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Introductory Report on Nature Conservation in Armenia

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POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR NATURE CONSERVATION IN ARMENIA

The Republic of Armenia is located in the north-eastern part of the Armenian Plateau and occupies 29,740 km² at altitudes ranging from 375 to 4095 meters above sea level, there are roughly 3,500 species of high quality flowering plants and more than 17,500 species of animals, including around 500 vertebrates. In addition Armenia is located on the intersection of two different physical-geographic areas, particularly, various botanical-geographic regions, such as the Caucasian mesophilous and Armenian-Iranian xerophilous ones, where natural speciation is active.

The system of specially protected nature areas (SPNA) of the Republic of Armenia (RA) includes National Parks, State Reserves, Sanctuaries and Natural Monuments. Totally, they make about 10% of the territory of the country. The traditions of nature protection and worship of nature have had their expression in Armenian nation since ancient times. The chroniclers of the Early Middle Ages mentioned the hunting site and artificial forest established during the reign of the Armenian King Khosrov Kotak on the territory of the present Khosrov Forest State Reserve.

However, at present the use of biodiversity in the country exceeds natural regeneration of biological resources. Overuse and habitat destruction have resulted in reduction of populations of certain species and nowadays a number of species are under the threat of extinction. This has resulted in overall reduction of biodiversity and habitat degradation (including forests, mountainous pastures and wetlands). These processes were most intensive during the last century due to environmental pollution by industrial, agricultural, transport and energy sectors as well as increased anthropogenic impact on ecosystems.

In order to protect landscapes and ecosystems of Armenia it is necessary to include in the system of SPNAs valuable ecosystems, which are currently out of the protected areas, as well as to promote strategic activities implemented in the field of expansion of protected areas and establishment of new SPNAs. The protection of areals of biodiversity components – plant and animals in accordance with the Bern Convention as well as reduction and prevention of anthropogenic impact are in the list of main objectives.

The Republic of Armenia has already finished the pilot project of pilot database development containing a fair proportion of Areas of Special Conservation Interest of the Emerald Network, to be identified in Armenia. Our National team of Emerald collected the proper description of flora and fauna safety status and the condition of habitat places of the territories that were offered to include in the net. In future Armenia will be responsible for these territories and we will take all the necessary steps to secure their safety. We will also take the necessary steps to make plans of running for reaching long-term and short-term goals. Emerald is of big importance to Armenia as it is an electronic cadastre of territories. Such cadastre can be used both by foreign partners and by Armenian governmental and nongovernmental organizations that need proper information about species' and inhabitants.

At present the protection and development of the existing system of SPNAs is an important component of the environmental policy of Armenia. It is one of the main guarantees of sustainable and long-term development of the country.

THE ROLE OF SPECIALLY PROTECTED NATURE AREAS IN BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION AND SUSTAINABLE USE

The strategic goal of SPNAs development in Armenia is the protection of natural complexes, landscape and biological diversity, unique and typical natural complexes, objectives and their genetic fund.

The role of SPNAs in biodiversity protection specially emphasized in the Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan of the Republic of Armenia (1999). The Strategy mentions that specially protected nature areas are reliable guarantees for protection of nature and its components and they ensure the following:

- In-situ protection of biodiversity specially rare and endangered species;
- Monitoring of ecosystems and species;
- Favourable prerequisites for rehabilitation and regeneration of ecosystems and species;
- Regulated and sustainable use of natural resources.

In addition to addressing certain problems of biodiversity protection SPNAs contribute to a number of important environmental and social functions such as:

- Water protection, climate regulation, anti-erosion, forest protection, soil protection and other functions;
- Protection and sustainable use of recreational resources;
- Ecological education and up-bringing;
- Protection and use historical-cultural heritage (values).

MANAGEMENT OF SPNAs

At present about 60-70 % of species composition of the flora and fauna of Armenia is protected in the SPNAs, including the majority of rare, endangered and endemic species and species under threat of extinction, as well as genetic resources of wild species.

