



**Convention on Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and
International Lakes**

**SEMINAR ON THE ROLE OF ECOSYSTEMS
AS WATER SUPPLIERS**
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NATIONAL REPORT ON THE ROLE OF ECOSYSTEMS
AS WATER SUPPLIERS
GEORGIA

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A. PROTECTION AND RESTORATION OF WATER-RELATED ECOSYSTEMS

Georgia varies greatly in climate and relief. The Greater Caucasus in the north and the Lesser Caucasus in the south are joined by the Likhi ridge to create a natural barrier dividing Georgia into contrasting climatic zones. Western Georgia is humid, in the Black Sea coastal zone - subtropical, while Eastern Georgia tends towards a temperate climate. In the west the average annual rainfall is 1000 to 2800 mm, whereas in the east it is only 300 to 600 mm. This variety of climatic and relief conditions results in diversity of ecosystems in Georgia. Georgia is rich in water resources. There are more than 26060 rivers, with a total length of 59000 km, and about 800 lakes. The majority (99.4%) of the rivers are short (less than 25 km long). There are numerous thermal and mineral water springs, natural and artificial reservoirs.

Forest covers about 35 - 37% of the country, including the major part of the mountainous area. The distribution of forests in Georgia is uneven. Along with the forest-rich regions there exist areas with less than 10% of forestation. The forests are situated mainly on steep mountain slopes, and fulfill an important function in preventing soil erosion, having a water retaining and water regulating ability.

Before the 90s in order to protect biodiversity and ecosystems of the country a wide net of National Reserves was created. Georgia has designated 15 National Reserves with a total area of more than 168 800 ha, 2.4% of the whole territory, and all protected areas cover approximately 6 % of the country's territory.

In support of the development of protected areas in Georgia certain actions have already been performed:

- Borjomi - Kharagauli National Park was established in 1999 with financial support from the Government of Germany;
- within the Black Sea Integrated Management programme supported by the GEF and the World Bank implementation of the system of protected wetland areas in the coastal zone of Georgia – Kolkheti National Park is in progress;
- in order to expand the system of protected areas in East Georgia, establishment of Tusheti National Park and Protected Landscape, the National Park of Vashlovani, and development of the oldest Lagodekhi Reserve was started in 2002. The project is supported by GEF/World Bank.

In 1996 Georgia ratified the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as a Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar,1971). Georgia has designated two Ramsar sites (Kolkheti wetlands lowland complex and Ispani peat bog).

The Central Kolkheti Ramsar site is located on both sides of the Rioni River mouth along the central part of the eastern Black Sea coast. Total area of Central Kolkheti Ramsar site is 33,700 ha. It encompasses the Anaklia-Churia, Nabada and Imnati-Grigoleti mires, forests, dune, marine and riparian natural habitats.

The Ispani peat bog is a smaller several hundred-hectare area (500 ha) located just inland from the Black Sea coast near the city of Kobuleti. It is also part of the larger Kolkheti wetland lowland complex.

The Georgia Integrated Coastal Management Project (GICMP) is initiated by the Ministry of Environment (MoE) of Georgia within the framework of the Black Sea Environmental Program BSEP / GEF (the World Bank). The GICMP was implemented in response to the management challenges faced by the country in its coastal areas and, in particular, the wetlands of international significance – Kolkheti RAMSAR sites.

In spite of the mentioned, there are no direct linkages between conducted activities and protecting and restoring of water – related ecosystems, i.e. there are not defined the measures for protection ecosystems – as water suppliers.

Concerning mitigation of extreme water-related events, the Ramsar sites existing in Georgia might be considered as water collectors during flooding. Though, government should pay more attention to control extreme water related events and make appropriate measures.

B THE INTEGRATED APPROACH AS A DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY

Elaborating of Integrated Water Resources Management Plan for Georgia is complicated for this time, because firstly new water legislation should be elaborated, based on the basin approach. Currently we only have prepared the national programme of harmonization of Georgian legislation (including water legislation) to EU legislation.

Dissemination of the best practices common among authorities and institutions at the local, national and international level is very weak. Campaigns on “ecosystems as water suppliers” have not been organized. As a result public awareness with regard to linkages between forest, wetland and water is poor, despite that some people traditionally know that “disappearing of water is cause of deforestation”.

C LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE DIMENSION

In the law of Georgia on Protection of the Environment (framework law) is stated that one of the main goal of law is preservation and protection of original landscapes and ecosystems. Also, the law states that the natural ecosystems (including wetlands and forests) and landscapes shall be protected from pollution, violation, damage, degradation, exhaustion and disintegration.

The Forest Code of Georgia in its provisions states that goals of the code include conducting forest tending, protecting, and restoring with the purpose of conserving and improving climate, water regulating and other useful natural properties of forests. Article 42 of the code establishes the special protection regimes for forest areas with special soil protection and water regulation functions. According to the article 42 “the Provision on the allocation and appropriation of appropriate status for special functional purposes and landscape districts” was adopted in September 2003 by former State Department of Forestry (currently the department is within of Ministry of

Environment of Georgia). Under this provision the list of such districts has been elaborated. These districts mainly cover all flood plane forests areas of country, which are important also from the water regulating point of view. Country's protected areas cover also mentioned flood plane forests.

In 1997 Georgia ratified the Agreement between the Governments of Georgia and Azerbaijan in the field of Environmental Protection. In 1998 Georgia ratified similar agreement with Armenia. According to the both agreements, governments shall cooperate in creating of specifically protected areas within the transboundary ecosystems.

As a part of the Caucasus Initiative, lunched by the German Ministry of Cooperation and Development (BMZ), is the implementation of the "Ecoregional Nature Protection Programme for Southern Caucasus". The programme covers three countries: Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. The programme is going to be implemented in the nearest future and the purpose of the Georgian Programme component is the establishment of protected areas in Georgia's Javakheti Region. Some of the activities to be implemented are following: To establish a National Park bordering the Republics of Armenia and Turkey to the South (approx. 20,000 ha); To establish four wetland sanctuaries: Khanchali, Bugdasheni, Madatapa and Sagamo. The project will facilitate to protect and sustainable use of water resources in the region.

It is expected that "Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan for Georgia" will be adopted by Georgian Parliament soon. One of the goals of the strategy is to develop a protected areas (including new Ramsar sites) system to ensure conservation and sustainable use of resources.

The Ministry of Environment Protection and Natural Resources of Georgia is responsible for management of water, forestry and wetlands. The Ministry has not been elaborated yet action plans linking water to forest and wetland management.

In conclusion, ecosystem approach is in the very early stage in Georgia, and first of all it is necessary to make relevant changes in the law on Water of Georgia and the other appropriate laws of Georgia. It is worth to mention that, the National Environmental Action Plan - 2 of Georgia will be developed in 2005 and ecosystem approach will be one of the important issues to be reflected there.