the administration is guided by the following Vision for the Lake Shkodra Nature Park, set out in the Management Plan:



“Shkodra Lake is a well preserved and wisely used trans-boundary ecosystem, offering possibilities for sustainable development activities.”

In order to achieve this Vision, the following management objectives are identified:



Improve control and management of the protected area by focusing on the legislative and institutional framework, capacity strengthening and transboundary cooperation, as well as sustainable financing for protected area management.



Guarantee the water quality and fluctuation levels, suitable for aquatic communities and for public use.



Protect biodiversity and improve wildlife management, especially important habitats and species.



Improve protection and management of landscape, cultural resources and heritage.



Support the sustainable use of the lake area: fishery, forestry, organic agriculture, stock breeding, eco-tourism, medicinal plants, handicrafts and other traditional products.



Enhance information, promotion and education and strengthen community relationships for lake management.

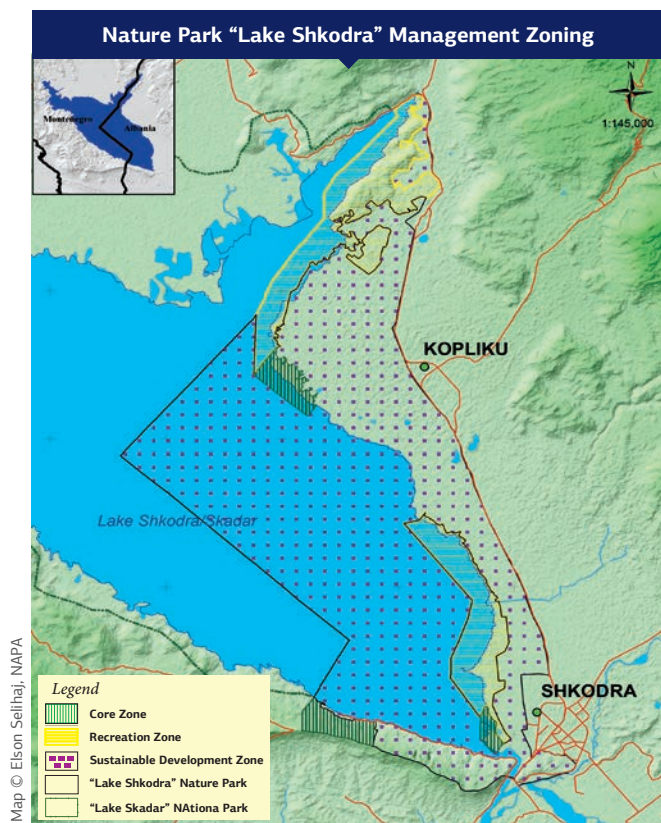
Management zoning of Lake Shkodra Nature Park

► Management zoning is used as a tool to spatially define land use objectives and restrictions, in a form understandable to stakeholders and users. The Decision of the Council of Ministers of 2005 on the proclamation of Lake Shkodra Nature Park establishes the following management zones:

- *Core zone: areas with high conservation values, managed primarily for nature conservation*
- *Recreational zone: areas managed for visitories use, scientific research, education and awareness raising.*
- *Sustainable development zone: areas managed to protect natural ecosystems and use natural resources sustainably*

The Management Plan includes a revised zoning in line with the Biosphere Reserve concept of UNESCO, with the aim to support the achievement of its objectives. This proposal was further revised in 2016 by the Shkodra RAPA in close consultation with local stakeholders in the frame of the project “Supporting the Long-Term Sustainable Management of Transboundary Lake Skadar”, and aligning with the Management Plan’s objectives.

The rules guiding the human activities in the different zones of the park are as follows:



ACTIVITY	ZONE		
	Core zone	Traditional use zone	Sustainable use zone
Scientific research (with a permit)	✓	✓	✓
Hiking (along marked trails)	✓	✓	✓
Horse/mule/donkey riding	✓	✓	✓
Motor vehicles (on existing roads)	✗	✓	✓
Sailing/motor boats	✗	✓	✓
Camping (in designated places)	✗	✓	✓
Campfires (in designated places)	✗	✓	✓
Collection of wild animals and plants	✗	✓	✓
Grazing (with a permit)	✗	✓	✓
Traditional agriculture	✗	✓	✓
Wood harvesting	✗	✓	✓
Commercial/subsistence fishing	✗	✓	✓
Recreational fishing	✗	✓	✓
Hunting	✗	✗	✗
Building of soft-tourism infrastructure (trails, shelters, information boards, etc.)	✓	✓	✓
Construction of new tourist facilities	✗	✓	✓
Construction of new roads	✗	✓	✓
Reconstruction of existing buildings	✓	✓	✓
Reconstruction of existing roads	✓	✓	✓

A growing spirit of cooperation

► The commitment to collaborative management of the protected area was best demonstrated in the development of its new management zoning. In 2015, the Shkodra RAPA engaged with scientists from the Shkodra University and with local fishermen, initiating a consultation process aimed at agreeing upon the rules that should be applied concerning the use of natural resources for the Albanian part of the lake. The Albanian fishermen, organized through their own Fishery Management Association (FMO), have an important stake in the sustainable use of the lake's fisheries. During the process they learned about the concept of management zoning and discussed different zoning options that would allow continued fishing to sustain their livelihoods while protecting the key fish spawning grounds and other important habitats for the lake's wildlife. Moreover, an agreement has been reached between the FMO and the Shkodra RAPA to team up for the enforcement of the lake's new zoning plan and rules.

