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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

38th meeting
Strasbourg, 27-30 November 2018

Complaints on stand-by

**Possible threat to Svaneti 1 Candidate Emerald
site from Nenskra HPP (Georgia)**

- REPORT BY THE GOVERNMENT -

*Document prepared by
the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture, Georgia*

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- August 2018 -



გარემოს დაცვისა და
სოფლის მეურნეობის
საინჟინერო

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION AND AGRICULTURE
OF GEORGIA

ს ა ქ ა რ თ ვ ე ლ რ
G E O R G I A



N 7485/01
201808241722
24/08/2018

7485-01-2-

To: Ms. Iva OBRETENOVA
Secretary of the Bern Convention
Head of the Biodiversity Unit

Dear Ms. Iva Obretenova,

The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia would like to present its compliments and expresses the deepest consideration to the Secretariat of Bern Convention. Once again we would like to confirm the commitment of the Government of Georgia in terms of active engagement into the Emerald Network development process.

Taking into account the great importance of the subject we would like to give the secretariat of Bern convention the information regarding the progress in updating the national Emerald database of Georgia and the eventual decisions of the authorities regarding the status of their various proposed and candidate Emerald sites.

Following your letter dated 13.11.2017 (№DG-II IO/vdc) concerning the decision of the Bureau of Bern Convention of March 2018, The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia decided to nominate approximately 35 Emerald Sites for final designation by the 38th Standing Committee meeting, which will be held in November 2018, in Strasbourg, France. Out of those 35 Emerald Sites 28 are candidate, including 3 compensatory sites, and 7 of them are proposed territories. For other 20 sites (7 candidate and 13 proposed sites) additional scientific studies are required and the Ministry is working to generate funds for the abovementioned researches.

I would like to underline that 3 compensatory sites which were identified in November 2017, during the Biogeographical Seminar, were selected based on literature information only. The method of so called “umbrella species” was used in order to define the territories, *Ursus arctos*, *Lynx lynx* and *Lutra lutra* were chosen as umbrella species. Unfortunately, the field studies weren't held before now. In spring 2018 the Ministry addressed the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ) for financial support for the scientific studies of the species and habitats on the territories. In June 2018 “NACRES –Centre for Biodiversity Conservation and Research”, was contracted by GIZ for the research on Samegrelo 2 (GE0000057), Racha-Lechkhumi (GE0000058) and Svaneti-Racha (GE0000059). The studies will be finalized by the

end of August and Standard Data Forms will be updated accordingly. For this time, GIS analysis and literature studies have been conducted for the habitats of those sites. The final habitat maps will be available after the field studies. When the report is translated into English we will send it to the secretariat of the Bern Convention.

It is worth to mention that due to rising interest of stakeholders, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture requested GIZ to publish the frequently asked questions regarding Emerald Network, which will be available within this week for the stakeholders. Due to the fact that impact assessment on Emerald Network is new for the country as well as for the infrastructure projects developers, and thus as we don't have any guidelines regarding this issue from the Bern Convention, the Ministry is unable to give the stakeholders exact methodology of the impact assessment. This is why the Ministry approached GIZ with the request to elaborate the guideline for the "Assessment of Impact on Emerald Network". At this moments the document is being prepared (with coordination of the Ministry) and will be finalized by the end of this year. The guideline will be statutory act in future.

In addition to this, the Data Base is being updated according to the decisions of biogeographical seminar held in Tbilisi, November 2017. The recommendations of the Biogeographical Seminar 2017 were reflected offline, which will be updated online shortly, for the following species and habitats:

	Species
1302	<i>Rhinolophus mehelyi</i>
1307	<i>Myotis blythii</i>
1308	<i>Barbastella barbastellus</i>
1307	<i>Myotis blythii</i>
1321	<i>Myotis emarginatus</i>
1323	<i>Myotis bechsteini</i>
2635	<i>Vormela peregusna</i>
1219	<i>Testudo graeca</i>
1143	<i>Barbus capito/5918 Luciobarbus capito</i>
1146	<i>Sabanejewia aurata</i>
4125	<i>Alosa immaculata/Alosa maeotica</i>
4127	<i>Alosa tanaica</i>
1043	<i>Lindenia tetraphylla</i>
1061	<i>Maculinea nausithous/6179 Phenagris nausithous</i>
1083	<i>Lucanus cervus</i>
4038	<i>Lycaena helle</i>
A021	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>
A022	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>
A023	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
A024	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>
A026	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
A027	<i>Casmerodius albus</i>
A029	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
A030	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>
A032	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
A034	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
A035	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>

