

**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 2024

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: Vashlovani Protected Areas was granted the European Diploma Status in 2015, award was renewed in 2020.

Central authority concerned:

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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 is currently undergoing the procedure for official approval 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.

This comprehensive plan outlines the strategic direction for managing the protected areas over the next nine years, ensuring sustainable conservation, biodiversity protection, and community involvement. The approval of this plan represents a significant milestone in the long-term conservation efforts for Vashlovani Protected Areas.

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 state and other sources;

The Agency of Protected Areas, in partnership with the European Union (EU) and the United Nations 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 already begun receiving lease applications from shepherds, with approximately 80% of the available pasturelands currently leased. Regular awareness-raising meetings are also held by the Vashlovani National Park administration staff 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 the newly developed 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 studies, the resulting reports are submitted to both the park administration and the Agency of Protected Areas for review and integration.

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 the local authorities and tourist service providers. Representatives of the National Park are active members of "Dedoplistskaro Tourism Development Association"

The Administration of Vashlovani Protected Areas maintains close collaboration 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 promoting the growth of the local tourism industry.

In 2024, several new guesthouses, dining establishments, and other tourism service points were established within the municipality. Local tourism businesses frequently seek guidance and receive informal advice from the park administration staff through phone calls, social media, and other direct communication channels. This approach has proven effective in building strong, cooperative relationships between the National Park and local businesses.

The Vashlovani Protected Areas Administration also collaborates closely with the Dedoplistskaro Tourism Development Association, with representatives actively participating in several joint projects aimed at boosting tourism and 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;

The maintenance of tourist infrastructure within Vashlovani Protected Areas has been successfully completed. 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 2024, the Administration has consistently monitored the condition of infrastructure units to ensure their upkeep.

Several repair and enhancement projects have been undertaken, including the refurbishment of picnic tables and areas, as well as the renewal of board stickers and road signs. A new tourist shelter, along with picnic and camping areas, has been established in Kakliskure. Additionally, construction is underway for a new ranger station in Takhistskali, which will enhance security and visitor services.

Water drilling operations have commenced in the visitors' village, with the goal of supplying water to ten new tourist shelters upon completion. 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 to be highly successful, with the gazelle population now reaching approximately 500 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 have 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, there is a regular exchange of data, methodologies, and other critical information related to gazelle monitoring in the cross-border region. 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 more frequently the European Diploma designation 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.

The previous Management Plan for the Vashlovani Protected Areas expired in 2020. Beginning in early 2021, the Agency of Protected Areas, in collaboration with the Vashlovani Protected Areas Administration and various relevant stakeholders, commenced the development of a new Management Plan. With financial support from donor organizations, this plan, intended to guide the management and conservation efforts for the next nine years, is currently in the final stages of the approval process.

In 2024, the staff of Vashlovani Protected Areas was expanded, with an emphasis on employing local residents as rangers to strengthen community involvement. The current administrative team consists of 48 members, detailed as follows:

Rangers: 39
 Head of the Security Division: 1
 Director: 1
 Visitor Specialists: 2
 Natural Resources Specialist: 1
 Gazelle Monitoring Specialist: 1
 Accountant: 1
 Janitors: 2

In terms of financial performance, the revenue generated from tourist services in the protected areas amounted to GEL 75,443 (11 months) reflecting 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 carried out in 2019 to clearly define its boundaries. A minor adjustment to these boundaries was made in 2021. Currently, the total area of Vashlovani Protected Areas remains unchanged as of 2024, covering 35,292 hectares in total. 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 its 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 such as the Council of Europe and other organizations 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, which employs a data-driven approach for effective monitoring and management of protected areas, 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 Patrol continues 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.

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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