The system of specially protected nature areas of Armenia was created in 1958 with establishment of Khosrov, Dilijan and Shikahogh State Reserves and designation of State Sanctuaries in the Forest Districts of Gyumey, Gulagarak, Jermuk and Herher as well as certain territories with wild tree-bush species of new (*Taxus baccata*), hazel-nut (*Corylus colurna*), plane (*Platanus orientalis*), walnut (*Juglans regia*), pear (*Pyrus*), apple (*Malus*) and cornel (*Cornus mas*).

Later on the system of SPNAs was expanded with establishment of new reserves and sanctuaries for more efficient biodiversity protection.

The total territory of SPNAs of Armenia is about 308 thousand ha which makes about 10% of the territory of Armenia. 54% of this territory is occupied by forest ecosystems.

The system of specially protected nature areas of Armenia includes the following protected areas:

- State Reserves (Khosrov Forest, Shikahogh and Erebuni)
- 25 State Sanctuaries (mainly established in 1950-80 s):
- 2 National Parks (Sevan and Dilijan):

- Natural Monuments (since the works on inventory and passportization of natural monuments have been started, the list of natural monuments approved by the Government of Armenia in 2008).

The main law regulating legal relations connected with the management of SPNAs in the Republic of Armenia is the Law on Specially Protected Nature Areas (2006). It sets forth the order of establishment, protection and use of specially nature protected areas.

The authorities of the Government of the Republic of Armenia in the field of establishment, designation, management, protection and use of specially protected nature areas include approval and revision of management plans for SPANs of international and republican significance. Territorial bodies of state management participate in the development of state programs and management plans connected with the specially protected nature areas.

In 1995 the state reserves and national parks of RA were included in the structure of the RA Ministry of Nature Protection. At present the management authorities of Seva, Dilijan National Parks, Khosrov orest, Erebuni and Shikahogh State Sanctuaries as well as Plane Gove, Vordan Karmir, Akhnabat Yew Grove, Sev Lich, KhorVirap, Goravan Sands and Gilan Sanctuaries are implemented through “Sevan National Park”, “Dilijan National Park”, “Khosrov Forest State Reserve”, “Shikahogh State Reserve”, and “Reserve- Park Complex” State Non-Commercial Organizations (SNCO).

The authorities of the Republic of Armenia Ministry of Nature Protection are implemented through the Bioresources Management Agency. The aims of the Agency is to carry out scientific research, protection, reproduction, and sustainable use of natural ecosystems on the territory of RA including forests, landscapes and biological diversity, flora and fauna objects and natural heritage as well as to support the development and implementation of the state policy in the mentioned fields. The Agency coordinates the works on protection and sustainable use of specially protected nature areas.

The Agency ensures the implementation of measures on sustainable use, rehabilitation and reproduction of flora and fauna objects and other functions to fulfil its aims and objectives. The Agency includes Department of Fauna Resources, Plants Resources, Specially Protected Nature Areas and Arboretum Management.

On the territory of Armenia some sanctuaries are included in the structure of national parks and state reserves. Out of 25 State Sanctuaries 7 are in the structure of Ra Ministry of Nature Protection and 6 of them have Charters approved by the RA Government. 14 out of the rest 18 state sanctuaries are in the structure of “Hajantar” SNCO of the RA Ministry of Agriculture and included in Forest Enterprises (branches) One sanctuary – Aragats Alpine Sanctuary is in the structure of the Institute of Physics of the RA Ministry of Industry. Hankavan Hydrological, Jermuk Hydrological and Juniper Open Woodland Sanctuaries are on the reserve lands.

The development of management plans of SPNAs is specially mentioned in the activities of the Biodiversity Strategy and Action plan. In 2007 the management plans of Sevan and Dilijan National Parks were approved by the RA Government and activities on research of Sevan and Dilijan National Parks flora and fauna, technical assistance awareness raising and others were implemented.