	Habitats
C1.3411	<i>Ranunculus</i> communities in shallow water
C1.66	Temporary inland saline and brackish waters
E3.4	Moist or wet eutrophic and mesotrophic grassland
E4.4	Calcareous alpine and subalpine grassland
E6.2	Continental inland salt steppes
G3.17	Balkano-Pontic Abies forests
G3.9	Coniferous woodland dominated by Cupressaceae or Taxaceae
H2.3	Temperate-montane acid siliceous scree
H2.3	Temperate-montane acid siliceous scree
H2.3	Temperate-montane acid siliceous scree
H2.4	Temperate-montane calcareous and ultrabasic scree
H2.4	Temperate-montane calcareous and ultrabasic scree
H2.4	Temperate-montane calcareous and ultrabasic scree
H2.5	Acid siliceous scree of warm exposures
H2.5	Acid siliceous scree of warm exposures
H2.5	Acid siliceous scree of warm exposures
H2.6	Calcareous and ultra-basic scree of warm exposures
H2.6	Calcareous and ultra-basic scree of warm exposures
H2.6	Calcareous and ultra-basic scree of warm exposures
H3.1	Acid siliceous inland cliffs
H3.1	Acid siliceous inland cliffs
H3.1	Acid siliceous inland cliffs
H3.2	Basic and ultra-basic inland cliffs
H3.2	Basic and ultra-basic inland cliffs
H3.2	Basic and ultra-basic inland cliffs

“NACRES –Centre for Biodiversity Conservation and Research”, together with the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture continues to work on the decisions and recommendations of biogeographical seminar and we assure you that most of them will be reflected on the Central Data Repository (CDR) by November 2018.

Herewith, I would like to give you some statistics about the Emerald Network in Georgia. Currently, the total area of Emerald Network is 1 285 974 ha (18.45% of total area of Georgia). 44% of Emerald network is already under the National Protected Areas and Important Bird Areas.

The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia is looking forward to successful cooperation with the Secretariat of Bern Convention towards the further development of Emerald Network in Georgia.

Sincerely,

Deputy Minister
Solomon Pavliashvili

- February 2018 -



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MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION AND AGRICULTURE
OF GEORGIA

საქართველო
GEORGIA

N 1201/01
09/02/2018



To: Ms. Iva OBRETENOVA
Secretary of the Bern Convention
Head of the Biodiversity Unit

Dear Ms. Iva Obretenova,

The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia would like to present its compliments and expresses the deepest consideration to the Secretariat of Bern Convention.

In response to your letter dated 13.11.2017 (№DG-II IO/vdc) we would like to inform you on following: as you are aware, the Biogeographical Seminar of the South Caucasus Region that was held on November 8-9, 2017, Tbilisi, Georgia, reviewed and reassessed so called “sufficiency” status of those species and habitats that were assessed on the Biogeographical Seminar in 2015.

Based on outcomes of Biogeographical Seminar (2017) we consider that splitting of Svaneti Site into Svaneti 1 and Svaneti 2 does not diminish the “sufficiency” status of species and habitats that are found and monitored within the former Svaneti Site. This statement is supported by the following circumstances and facts:

Findings of field studies fulfilled by the Species Conservation Centre NACRES in 2013-2015 indicated that ecological characteristics of Svaneti Site (which was proposed to secretariat in 2012) did not comply with criteria established for the identification of the Areas of Special Conservation Interest (ASCIs). As we mentioned in our previous communications, only desk study data were available for the discussed site before the implementation of this field survey. In its initial state, Svaneti Site comprised 233800 hectares that covered wide range of land use including: urban areas, agricultural plots, licensed sites, ski resorts, areas modified under the development of infrastructure and degraded areas, etc.

The Biogeographical Seminar 2017 highlighted that species and habitats of Svaneti Region are

also found within boundaries of other Emerald Sites in Georgia (in alpine biogeographical zone among others) as well as outside the Emerald Network. It should be mentioned that the identified and nominated candidate sites are situated within the territory of the planned Svaneti Protected Areas and have high conservation value, which is highly important for the country.

During the Biogeographical Seminar 2017, in order to maintain and improve the “sufficiency” status of alpine habitats and species, Georgian Government added three new candidate sites (GE0000057 Samegrelo 2 85676,20 ha; GE0000058 Racha-Lechkhumi 43162,11 ha; GE0000059 Svaneti-Racha 59114,55 ha) that were approved on 37th meeting of the Standing Committee of Bern Convention in December 2017 in Strasburg. Correspondingly, the total area of the Emerald Network increased by 187 953 hectares and the nomination of 3 new candidate sites resulted in the fulfilment of the compensation plan for the former Svaneti Site (and entire alpine region as well).

