

**Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)1
on the revised regulations for the European Diploma for Protected Areas**

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 20 February 2008
at the 1018th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)¹*

Appendix 5: Model plan for annual reports

Annual report for the year 2023

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 has been granted with the European Diploma Status in 2015, award has been renewed in 2020.	
Central authority concerned:	
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Authority responsible for its management:	
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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 comprehensive nine-year management plan has been meticulously crafted and officially sanctioned by the Agency of Protected Areas of Georgia. The formulation of this new document was made possible through collaborative support from the Caucasus Nature Fund (CNF) and the Society for Nature Conservation (SABUKO), with active engagement from the Agency of Protected Areas, Vashlovani National Park Administration, and local stakeholders. Currently, the new nine-year management plan is in the final stages of approval, signifying a collective commitment to the sustainable management and conservation of the region.

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, with financial support from the European Union and 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 specifically addressed the establishment of winter shelters for livestock in protected areas and the encompassing 45 farms situated in Vashlovani. Applications for leasing have been submitted to the Vashlovani Protected Areas Administration and the Agency of Protected Areas, with approximately 80% of pasturelands already under lease agreements. To foster awareness and understanding among local farmers, regular meetings are organized by the administration's staff of Vashlovani National Park, further reinforcing the project's commitment to sustainable pasture management and community engagement.

To improve the living conditions of farmers, the construction of two water pipelines "Mlashetskali - Bugha Moedani" on 24 kilometers and "Mamachai Khevi - Samukhi" on 7 kilometers was undertaken.

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, as well as within the new 9-year Management Plan of Vashlovani Protected Areas, the Administration has the direct obligation to annually conduct biodiversity research and monitoring activities of the onsite represented species. Based on this, the above-mentioned data is periodically collected by the natural resources specialists and later integrated into the shared database. A systematic list of habitats with short descriptions is represented as an appendix to the report document.

Furthermore, the park administration actively collaborates with diverse environmental organizations and universities engaged in conducting research and monitoring projects within Vashlovani National Park. Upon the conclusion of these research initiatives, comprehensive reports are disseminated to both the park administration and the relevant protected areas. This collaborative approach not only facilitates the generation of valuable insights but also contributes to the ongoing conservation and management efforts within the park, fostering a synergistic relationship between the scientific community and the park administration.

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 maintains a robust collaboration with local authorities and tourist service providers. Actively participating as members in the 'Dedoplistskaro Tourism Development Association' and the 'Local Action Group' (LAG), representatives of the National Park play a pivotal role in increasing awareness of the park and the municipality at both local and international levels. A concerted effort is made to foster joint involvement in endeavors that contribute to the overall development and recognition of the park and its surroundings.

The Administration of Protected Areas takes proactive measures to support the growth of local tourism businesses. Notably, in 2023, several new hotels, guest houses, and food facilities were established in the municipality. The administration staff readily provides recommendations and tips to representatives of the local tourism business, often through informal channels such as phone conversations and social networking. This informal yet engaged approach serves to cultivate a closer relationship between the local business community and the national park, fostering a collaborative environment.

Further exemplifying this collaborative spirit, the Vashlovani Protected Areas Administration actively cooperates with the Dedoplistskaro Tourism Development Association, with a representative from the administration participating in various joint projects. This collaborative effort enhances the synergy between conservation objectives and sustainable tourism development, creating a positive impact on both the local community and the protected areas.

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 process of the tourist infrastructure is completed. Roads are being repaired regularly. Restrictions on driving motorcycles and large camper trucks inside the park were imposed. During 2023, the administration continuously monitored the state of infrastructure units. Repair works of picnic tables and the picnic areas have been done. board stickers and road signs were renewed. A new tourist shelter, picnic, and camping areas were arranged in Walnut Bay. The building of a new ranger station in Takhistskali is under process.

