



NEWSLETTER

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Zakatala Nature Reserve, Azerbaijan. ©H.Müller

CAUCASUS ECOREGION NEWSLETTER

News from the Caucasus - Issue 1, 2013

Developing the Protected Area System of Armenia

The project “Developing the Protected Area System of Armenia: Improving Capacity Building and Management Regime” initiated in 2010 is supported by UNDP/GEF, Armenia's Ministry of Nature Protection and implemented jointly by WWF Armenia and Environmental Project Implementation Unit of the Ministry of Nature Protection.

The project will make significant investment in developing national protected area system by expansion of the existing Zangezur sanctuary and establishment of Khustup and Gnishik sanctuaries in Syunik and Vayots Dzor Provinces, which will be better equipped to include and conserve currently underrepresented ecosystems (Mountain Steppe, High Mountain Subalpine, High Mountain Alpine) and associated species. While improving management of productive landscapes the project will also help to promote connectivity and alleviate poverty in the communities. The project will enhance the environmental, financial, social, and institutional sustainability of Armenia's protected area system.

In February-March 2013 the mapping of the area of the three sanctuaries was completed, the boundaries were defined, and the fifteen adjacent communities signed decisions of the community councils as an approval of sanctuary boundaries. The management and business plans of three sanctuaries including the area maps will be submitted to the Government for approval and consecutively, on the ground activities will be initiated. The project is expected to be completed by 2014.

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European bison can return to its historical range

European bison (*Bison bonasus*) is the largest and one of the rarest herbivores in Europe. Historically it was distributed throughout Western, Central, Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. Today the bison can only be found in one of the Caucasus countries - Russia.

In 2012, WWF-Azerbaijan in collaboration with Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources initiated the project “Feasibility study of Bison re-introduction in Azerbaijan” which was supported by Transboundary Joint Secretariat (TJS) and REC Caucasus. The objective of the project was to research several potential sites in Azerbaijan, exam their suitability as re-introduction site to build up a viable population of European bison in the future.

At the beginning 11 potential sites in the Caucasus Mountains and two sites in the steppe regions were selected for assessment. During fieldworks all possible sites were visited in Greater Caucasus. The conditions and possibilities for the re-introduction of each site was identified in the visited areas.

As a result of this monitoring it can be supposed with certainty - Azerbaijan has sufficient suitable habitats to sustain a viable population of bison. The bison can serve as an important flagship species to preserve the connectivity throughout the mountains range and stimulant to perform environmental impact assessment studies e.g. related to large mammal migration for new developments within the Caucasus Mountains. The local people are very much in favour of reintroduction, as well as the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources which is very supportive of the project. By end of the project the comprehensive report will be prepared outlining all aspects of bison reintroduction and further steps.

We hope some day we will smile and say: welcome back home bison!

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Bison survives harsh winter

WWF and Teberdinsky nature reserve helped the bison survive the harsh winter by bringing them hay, compound feed, and checking on the condition of the animals.

The bison are brought to the Caucasus from breeding centers in Central Russia, within the bison reintroduction program carried out by WWF and OJSC "Northern Caucasus Resorts".

To make sure that the reintroduced animals survive the winter and adopt to the unusual conditions of the Caucasus, WWF with support of Tsent-Soya Ltd provided bison with compound feed. Besides that, staff of Teberdinsky strict nature reserve prepared several haystacks in the bison habitat. During the whole winter they kept bringing new hay for the animals, no matter what the weather conditions were.

Check on the bison group at the end of the winter confirmed that the animals were in good condition, well-fed and healthy.

In Summer of 2013, WWF is planning to bring new bison to the nature reserve.

The bison is the largest land mammal in Europe, and the continent's only wild bull that survived to the present day. The bison is now listed in the Red Book of Russia as a species threatened with extinction. Since 1996, WWF-Russia with support from WWF-Germany has been implementing a program to create a population of wild bison in the forests of the European Russia. With the help of this program, by 2008, the number of bison in Orlov, Bryansk, Kaluga and Vladimir regions of Russia exceeded 150. This size is enough for the population to reproduce itself independently in the wild. After that, in 2009, WWF started to restore the European bison populations in the Caucasus mountains in the southwest of Russia. Now WWF is implementing the program together with OJSC "Northern Caucasus Resorts".