In addition to this, the Biogeographical Seminar held in 2017 in Tbilisi, came to the agreement that the downgraded “sufficiency” status of species and habitats will be improved through the nomination of new sites (GE0000057 Samegrelo 2 85676,20 ha; GE0000058 Racha-Lechkhumi 43162,11 ha; GE0000059 Svaneti-Racha 59114,55 ha) on the next Biogeographical Seminar.

The table below shows “sufficiency” status of species and habitats distributed in Svaneti area.

Alpine Region		
Species		
Species	Status in 2015	Status in 2017
1 <i>Agricides glandon aquilo</i>	EXCL REF LIST/CD	EXCL REF LIST/CD
2 <i>Callimorpha quadripunctaria</i>	IN MOD	IN MOD
3 <i>Canis lupus</i>	SUF	SUF
4 <i>Dicranum viride</i>	IN MOD	SUF
5 <i>Erebia medusa polaris</i>		
6 <i>Hesperia comma catena</i>		
7 <i>Leucorrhinia pectoralis</i>		
8 <i>Lindenia tetraphylla</i>		
9 <i>Lutra</i>		
10 <i>Lycaena dispar</i>		
11 <i>Lynx</i>		
12 <i>Miniopterus schreibersi</i>		
13 <i>Myotis blythii</i>		
14 <i>Rhinolophus ferrumequinum</i>		
15 <i>Rhinolophus hipposideros</i>		
16 <i>Ursus arctos</i>		
17 <i>Vaccinium arctostaphylos</i>		
18 <i>Vipera kaznakovi</i>		
19 <i>Capra aegagrus</i>		
Habitats		
D4.2 Basic mountain flushes and stream-sides, with a rich arctic-montane flora	SUF	SUF
E3.4 Moist or wet eutrophic and mesotrophic grassland	IN MIN	IN MIN
F9.1 Riverine scrub	IN MIN	IN MIN/IN MOD
G1.6 Fagus woodland		IN MOD/CD
G1.A1 Quercus - Fraxinus - Carpinus betulus woodland on eutrophic and mesotrophic soils		IN MIN/IN MOD

Source: Standard Data Forms of Candidate Emerald Sites “Svaneti 1” and “Svaneti 2”; Final conclusions of 2015 and 2017 Biogeographical Seminars.

Accordingly, the Government of Georgia believes that the above mentioned 3 new candidate Emerald Sites will facilitate the improvement of currently downgraded “sufficiency” status of species and habitats during the next Biogeographical Seminar.

As regard on-spot assessment, the Government of Georgia expresses its readiness to host the Secretariat of Bern Convention if they are willing to pay a visit. At the same time, taking into account the outcomes of the Biogeographical Seminar 2017, the Government of Georgia would not consider such surveys as essential and suggests to redirect the resources (financial and human) required for such studies to other issues that are similarly important for the development of the Emerald Network in Georgia.

Besides, please be informed that the Government of Georgia has initiated the official designation process of the Emerald Sites, as it was promised. As a result, Batsara, Lagodekhi and Vashlovani sites are already designated (see Report on 37th meeting of the Standing Committee of Bern Convention, December 5-8, 2017, Strasburg). It is worthy to mention that according to the current data, the Emerald Network of Georgia comprises 18% of the total country area that contributes to the achievement of Aichi Biodiversity Target 11. As you are aware, Aichi Biodiversity Targets are among tools used to measure the implementation of the CBD Convention. Target 11 requires the protection of terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity of particular conservation importance through an effectively managed system of protected areas.

It should be mentioned that Georgia is finalizing the elaboration of the draft Law on Biodiversity, which comprehensively discusses management, monitoring, ownership and other issues topical for the Emerald Network. At present, “Regulatory Impact Assessment” is being carried out for the draft law on Biodiversity. The process gives us the opportunity to have better regulations and ensures public participation in drafting the law. The assessment is being carried out by International School of Economy – ISET. The process of RIA started in July 2017 and will be finalized in February-March 2018.

The Government of Georgia takes the development of the Emerald Network with great responsibility. The existing national biodiversity monitoring system covers species and habitats protected under Bern Convention and they are treated as separate indicators. In addition, some publications, including the guideline for the assessment of impact on Emerald Network are being prepared (with coordination of the Ministry) to facilitate the development of the Emerald Network and to inform various stakeholders.

The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia is looking forwards to successful and fruitful cooperation with the Secretariat of Bern Convention towards the further development of Emerald Network in Georgia.

Sincerely,

Deputy Minister
Solomon Pavliashvili