

**Resolution CM/ResDip(2020)8
on the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas awarded to Vashlovani (Georgia)**

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 23 September 2020
at the 1384th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)¹*

Appendix 5: Model plan for annual reports

Annual report for the year 2025

Annual reports should describe the changes that have taken place since the previous year in dynamic terms of management and function and not be limited to basic data. Any new text or map introducing a change in the situation of the area should be attached to the annual report.

State: Georgia (country)

Name of the area: Vashlovani Protected Areas

Year and number of years since the award or renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas:

Central authority concerned:

Name: LEPL Agency of Protected Areas of Georgia

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Tel:

Fax:

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Authority responsible for its management:

Name: Vashlovani Protected Areas Administration

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¹ As amended by Resolution CM/ResDip(2014)2 on 2 July 2014 at the 1204th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies.
Internet : <http://www.coe.int/cm>

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. Finalise and start implementing, in 2020, a new management plan for the next nine-year period. Include specific provisions dedicated to climate change and ways to address this issue in relation to the long-term preservation of species and habitats typical of the area.

A new nine-year Management Plan for Vashlovani Protected Areas has been developed and officially approved by the Government of Georgia. The document was prepared with the financial support of the Caucasus Nature Fund (CNF) and the Society for Nature Conservation (SABUKO), in close collaboration with the Agency of Protected Areas, the Vashlovani National Park Administration, and various local stakeholders.

The plan outlines strategic directions for the next nine years (until 2029), ensuring sustainable conservation, biodiversity protection, climate change adaptation, and community engagement. An annual action plan has been prepared accordingly, and a monitoring system for both management and action plans has been introduced

2. continue to fully implement the pasture management plan as part of the general management plan; carefully monitor the pasture activities and the respect of lease contracts by farmers; secure the corresponding budgets from the state and other sources;

The Development Programme (UNDP) has successfully concluded the project titled "Sustainable Management of Pastures in Georgia to Demonstrate Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Benefits and Dividends for Local Communities." This initiative focused on the winter livestock shelters within the protected areas and 45 nearby farms in the Vashlovani region. As part of the project, a comprehensive evaluation of pasture productivity was conducted. A detailed map of the core plant species within Vashlovani Protected Areas was developed, complemented by an updated map of pasture lands integrated into a GIS database. The Vashlovani Protected Areas Administration, together with the Agency of Protected Areas, has been receiving lease applications from shepherds. Approximately 80% of the available pasture lands are currently leased. The Vashlovani National Park administration staff also holds regular awareness-raising meetings to engage local farmers. To enhance the living conditions of farmers, two significant water pipeline projects were completed: "Mlashetskali - Bugha Moedani," spanning 24 kilometers, and "Mamachai Khevi - Samukhi," covering 7 kilometers. However, during heavy rains in the spring of 2024, the "Mamachai Khevi – Samukhi " pipeline sustained damage and is currently out of service.

3. Collect all the available scientific data and integrate them into the database under construction. Present a systematic list of habitats with a short description and respective coverage in the Vashlovani Protected Areas; establish a comprehensive list of endemic, rare, and threatened species, with differentiation between the Caucasus, Georgian, and local species

According to the work plan approved by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia and a 9-year Management Plan of Vashlovani Protected Areas, the Administration is mandated to conduct annual biodiversity research and monitoring of the species present within the area. In line with these obligations, data collection is routinely carried out by natural resources specialists and subsequently integrated into a centralized shared database. A systematic list of habitats, along with brief descriptions, is included as an appendix to the report document. The Vashlovani National Park Administration collaborates with various environmental organizations and academic institutions that undertake research and monitoring projects within the park. Upon completion of these three studies, the resulting reports are submitted to both the park administration and the Agency of Protected Areas for review and integration. An independent organization "Rewilding Europe" will work with Vashlovani National Park over the next 5 years to develop various aspects of nature restoration — restoring forests, rivers, and grassland ecosystems, reintroducing keystone species, promoting coexistence between humans and wildlife, and developing nature-based tourism

4. continue working closely with the local authorities and communities, especially in the field of eco-tourism and sustainable development;

The Administration of Vashlovani Protected Areas works closely with local authorities and tourism service providers. Representatives of the National Park are actively engaged in the Dedoplistskaro Tourism Development Association and the Vashlovani Friends Association, fostering joint efforts to enhance awareness of both the park and the Dedoplistskaro municipality at local and international levels. The Administration plays a pivotal role in supporting the growth of the local tourism industry. Local tourism businesses frequently seek guidance and receive informal advice from park administration staff through phone calls, social media, and other direct communication channels. This ongoing communication has proven effective in building strong, cooperative relationships between the National Park and local businesses. Additionally, representatives of the Administration participate in several joint projects with the Dedoplistskaro Tourism Development Association, aimed at strengthening eco-tourism and promoting sustainable economic development in the region.