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The Book of Forest

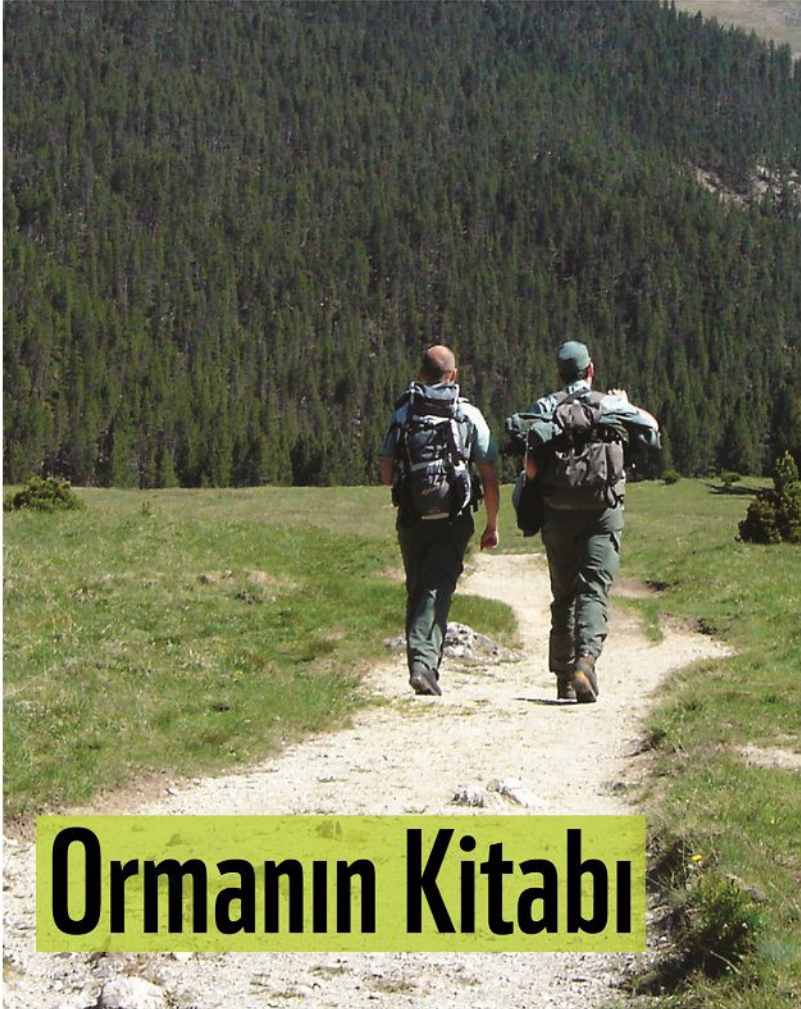
According to the UN world's population will hit nine billion in about forty years. This will inevitably increase the demand on natural resources and will boost the process of biodiversity loss, particularly in developing countries. That is why biodiversity conservation, sustainable use of natural resources and the dilemma of socio-economic development of people will be major issues for the future of our fragile planet. Forests will be perhaps the most adversely effected ecosystems and wise use and protection of forests ensuring the livelihoods of people will be challenging topics for managers, conservationists as well as general public. Therefore, there is a

need for popularizing forest conservation and improve our management. "The Book of Forest", a recently published book by WWF-Turkey and its collaborators, provides introductory level information on forest conservation. Being composed of three parts, the first part of the book covers principles of ecology and introduces the specific topics of forest ecosystem, biodiversity and biodiversity monitoring. Second part presents an overview of Turkey's forests, forest hotspots and brief guides on trees, birds and mammal species. The last section of the book provides practical information on conducting field observations and surveys in forests. WWF-Turkey hopes this book will be a guidebook for forest and protected area rangers and beginners as well to encourage them getting involved in forest conservation.

"The Book of Forest" was published under WWF's Protected Areas for a Living Planet Programme with financial support from MAVA Foundation and PAN Parks Federation in collaboration with Ministry of Forest and Water Affairs and UNDP-Turkey under GEF funded "Enhancing Forest Protected Areas Management System in Turkey Project".

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Promoting green economy in Georgia



WWF-Caucasus, UNEP and Georgia's Ministry of Environment Protection presented first in the Caucasus TEEB Scoping Study on the 6th Biodiversity in Europe Conference held on 18 April 2013 in Batumi, Georgia. The TEEB Scoping Study identifies policy priorities, which will form the basis of a TEEB country study for Georgia, which would make recommendations for meeting policy priorities. The study will be launched later this year.

The TEEB Scoping Study for Georgia identifies

policy priorities, which will form the basis of a TEEB country study for Georgia. The country study would make recommendations for meeting policy priorities through this six step approach:

1. Refine the objectives of the TEEB country study by specifying and agreeing on the key policy issues with stakeholders.
2. Further refine and identify which ecosystem services are most relevant within the context of these policy issues.
3. Define information needs and select appropriate methods for a Georgia context.
4. Undertake the actual assessment of ecosystem services, possibly, but not necessarily, by monetary valuation.
5. Look at possible policy responses and the policy instruments at hand, some of which have been preliminarily reviewed in the scoping study and assess their distributional impacts.
6. Review, revise and report results.

The scoping study recommends five priority areas to be examined under a full TEEB study, namely: energy, forestry, agriculture, mining & tourism.

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Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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Regional projects in Turkish and Russian parts of the Caucasus are coordinated and implemented accordingly by WWF-Turkey and WWF-Russia in close cooperation with WWF Caucasus PO under one vision of Ecoregion Conservation Plan.

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