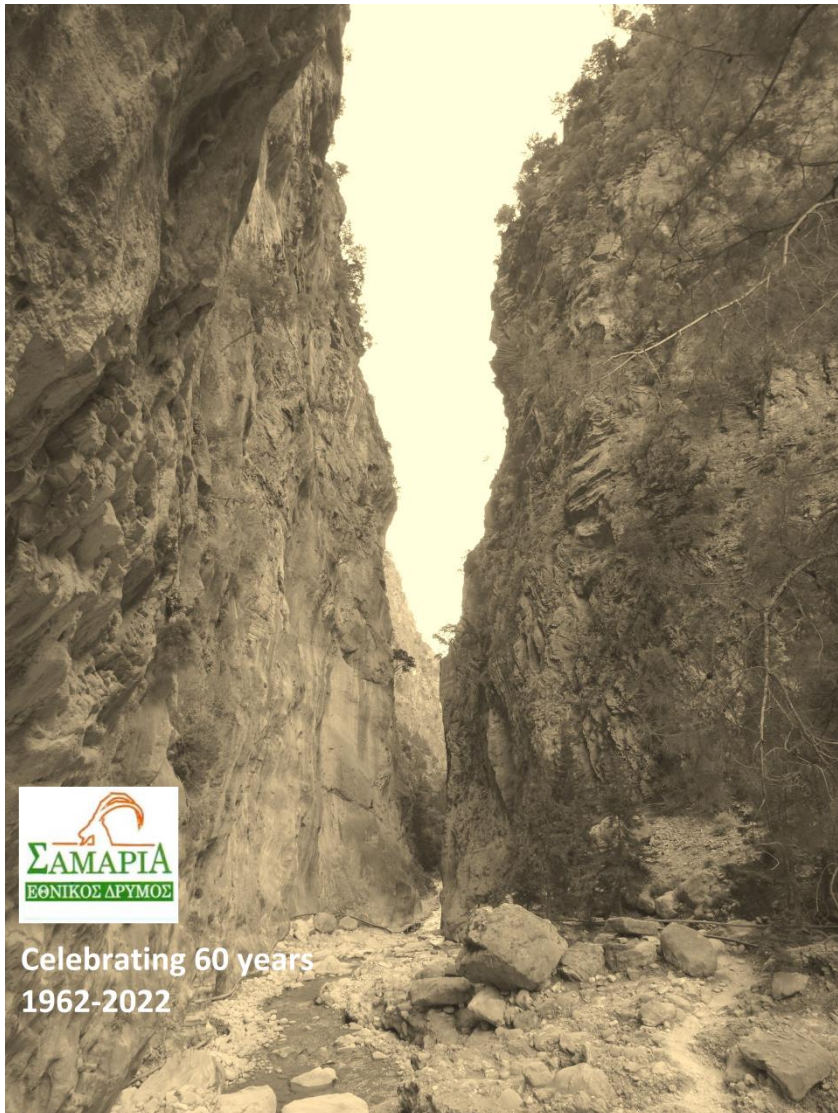


Annual Report for Samaria (Lefka Ori) National Park



Samaria was declared a National Park in 1962, mainly, to protect the “agrimi” (Capra aegagrus cretica). On 7 April 1960, the residents of Samaria and Agia Roumeli declared an unwritten law: “...we give our word of honour that not only we will not hunt this animal, but on the contrary we will protect it, and we shall report anyone who attempts to kill it to the relevant local authorities. In closing, our signatures seal the word we have given”.

Today, 60 years later, the agrimi, this unique creature of Cretan nature, still unites nature with man and the Gorge of Samaria shows us the way to the optimal protection and promotion of Greek Nature.

2022 Annual Report for Samaria (Lefka Ori) National Park

State: Greece	
Name of the area: Samaria (Lefka Ori) National Park – (designated as “Cretan White Mountains National Park”)	
Year and number of years since the award or renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas: 2022, 3 years after the last renewal (11/2019). First award: 1979.	
Central authority concerned:	
Name:	Ministry of Environment and Energy General Directorate of Forests & Forest Environment – General Directorate for Environmental Policy
Address:	Alkmanos Str, PO 11528 Athens, 2 Patision 147 PO 11251 Athens
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Fax:	N/A
e-mail:	info@ypen.gov.gr , p.drougas@prv.ypeka.gr
www:	ypen.gov.gr/
Authority responsible for its management:	
Name:	Natural Environment and Climate Change Agency (N.E.C.C.A.) <i>Local Unit concerned: Management Unit of Samaria National Park & Protected Areas of Western Crete</i>
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e-mail:	info@necca.gov.gr
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Authority responsible for its management:	
Name:	Forest Directorate of Chania
Address:	Chrysopigi, 73100, Chania, Crete, Greece
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www:	