5. continue maintaining and improving the infrastructure for visitors in the park; carefully control the motor traffic on the roads inside the protected areas and monitor visitors' activities;

Renovation of tourist shelters and administrative buildings in Vashlovani National Park began in the second half of 2025. Regular road repairs are carried out to ensure accessibility, and new restrictions have been imposed on driving motorcycles and large camper trucks inside the park to preserve the natural environment. Throughout 2025, the Administration has consistently monitored the condition of infrastructure units to ensure proper upkeep and has actively monitored visitor activities to ensure compliance with park rules and minimize environmental impact. Several repair and enhancement projects have been undertaken, including the refurbishment of picnic tables and rest areas, as well as the renewal of board stickers and road signs. Additionally, construction is underway for a new ranger station in Takhistskali, which will enhance security and visitor services. Water drilling operations have been completed in the visitors' village with the goal of supplying water to ten tourist shelters. These improvements aim to enhance the visitor experience while ensuring the sustainable use of park resources.

6. Pursue and develop international collaboration with the Republic of Azerbaijan, especially focusing on ungulate and large carnivore conservation;

Since 2013, Georgia and Azerbaijan have been actively engaged in cross-border cooperation, particularly in the restoration of biodiversity in the Iori-Mingechauri region. A key initiative within this framework is the Gazelle Reintroduction Project, launched in 2013 with the support of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the Agency of Protected Areas of Georgia, and relevant Azerbaijani agencies. Between 2013 and 2021, a total of 73 gazelles were successfully relocated from Shirvan National Park in Azerbaijan to the Eldari Lowland in Georgia. The project has proven highly successful, with the gazelle population now reaching more than 600 individuals. Vashlovani Protected Areas, situated near the Azerbaijan border, include sections that adjoin the Ilisu Protected Areas. The ongoing Gazelle Restoration Project in Ilisu provides a strong foundation for future cross-border collaboration. As part of the project, staff from the Vashlovani Protected Areas Administration have participated in several exchange visits to Azerbaijan. These visits focused on training rangers in gazelle monitoring, sharing expertise, and strengthening cooperative efforts. Similarly, Azerbaijani colleagues have visited Vashlovani Protected Areas to engage in joint monitoring activities. Currently, a structured system is in place for the regular exchange of data, methodologies, and other critical information related to gazelle monitoring in the cross-border region. In addition, the two countries exchange information on the presence and movement of large carnivores in the transboundary area, contributing to improved monitoring and coordinated conservation efforts. Notably, the Parliament of Georgia has officially approved granting the status of a "multiple-use area, named after Nugzar Zazanashvili" to the Samukhi Valley. This designation has enhanced the protection and monitoring efforts for the gazelle population. The Gazelle Monitoring Service of the Vashlovani Protected Areas Administration is well-equipped with advanced monitoring tools, including a thermal vision drone. This device is utilized not only for wildlife monitoring but also for detecting potential violations, thus enhancing the effectiveness of conservation efforts.

7. Use the European Diploma designation more frequently in promotional activities and display its logo; carefully consider other potential international designations, in order to avoid confusion among local authorities and the population.

The European Diploma designation for Vashlovani Protected Areas is consistently highlighted in both local and international media, reinforcing its recognition and prestige. Visitors to the Vashlovani Visitor Center are provided with comprehensive information about this accolade, ensuring that the area's status as a holder of the European Diploma is well-publicized. To further enhance visibility, the European Diploma logo is prominently featured on Vashlovani trekking maps, as well as on various printed materials such as leaflets and brochures distributed to tourists. This designation is also a key focus in presentations and public speeches, underscoring the international recognition and significance of Vashlovani Protected Areas. The continuous promotion of the European Diploma status serves to boost awareness and appreciation of the park's exceptional natural values among visitors and stakeholders alike.

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.

In 2025, the staff of Vashlovani Protected Areas consists of 46 members, detailed as follows:

Rangers: 38
 Head of the Security Division: 1
 Director: 1
 Visitor service Specialists: 2
 Natural Resources Specialist: 1
 Gazelle Monitoring Specialist: 1
 Accountant: 1
 Janitors: 1

Revenue generated from tourist services in 2025 reflected the growing interest in Vashlovani as a tourist destination.