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

Georgia-Azerbaijan cross-border cooperation has been in an active phase since 2013. Cooperation in the field of biodiversity restoration in Iori-Mingechauri cross-border area is noteworthy, in which the main component is the Gazelle Reintroduction Project. The above-mentioned project was launched in 2013 with the support of the World Wildlife Fund, the Agency of Protected Areas, and relevant agencies in Azerbaijan. 73 Gazelles were relocated from Shirvan National Park to Eldari lowland in 2013-2021. The project is successful and today the number of Gazelles reaches up to 450 individuals. Most of Vashlovani Protected Areas is located near the border of Azerbaijan and a certain section of it borders the Ilisu Protected Areas. The Gazelle Restoration Project is also underway in Ilisu Protected Areas, which is an important basis for future cooperation. Employees of the Vashlovani Protected Areas Administration have visited Azerbaijan several times under the Gazelle Restoration Project. The visits served to train rangers to monitor Gazelles, share experiences, and enhance cooperation. Azerbaijani colleagues also

visited the Vashlovani Protected Area to participate in the monitoring of the Gazelles. At this stage, the results, methods, and other important information on the Gazelle monitoring in the cross-border area are being exchanged regularly.

It is important to highlight that the Parliament of Georgia officially approved the designation of Samukhi Valley as a "multiple-use area, named after Nugzar Zazanashvili." This formal recognition has significantly enhanced the effectiveness of protection and monitoring initiatives for Gazelles in the region.

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.

Information regarding the attainment of the European Diploma is consistently disseminated through both local and international media channels. For the convenience of local and international tourists, comprehensive information is available at the Visitor Center. The strategic goal is to ensure the widespread visibility of the European Diploma designation within the holding area. This recognition is prominently featured on Vashlovani trekking maps, and promotional materials such as leaflets and brochures consistently showcase the European Diploma logo. The significance of this designation is underscored in every presentation and public speech, emphasizing the international acknowledgment bestowed upon the Vashlovani Protected Areas.

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 of Vashlovani Protected Areas expired in 2020. From the beginning of 2021 the Agency together with the Vashlovani Protected Areas Administration, various stakeholders, and within the financial support of donor organizations, has ensured the elaboration of a new Management Plan which will be valid for the next nine years. The new management plan is already under the process of final approval. In 2023 The staff of Vashlovani protected areas has increased. Locals were employed as rangers. Currently, there are 47 people in the administration staff. Compared to 2022, revenues of VPA have increased which is a positive tendency that hopes to be maintained in the upcoming years as well. (71355 GEL in 2022; 86562 in 2023)

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.

Demarcation was conducted in 2019 to clarify the boundaries of Vashlovani Protected Areas. In 2021 there was a little change in boundaries.

The total area of Vashlovani Protected Areas represents 35292 ha(Vashlovani strict nature reserve- 9962ha; Vashlovani national park- 25021ha; Eagle gorge-98ha; Alazani floodplain forest- 201ha; Takhti tefa mud volcano- 10ha)

In 2023 there are no changes in boundaries

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.

It is imperative to highlight that the establishment of the first-ever Biosphere Reserve in Georgia, located in the Kakheti Region, marks a significant milestone. This reserve serves as a linkage between the Vashonavi and Tusheti Protected Areas. It is noteworthy that the creation of this Biosphere Reserve is not only a pioneering achievement within the borders of Georgia but also stands as the inaugural instance in the broader South Caucasus Region.

The involvement of the Council of Europe and other international organizations is very important for the successful implementation of the project.

In January 2022, the security department initiated the "SMART patrolling" of territories in a testing mode. Subsequently, a comprehensive report for January was compiled in February, utilizing data collected with the assistance of a foreign expert. To address any errors identified during the data collection phase, additional training sessions were conducted for rangers within the security department, focusing on the proficient use of smartphones.

In September, the Smart Patrol program underwent a database update, synchronized with corresponding updates on smartphones. Furthermore, the acquisition of new computers was made to bolster the efficiency of the "Smart patrolling" initiative. As of the current moment, all rangers within the National Park have been trained in Smart Patrolling and are effectively utilizing the system in their patrolling and monitoring activities. The successful implementation of this program underscores its seamless functionality and integration within the protected areas, contributing to enhanced security and monitoring practices.

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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