1. **Conditions:** List here all conditions which were attached to the award or the renewal of the European Diploma. Explain either how the conditions have been totally complied with or detail the progress in complying with the conditions. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

N/A

2. **Recommendations:** List here all recommendations which were attached to the award or the renewal of the European Diploma. Explain either how the recommendations have been totally complied with or detail the progress in complying with the recommendations. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

1. **proceed as quickly as possible to the signing of the pending presidential decree recognising the new boundaries of the Samaria National Park; adapt accordingly the funding of the management board and the implementation of the management plan; continue the monitoring of species and ecosystems, including in particular the phenomenon of drying pine trees;**

1.a Proceed as quickly as possible to the signing of the pending presidential decree recognising the new boundaries of the Samaria National Park.

According to Greek legislation (Law No 1650/1986) a "National Park" is established through a Presidential Decree following the conduction and approval of the Specific Environmental Study (SES) for the area. The SES proposes the boundaries of a National Park, its zonation, the necessity for the establishment or not of regional zones or ecological corridors, and it also makes provisions for the regulation of activities to maintain the protected objects.

In 2019, the Ministry of Environment & Energy assigned a contract to a group of experts to conduct the SESs and Management Plans for the NATURA 2000 sites in the region of Crete, under the context of the contemporary legislative framework. The deliverables concerning the National Park of Samaria are currently under compilation.

1.b Adapt accordingly the funding of the management board and the implementation of the management plan

According to Law No 4685/2020, the management of protected areas of Greece has been assigned to the recently established legal entity of private law, supervised by the Ministry of Environment and Energy, called "Natural Environment and Climate Change Agency" (NECCA). NECCA replaced and integrated all the former Management Bodies of Protected Areas of Greece. The abolishment of the MB of Samaria National Park and its integration as a Management Unit of NECCA took place in March 2022, following the relevant Ministerial Decision (Government Gazette....).

NECCA receives permanent funding by the state for its operational costs, but can also have other funding sources. The Resources and Financial Management of the new Agency is described in detail in article 31 of Law 4685/2020.

Starting from 2022, the revenues from the entrance ticket to the National Park of Samaria constitute a resource of NECCA. From this amount 30% will be allocated every year to the adjacent municipalities for the conduction of works related to the management of the protected area.

NECCA has also undertaken the implementation of all the necessary actions for the operation of the Gorge of Samaria as a visiting area. NECCA also operates, as the sole beneficiary, all the co-funded projects of the former Management Bodies of protected areas of Greece, including the projects implemented in the National Park of Samaria.

The management plans for the protected areas of Greece are under compilation, as already mentioned in the previous section. Their implementation will be a responsibility of NECCA, in cooperation with other relevant authorities, where necessary.

In general, NECCA is responsible for the implementation the policy drawn up by the Ministry of Environment and Energy for the management and conservation of protected areas in Greece, the promotion and implementation of sustainable development actions and the response to climate change.

Among its responsibilities are:

a) the undertaking of the scientific and administrative support of the national system of protected areas.

- b) the preparation of a Five-Year Action Plan which is approved by the Minister of Environment and Energy, which ensures the planning and coordination of the management of the protected areas of Greece, as well as the monitoring of its implementation according to specific performance indicators set.
- c) the drawing up of a Priority Action Framework, which is approved by the Minister of Environment and Energy, as a strategic and operational planning tool, in which funding needs and priorities are determined regarding the management of protected areas at national and regional level and through which their financing is facilitated.

However, since NECCA is a recently formed Organization, the year 2022 can be characterized as a transitional period in which emphasis was placed in the coordination of its local units and the preparation for the next programming period.

1.c Continue the monitoring of species and ecosystems, including in particular the phenomenon of drying pine trees;

In 2012 a monitoring program for the two NATURA 2000 sites GR4340008 and GR4340014, covering the total size of the National Park of Samaria, was established by the former Management Body of Samaria National Park-West Crete (MB). The program includes the monitoring of important habitat types and species of flora and fauna, according to the European and the Greek legislation, or species which are considered threatened according to international institutions (e.g., IUCN). In particular, at present, monitoring is implemented for: 17 terrestrial habitat types, 32 plant species, 31 species of fauna (terrestrial molluscs, terrestrial arthropods, amphibians, reptiles, bats, other mammals and micromammals), 3 marine habitat types, 4 marine species, and of the species of avifauna.