The managers at the Shkodra RAPA and Skadar Lake National Park in Montenegro coordinate their action plans to address shared challenges and to maintain regular exchange of information and experiences. The Shkodra RAPA is currently involving all key stakeholders in updating the action plan for implementation of the current management plan for the period 2016-2021. It also provides the opportunity to mobilize support from local communities and NGOs, including the FMO, towards achieving some of the most challenging management objectives, in particular the sustainable use of the natural resources, such as fish, forests, medicinal plants and land.



The Management Plan can be downloaded from the following link:
<http://www.akzm.gov.al>

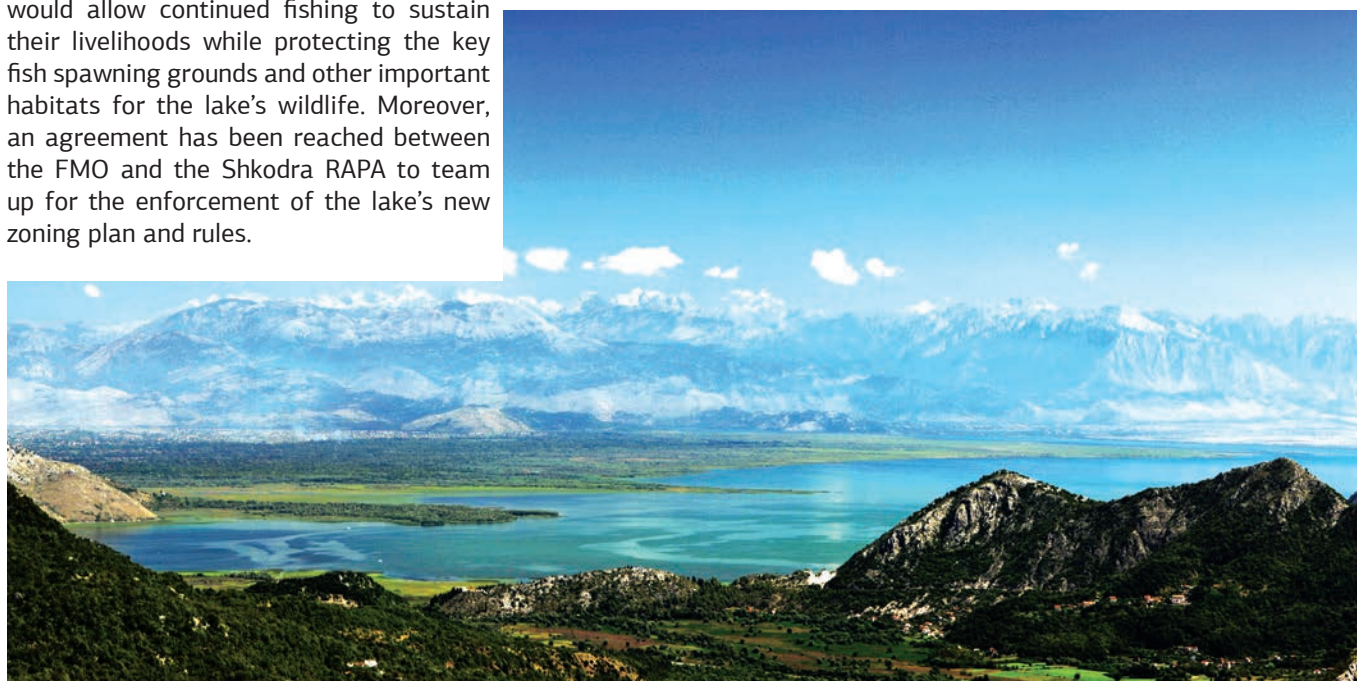


Photo Flickr© Toma Koma



Main points of interest and activities

1. Poseljani village
2. Rijeka Crnojevića
3. Žabljak Crnojevića
4. National Park Skadar
Lake visitor centre
5. Pelican colony at Pančeva Oka
Reserve, observation tower
6. The Eye of Shegan
7. Zogaj village
8. Shiroka village
9. Tarabosh Mountain summit
10. Rosafa castle



For more information visit the **Facebook page** of the Regional Administration for Protected Areas-Shkodra
Administrata e Zonave të Mbrojtura, Shkodër

Additional information is also available at the website of the National Agency for Protected Areas
www.akzm.gov.al

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