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.

The demarcation of Vashlovani Protected Areas was completed in 2019 to clearly define its boundaries. A minor adjustment to these boundaries was made in 2021. As of 2025, the total area of Vashlovani Protected Areas remains unchanged at 35,292 hectares. The breakdown of the area is as follows:

Vashlovani Strict Nature Reserve: 9,962 hectares
 Vashlovani National Park: 25,021 hectares
 Eagle Gorge: 98 hectares
 Alazani Floodplain Forest: 201 hectares
 Takhti Tefa Mud Volcano: 10 hectares

These defined boundaries are essential for the effective management and conservation efforts within the protected areas, ensuring the preservation of their unique landscapes and biodiversity

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 establishment of the first-ever Biosphere Reserve in Georgia, located in the Kakheti Region, marks a significant milestone not only for the country but also for the entire South Caucasus Region. This Biosphere Reserve strategically links Vashlovani Protected Areas with Tusheti Protected Areas, creating a continuous corridor for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. The involvement of international bodies, including the Council of Europe, has been crucial to the successful implementation of this pioneering project.

In January 2022, the Vashlovani Protected Areas Administration initiated a pilot phase of the Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART) within its security department. The system employs a data-driven approach for effective monitoring and management of protected areas and was initially tested with the assistance of a foreign expert who helped prepare the first report based on January's data. To address challenges in data collection, additional training was provided to rangers on the use of smartphones for the system.

By September 2022, the SMART Patrol program's database was updated, and new computers were acquired to support its implementation. Throughout 2024, SMART Patrolling has continued to be effectively implemented in the protected areas. All rangers are now proficient in using the system, which has become an integral part of their daily patrolling and monitoring activities. The program is operating smoothly, enhancing the efficiency of conservation efforts and law enforcement within the National Park.

Furthermore, the Rewilding Europe program, which will be implemented in Vashlovani Protected Areas over the next five years, is expected to play a significant role both in advancing conservation projects and in developing local eco-tourism services and community involvement.

The following sections of the form should only be filled in if your area is in the year before a renewal of its European Diploma for Protected Areas, i.e., year 4 after the award of the European Diploma or year 9 after its renewal.

6. Natural heritage (general abiotic description: geomorphology, geology and hydrogeology, habitats, flora, fauna, landscape) – State of conservation

- 6.1. Environment: changes or deterioration in the environment, of natural or anthropic origin, accidental or permanent, actual or anticipated
- 6.2. Flora and vegetation: changes in the plant population and in the vegetational cover; presumed causes
- 6.3. Fauna: changes in the sedentary or migratory populations; congregating, egg-laying and breeding grounds

7. Cultural heritage and socio-economic context

- 7.1. Cultural heritage
 - 7.1.1. Changes concerning cultural heritage
- 7.2. Socio-economic context
 - 7.2.1. Changes concerning the socio-economic context

8. Education and scientific interest

- 8.1. Visitors – Information policy
 - 8.1.1. Arrangements for receiving and informing the public (building, booklets, maps, cards, etc.)
 - 8.1.2. Frequentation by visitors and behavior (number, distribution in time and space)
 - 8.1.3. Special visits (distinguished persons, groups, etc.)
- 8.2. Scientific research
 - 8.2.1. Current or completed research (observation, experimentation, etc.; identification or inventory of the species listed in the appendices to the Bern Convention, etc.)
 - 8.2.2. Scientific publications

9. Site description (vulnerability, protection status, ownership, documentation)

- 9.1. Changes in legislation or regulations
- 9.2. Changes in ownership title (conversion to public property, rentals, etc.)
- 9.3. Extension or transfer, new uses (for example, conversion into total reserve)

10. Site management (management plans, budget, and personnel)

- 10.1. Improvements made
 - 10.1.1. Ecological action affecting the flora and biotopes; controls of fauna
 - 10.1.2. Protection against the elements (fire, water regime)
 - 10.1.3. Approaches and thoroughfares (paths, roads, car parks, signposting, fencing, etc.)
 - 10.1.4. Field equipment (hides and study facilities)
 - 10.1.5. Waste management
 - 10.1.6. Use of renewable energy systems
- 10.2. Management
 - 10.2.1. Administrative department: changes made
 - 10.2.2. Wardens' department: changes made
 - 10.2.3. Internal policing measures
 - 10.2.4. Infringement of regulations and damage; legal action

11. Influence of the award of the European Diploma for Protected Areas

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