

# Use of the Concept of High Conservation Value Forests (HCVF) to Improve Forest Sanctuaries in Armenia

Transfer project in the framework of the Klaus Toepfer Fellowship Programme

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## Executive Summary

Armenia is a country with extremely rich biodiversity. Forests occupy about 11.2% of the country's territory. 75% of forests (including 13 forest sanctuaries) are in the structure of "Hayantar" State Non-Commercial Organization (SNCO), and 25% are in the structure of the Ministry of Nature Protection. The sanctuaries in the structure of "Hayantar" SNCO often have no defined specific management regimes.

The concept of "High Conservation Value Forests (HCVF)" was developed in 1999 by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Principle 9 of FSC certification system requires special actions to maintain high conservation values (HCVs) in the forests. There are six internationally agreed generic categories of HCVs. National criteria for identification of HCVFs need to be developed prior to application of the concept at the national level.

The transfer project (TP) considered the concept and approaches of HCVFs to identify such areas in forest sanctuaries. The TP focused on the categories 1 and 3 of HCVFs, with particular emphasis on threatened and rare species and ecosystems. The goal of the project was to have better managed forest areas with HCVs in Armenia through identification of such areas for their improved management and conservation status. The purpose of the project was to develop national criteria 1 and 3 for HCVFs and check their applicability to forest sanctuaries in Armenia, as well as their usefulness for improvement of management in forest sanctuaries.

The main project partners were the Biodiversity and Landscape Conservation Union (BLCU) NGO and Young Forests Union NGOs.

The main outputs of the project included:

- reviewed main framework documents (national policy, strategy and legislation) related to conservation and management of forests and biodiversity in Armenia with conclusion on to what extent they reflect the concept of HCVFs (and in particular the categories 1 and 3 of HCVFs);
- developed national criteria for HCVFs, in particular the categories 1 and 3 (contribution to the as a team member of the BLCU);
- the results of testing national criteria 1 and 3 of HCVFs on the territory of Ijevan Sanctuary (Tavush Region of Armenia) with identification and mapping of areas belonging to categories 1 and 3 of HCVFs;

- management recommendations for identified HCVPs in Ijevan Sanctuary, such as an emphasis on protection in comparison with the rest of the territories, priority restoration, focused scientific research and others; and
- the developed general recommendations on application of criteria 1 and 3 in forest sanctuaries in Armenia.

The approach proved to be fully applicable to forest sanctuaries in Armenia. It allows identification of forest areas with HCVPs subject to strengthened protection, priority restoration, focused scientific research or other actions.

The experience from the TP implementation showed the importance of detailed project development and planning, risk assessment, consultations, motivated partners and dedicated colleagues, realistic timeframe and availability of funding.