The current research, with a duration until the end of 2023, is funded through the Operational Program "Crete 2014-2020, NSRF 2014-2020, and it is conducted through contract assignments to scientific experts in each field. NECCA as the legal successor of the MB is the beneficiary of this project and is responsible for the monitoring of its performance.

The former MB, also, in 2012 installed 3 meteorological stations in the National Park, which operate since then on a continuous basis (<https://www.samaria.gr/el/meteorologikoi-stathmoi/>). The meteorological parameters monitored follow the standards set from the National Observatory of Athens.

Regarding the phenomenon of drying pine trees, in 2016 the former MB funded via the NSRF 2007-2013, the "*Study for the assessment and evaluation of pine diseases and of its extensibility in Lefka Ori, with subsequent management proposals*". In 2019, the former MB included in a project funded by the O.P. "Transport Infrastructure, Environment and Sustainable Development" NSRF 2014-2020, the implementation of pilot management actions to address the existing problem and to monitor its process, covering a period until the end of 2023.

The monitoring of sampling plots was assigned to a scientific expert in November 2020 and is currently under way. The pilot actions are expected to commence in 2023.

2. open a certain number of side trails along the main trail for several purposes: a. for mountaineering, b. for scientific research, c. to make some historical buildings or ruins accessible for rehabilitation, and d. to create new emergency paths for rescuing people or combating fires. The access to these newly reopened trails should be prohibited for visitors and strictly regulated;

Proposals regarding this recommendation, which refers to the core zone of the protected area (gorge of Samaria), will be examined/studied thoroughly by NECCA in collaboration with the relevant authorities, taking into account the current legislative status of the area, in order to define actions to be incorporated in the next Priority Action Framework.

Apart from this, it should be noted that scientific research and restoration of historical buildings are not prohibited, but are strongly supported by the relevant authorities responsible for the management of the protected area. Apart from the aforementioned monitoring program that is implemented, other scientific projects are carried out within the boundaries of the National Park and its core zone. For instance:

- In 2020, following the approval from the Ministry of Culture, of a relevant study, the project "Restoration and promotion of five of churches in the National Park of Samaria", received funding by the O.P. "Crete 2014-2020", and is currently carried out under the supervision of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Chania. The aim of the project is to preserve and enhance these historical buildings (dating from the beginning of the 14th to the

18th century), which are integrated harmoniously in the landscape of the forest, so that they can be statically and morphologically restored and safely accessible.

During 2022, restoration works (eg, removal of the old tiles, removal of embankments and plastering from the domes, etc) were conducted at 3 from the 5 in total small single-aisled temples located in the Gorge of Samaria from the Ephorate of Antiquities of Chania.

- The applied research project "Creation of the three-dimensional geological structure of the Samaria gorge with the ultimate goal of investigating the hydrological conditions and diet of the springs at the core of the National Park of Samaria" with a duration period: May 2020 – July 2024, and funded by the Green Fund of the Ministry of Environment & Energy, is currently implemented by the Technical University of Crete in collaboration with the General Secretariat of Natural Environment and Water, the General Directorate of Forests and Forest Environment, the Forest Directorate of Chania and NECCA (former MB). The actions/deliverables for the period between October 2021-December 2022 include:

- Updating and renewal of the bibliographic references of the Phase A Deliverable.
- Completion of the "Annual progress report of the measurements / records / observations of the sources for the year 2022".
- Dissemination of the results in international scientific journals and conferences, with reference to the funding program. More specifically, the relevant publications are the following:

