

TERMS OF REFERENCE

PREPARATION OF SUSTAINABLE OPERATING PLANS FOR SELECTED PASTURE AREAS NEAR CHACHUNA SANCTUARY, GEORGIA

WWF-Caucasus Programme Office is implementing a project on *Increasing Biodiversity in a Priority Transboundary Protected Area in the Iori Mingeaur Region* (“the project”), supported by German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and WWF-Germany. Within the framework of this project, WWF-Caucasus will award a service contract for preparing sustainable management plans for selected pasture areas in the rangeland surrounding Chachuna Sanctuary (Dedoplistskaro Municipality, Georgia).

Background information

The overall objective of the project is to improve biodiversity in a transboundary Priority Conservation Area, Iori-Mingeaur, by enhancing management of protected areas and pastures, restoration of floodplain forests and re-introduction of the locally extinct Goitered Gazelle (*Gazella subgutturosa*).

Main part of the area is characterized by a mosaic of steppes and semi-deserts with drought-resistant tree species (such as Pistachio – *Pistacia mutica*), shrubs and grasses. Chachuna Sanctuary represents unique floodplain (tugai) forest in the Iori river valley, dominated by Floodplain oak (*Quercus pedunculiflora*). With 500 mm yearly precipitation, the region represents one of the driest areas in the south Caucasus.

The region is populated sparsely. Transport infrastructure is poorly developed. Only a few minor roads traverse the project area. Main economic activities are livestock keeping (mainly sheep) and agriculture. Following the wave of liberalization in Georgia in the 1990s, livestock was transferred to private hands. As a consequence, uncontrolled grazing and resulting overgrazing is a common practice exercised presently. Land owners have their own sheep or lease their land to other sheep owners. The sheep owners and shepherds are generally not aware of negative effects of over-grazing on the productivity of the pastures.

Around Chachuna Sanctuary, there are estimated 30,000-40,000 sheep grazing, with more than 10 sheep owners or lease holders. The degradation of the ecosystem is worsened by the fact that the buffer zone around the Sanctuary was canceled after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Also, near the Sanctuary, the supply of drinking water for sheep is totally inadequate. As a result, the shepherds lead the sheep herds to drink water from Iori River - through the territory of the Sanctuary. The grazing of sheep causes damage by browsing young trees in the natural regeneration area of floodplain forests.

Under the above-mentioned project, overall sustainable grazing management plan was prepared for the winter pasture area surrounding Chachuna Sanctuary (around 5,000 ha, including scarce tree cover), in 2013-2014. Specific recommendations were produced to improve the grassland. In order to implement these recommendations, it is desirable for prepare smaller-scale, but more specific individual management plans for concrete owners or lease holders. These small-scale management plans should be consistent with the overall management plan.

Objectives, scope and methodology for the assignment

Individual, small scale and specific management plans (*at least three*) should be developed on a pilot basis for pasture land owners or lease holders. The research conducted for the preparation of overall pasture management plan revealed that there are three major levels of degradation of winter pasture land surrounding Chachuna Sanctuary – very high (365 hectares), high (3,146 hectares) and low (1,236 hectares).

The pilot areas for individual management plans should be selected in a way to have at least one area for each level of degradation mentioned above. Concrete management recommendations, aiming to improve the condition of pastures and achieve sustainable management (e.g. rotational grazing, seeding, etc.), should be elaborated. These recommendations should be based on advanced international practices and should also take into consideration local conditions.

Each management plan should be properly structured and should be for certain time periods (e.g. 10 years), based on the best international experiences and requirements.

In order to identify the potential pilot sites, the boundaries of individual ownerships or lease holdings will be overlaid on the pasture degradation map. Relevant maps in GIS formats are available at WWF-Caucasus Programme Office and will be provided to the consultant.

One or more field visits should be made to the project area. The consultations with selected landowners (and if necessary shepherds) and Protected Area administration will be conducted. WWF-Caucasus Programme Office will assist the consultant in arranging and conducting these consultations.

The field surveys should at minimum include: (a) ecological condition of grass and degradation levels of pastures b) currently used grazing system, (c) inventory of sheep and d) possible (more ecologically acceptable) ways to resolve water shortage problems.

Subsequently, management plans (with maps) should be produced with norms of sustainable livestock grazing for each private/lease holding. These plans should cover entire areas within the boundaries of selected private or lease holdings. Each private owner or lease holder involved in this activity should be provided with the final versions of the plans (translated into Georgian).

Format and time scope of the pasture management plans

The format (outline) and time scope (duration) of the pasture management plans should be determined on the basis of the best available technical guidelines and experience. These should be agreed at the initial stages of contract implementation.

Technical assistance and supervision by WWF

WWF-Caucasus has many years of experience in biodiversity conservation. The work planned under this ToR will be conducted under the supervision of the Project Country Coordinator for Georgia and with technical assistance and advice from the GIS Expert (electronic database, maps). The consultant will be assisted in arranging meetings with shepherds and/or sheep owners. The translation of the final version into Georgian will be the responsibility of WWF-CauPO.

Deliverables

The deliverables should include a final report containing a) at least three management plans, b) description of conducted work and implemented methodology and c) key points outlined at the meetings with shepherds. The report and relevant documents should be in an electronic format and in a hard copy. This includes GIS-based maps.

Duration of the assignment

The duration of the assignment is about 25 working days within the overall period of beginning of November - mid-December 2015. The seasonal migration of sheep should be taken into consideration – the shepherds and the sheep usually come back from the summer pastures to the project area in November.

Qualification requirements

A suitable candidate should have a diploma or equivalent in biological/agricultural sciences or related fields (preferably post-graduate level). The candidate should have at least four years of experience in the field of pasture management.

The extent of relevant advanced international experience (related to the assignments under this ToR) as well as working experience in Georgia will be considered. Working knowledge of English will be an asset. Knowledge of Russian or Georgian will also be an advantage.