

Sustainability factors and management planning of the Caucasus Wildlife Refuge, the first privately protected area in Armenia

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Executive Summary

The modern developments from all over the world require us to be more proactive in nature conservation, moving from species based conservation practices to ecosystem and habitat based strategies. At the same time applying flexible, complex and adaptive mechanisms of biodiversity conservation can ensure better connectivity of ecosystems. Private land conservation practices have a specific role in this context, promoting human-nature balanced relations. Numerous types exist in the world, and yet the regulations are not so clear and there is no inclusive definition for all of them.

During this study I have identified a major reason that has a negative effect on recognition and sustainability of many Privately Protected Areas (PPAs) all over the world, though it is not the only reason. The complex of external and internal factors was observed during this research to develop a sustainable model for Caucasus Wildlife Refuge (CWR).

As the first initiative in Armenia that is claiming to have an official recognition of PPA, there was no precedent to consider for development of management strategy.

The goal defined for this project is as simple as possible: To have strategic guidelines for a CWR management plan by the end of 2016.

Identified objectives towards that goal were:

- To develop conservation strategy for CWR;
- To determine main stakeholder groups, develop communication schemes and maintain public participation in decision making;
- To implement measures towards local and international recognition of CWR as PPA.

The activities were divided into three major groups a) Situation analysis; b) Conceptual model development; c) Strategic guidelines expertise and public outreach which also had 11 sub activities.

They are based on multilateral situation analysis to ensure connectivity. Stakeholder analysis was important as the first step of communication gaps elimination. During the strategy development I have identified conservation targets, threats and contributing factors as well. The whole process also considers professional discussions and presentations, thus trying to create a culture of public engagement in decision making from this stage.

The main outcome of the project was the template of the management plan, emphasizing all

potential chapters and core directions how to pursue the material. In addition to this, I have implemented other analyses, which served for guidelines development, including conceptual model and 5 result chains for each of the strategies, stakeholder table, feasibility study, SWOT analysis, management positions and the supervisory system that are attached as Annexes.

Based on different opinions, it was decided to design a “dynamic” structure for this management plan, considering permanent improvements even during its implementation. It is a long-term process and filling the gaps should be the main measure towards successful conservation of targets.

The implementation of the project took approximately thirteen months. More than 10 people from Armenia and abroad advised me on different topics, including Dr. Tilmann Disselhoff and Dr. Arevik Mkrtychyan as my mentors, who outlined the scopes of the project and guided me throughout its implementation. Equally crucial was the influence of KTF modules and periodic discussions with coordinators. The idea of sustainable livelihoods, which is supposed to be used the case in CWR, was born while travelling through Germany.

The lessons I learned were very important as well. They enabled me to be more confident in the professional arena and to improve some personal characteristics.