- 1) Manoutsoglou, E., Lazos, I., Steiakakis, E., Vafeidis, A., 2022. The Geomorphological and Geological Structure of the Samaria Gorge, Crete, Greece – Geological Models Comprehensive Review and the Link with the Geomorphological Evolution. Applied Sciences, 12(20), 10670 (<https://doi.org/10.3390/app122010670>)
- 2) Lazos, I., Grigorakis, E., Gouskos, Z., Steiakakis, E., Vafidis, A., Manoutsoglou, E., 2022. Investigation of the Geological Structure and Assessment of the Groundwater Potential in Samaria Region (W. Crete). Proceedings of the 12th International Hydrogeological Congress, Nicosia, Cyprus, 20-22 March 2022, p. 326-329.
- 3) Manoutsoglou, E., Lazos, I., Steiakakis, E. Vafidis, A., 2022. The Geological Structure of the wider Samaria Gorge Area, White Mountains, Crete (Greece) – A Comprehensive Review of the Geological Models. Proceedings of the 16th International Congress of the Geological Society of Greece (GSG2022), Patras, Greece, 17-19 October 2022, Ext. Abs. GSG2022-136.
- 4) Lazos, I., Kanellopoulos, C., Sboras, S., Moforis, L., Kallithrakas-Kontos, N., Steiakakis, E., Manoutsoglou, E., 2022. Lithofacies and geochemical study of the Trypali Unit at the Samaria Gorge, Western Crete, Greece. Proceedings of the XXII International Congress of the Carpathian-Balkan Geological Association (CBGA), Plovdiv, Bulgaria, 7-11 September 2022, p. 266.
- 5) Lazos, I., Sboras, S., Kanellopoulos, C., Vafidis, A., Manoutsoglou, E., 2022. Geological and geophysical mapping within the Samaria Gorge, Lefka Ori, Western Crete, Greece and new insights by 3D visualization. Proceedings of the XXII International Congress of the Carpathian-Balkan Geological Association (CBGA), Plovdiv, Bulgaria, 7-11 September 2022, p. 147

3. design and apply measures to reverse the observed invasion of old olive groves by pine trees next to the village of Samaria;

During 2020-2021, the former MB, under the O.P. "Transport Infrastructure, Environment and Sustainable Development" NSRF 2014-2020, proceeded in the mapping and evaluation of the current state of the old olive groves around the abandoned village in the Gorge of Samaria. The results of this project are intended to be used for the compilation and implementation of an action plan that will clearly define and support/protect the habitat from the surrounding coniferous forest.

4. preserve the current extent and quality of wilderness, excluding any new roads within the limits of the Samaria National Park, and retain a similar situation as far as possible in the surrounding areas;

- Following a relevant Ministerial Decision (Government Gazette 1007/D/2021) conditions and restrictions for the protection of the roadless area of Lefka Ori were set for a period of 2 years. In particular, in an area of 382,06 km² covering the largest part of the National Park of Samaria corresponding to ~65% of the NP, which has a total size of ~585 km², the construction of new roads for motorized vehicles, -regardless of scale, or any other kind of technical intervention, change or alteration of the natural environment-, is prohibited.

This decision aims to protect the important habitats and species of the area, until the issuance of the relevant Presidential Decree of the official declaration of the National Park.

- Other actions to preserve the quality of wilderness involve:

i. the provision of expert opinion and the proposal of specific terms and conditions for works and activities to be implemented within the boundaries of the National Park, in the context of the "appropriate assessment" of the article 6 of the EU Directive 92/43/EEC and the national forest & environmental law,

ii. scientific work/research for the evaluation of the management of the protection elements, such as:

- The collection of data from the implemented monitoring programs for the assessment of the conservation status of species and habitats in the context of Directive 92/43/EEC & Directive 2009/147/EC for the Natura 2000 sites of the National Park.

- the new Conservation Status Assessments of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List, which was conducted by the CIHEAM Mediterranean Agricultural Institute of Chania (MAICH) for the threatened flora taxa of Lefka Ori (National Park of Samaria), and are currently in the process of publication.

- the project "Development of a methodology for strengthening and protecting populations of endangered plant species in Crete. Pilot application in the Prefecture of Chania", also, implemented by MAICH, in collaboration with the Forest Directorate of Chania, which includes actions concerning plant taxa in the NATURA 2000 area of Lefka Ori. The project's duration is: January 2020 – December 2022 and it is financed by the "Protection and Upgrading of Forests 2019" Program of the Green Fund - Special Forest Agency (national resources). The objectives of the project are:

- Development of methodology to address short-term and long-term needs for the conservation of threatened plant species and expansion of relevant scientific knowledge.
- Contribution to the conservation of endangered plant species in the Prefecture of Chania in situ & ex situ.
- Information, training and development of partnerships between the competent bodies for the conservation of biodiversity.

The actions of the project include:

- Implementation and harmonization of the criteria for determining the conservation priorities of the threatened plant species of the Prefecture of Chania
- Investigating the best methodology for enhancing/reintroducing natural populations for selected threatened plant species
- Conservation of genetic material outside the natural environment (exsitu) of endangered plant species – Seed ecophysiology
- Dissemination of the final results of the Program – Education.

5. take appropriate measures to facilitate the accessibility of the national park for disabled people up to 2.5 km from the south entrance of the park.

