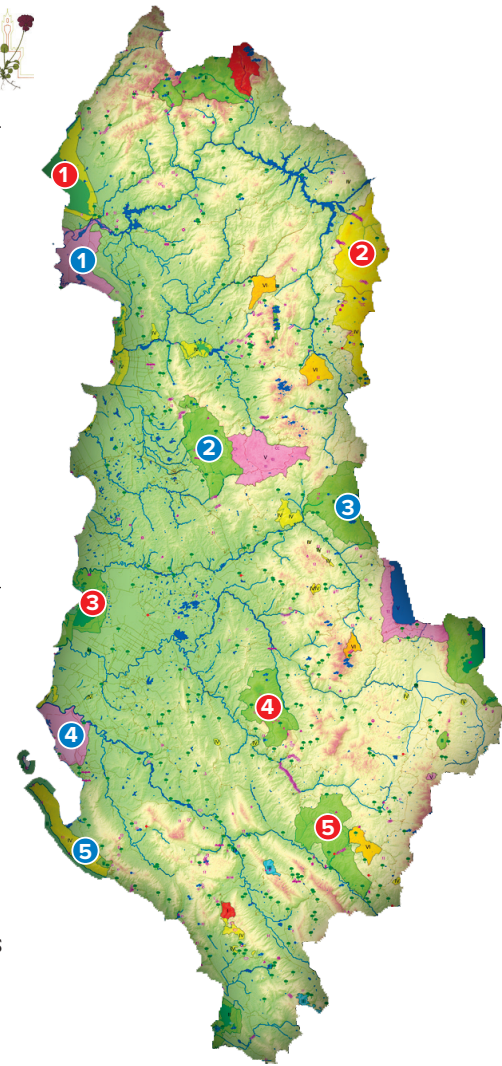




STRENGTHENING CAPACITY IN NATIONAL NATURE PROTECTION PREPARATION FOR NATURA 2000 NETWORK

CARING FOR ALBANIA'S BIODIVERSITY



The term *biodiversity* is a contraction from *biological diversity* and refers to all the different varieties and forms of life in a given place, be it as small as a fallen log or as large as the planet Earth. Biodiversity supports both our economy and our lifestyles. It provides to all human beings many goods and services, such as food, fuel, medication, materials, clean water and oxygen. It allows us to live healthy lives and it leads ecological processes that make life on Earth possible. Biodiversity allows the ecosystems to adjust to disturbances like extreme weather, fires and floods. Its beauty inspires and enriches our lives, and we must protect it to ensure its, and our, survival.

Although a small country, Albania is very rich in biological diversity. The tremendous diversity of ecosystems and habitats supports about 3,200 species of vascular plants, 2,350 species of non-vascular plants, and 15,600 species of invertebrates and vertebrates, many of which are threatened at the global or European level. In recognition of Albania's significant contribution to European and global biodiversity, the European Union is funding the project NaturAL (full title: Strengthening national capacity in nature protection - preparation for Natura 2000 network).

Protected areas are the cornerstones of nature conservation and often the most reliable way to conserve the diversity of ecosystems. Albania has recently made significant progress in expanding the network of

protected areas from 5.2% of the country's territory in 2005 to 16% in 2014. Despite this remarkable process, the investments in the protected areas, in particular infrastructure, equipment and technical capacities of protected area staff, have been inadequate. The actions of the project are therefore focusing on the implementation of management plans in the selected protected areas. The foreseen activities centre on developing and implementing a comprehensive capacity building programme for protected areas staff, and realization of specific actions concerning infrastructure, equipment, conservation of priority habitat and species, and biodiversity monitoring. Protected area managers will also be trained and assisted in developing project proposals for future financing under the EU programmes.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Halt biodiversity loss through improved management of protected areas in Albania by:

- Implementation of at least five existing management plans for selected protected areas in Albania;
- Preparation of a preliminary list of Natura 2000 sites for the country in view of their future submission to the European Commission by the Albanian authorities.

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The conservation of biodiversity in Albania will be further strengthened by preparing a preliminary list of Natura 2000 sites in the country in view of their future submission to the European Commission. These sites will be part of the Natura 2000 network that includes core breeding and resting sites for rare and threatened species, and some rare natural habitat types which are protected in their own right. The aim of the network is to ensure the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species

and habitats, listed under both the Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive. The project also supports activities to inform, communicate and educate a range of target groups, such as protected area visitors, local communities, nature resource managers and other stakeholders about the importance of nature conservation in Albania and the role of the protected areas. These activities aim to raise general awareness and inspire the public to support and get involved in the project activities.

PILOT SITES

In order to improve the biodiversity conservation at the site level the project will implement existing management plans in a number of protected areas that have been selected as pilot sites.

- The primary pilot sites: (1) Lake Shkodra MNR; (2) Korab-Koritnik MNR; (3) Divjaka-Karavasta NP; (4) Tomorri Mountain NP; and (5) Bredhi i Hotoves-Dangelli NP.
- Limited actions will also be implemented in the following secondary pilot sites: (1) Buna River-Velipoje PL; (2) Dajti Mountain NP; (3) Shebenik-Jabllanica NP; (4) Vjosa-Narta PL; and (5) Llogara NP.

NP - National Park; MNR - Managed Nature Reserve; PL - Protected Landscape

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Project partners: Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS)
International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and
Italian Botanical Society (SBI)

Beneficiaries: Ministry of Environment, National Agency for Protected Areas
and Regional Agencies for Protected Areas

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