Following the relevant recommendation of the Council of Europe, the co-competent authorities/services (Forest Directorate of Chania, former MB, Region of Crete, Municipality of Sfakia) worked together to technically study this issue and find resources for its application.

As a result of this process, the Decentralized Administration of Crete in 2021 became the beneficiary of the Project "Creation of an accessible route in the Samaria National Park" in the framework of the O.P. "Crete 2014-2020", NSRF 2014-2020. Through the project a route of approximately 2 km, starting from the southern entrance of the gorge, will be improved in order to become accessible to people with disabilities that require a wheelchair. The project intends to also make provisions of accessibility for the entire route until the southern entrance of the gorge (eg, the route from the port of Agia Roumeli until the southern entrance of Samaria, as well as the starting points to reach Agia Roumeli by ferry boat). The project is expected to be completed and operational within the next three years.

3. Site Management: List here any changes to the European Diploma holding site management, in relation to both terrestrial and aquatic environments (as appropriate), and in relation to staff and finances, since the last annual report was submitted to the Council of Europe. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

There are no changes to the Samaria National Park, in relation to the terrestrial or aquatic environments.

As it was already mentioned in previous sections, the former MB was abolished and integrated into NECCA - a new organizational system for the management of protected areas of Greece. The personnel of the former MB, are now the staff the local management unit of NECCA called “Samaria National Park & Western Crete Protected Areas Management Unit”.

In 2022, for the first time NECCA undertook the operation of the Gorge of Samaria during the visiting period, from May 1st-October 30th, through collaboration with external cooperators (contractors). Until then, this was a responsibility of the Forest Directorate of Chania for over 60 years.

In addition to its other resources, NECCA receives the revenues from the entrance ticket to the National Park of Samaria. This is the first time that these resources are allocated directly to the Organisation/Service that manages the protected area. The adjacent municipalities will continue to receive a 30% from the revenues every year for the conduction of works related to the management of the protected area.

The Forest Directorate of Chania, as well as the Fire Department, also contributed, each Service in their field of jurisdiction, to the operation/supervision of the core zone of the National Park, during the operational period.

Specifically regarding the Forest Directorate of Chania:

- The permanent staff employed this year at the Gorge of Samaria by the Forest Directorate of Chania, included one Forester, one Forester of technical education, and four forest rangers. Two forest rangers were on a daily basis at the Xyloskalo outpost (northern entrance of the Gorge of Samaria) and at the central outpost inside the Gorge of Samaria, during the operational period of the National Park, and additionally, on a daily basis, at Xyloskalo outpost, after the end of visiting hours. Additionally, occasional visits from different entrances within the Gorge of Samaria took place, in order to protect the ecosystem.
- Two forest rangers, in addition to the onesthe previously mentioned, were employed as mule porters in order to transport the materials needed for the restoration of the old churches in the Gorge of Samaria.
- The Forest Directorate of Chania donated the working animals (5 mules) it possessed, to NECCA for the operation needs of the Gorge of Samaria.
- The meteorological data sent daily by the Hellenic National Meteorological Service to the Forest Directorate of Chania with certain actions/arrangements of the Forest Directorate were also forwarded to NECCA,
- Forest rangers connected the water supply at the escape path of Potistiria-Kalyvaki and resolved problems that occurred in the water supply network of Mitatouli-Samaria-Prinari, inside the Gorge of Samaria.
- The implementation of the restrictive measures for the prohibition of the entrance of domestic goats into the National Park, continue, in order to prevent mating with the wild goat of Crete (*Capra aegagrus cretica*) and hybridization.
- The effort to eliminate illegal poaching is an ongoing process.
- The Forest Directorate of Chania collected and treated 53 wild animals (birds) from all over the Prefecture of Chania, of which 39 were sent to Athens to ANIMA (a non-profit association active in the field of natural environment, with its main activity being the nursing of wild animals) and the rest after being treated by local veterinarians and the personnel of the Forest Directorate of Chania were released back to the natural environment, at Lefka Ori.

4. Boundaries: Give details of any changes to the boundaries of the European Diploma holding site since the last annual report was submitted to the Council of Europe. If there are any changes, please attach an appropriate map to this report. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

There are no changes in the boundaries of the Samaria (Lefka Ori) National Park, since the last reporting period (2021).

5. Other information: List here any other information about the European Diploma holding site which you consider should be provided to the Council of Europe.

- The logo of the European Diploma appears on the information sign at the entrance of the National Park and on all the signs along the central path. Moreover, Council of Europe flags have been hoisted at both entrances of the Gorge of Samaria.