

**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)<sup>1</sup>*

**Appendix 5: Model plan for annual reports**

**Annual report for the year 2019**

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

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 Area has been awarded in 2015; Number of years - 4 years

**Central authority concerned:**

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

**Conditions:**

1. By the end of 2015, remove the shelters located on the immediate border of the Vashlovani Strict Nature Reserve, and rigorously enforce the existing regulation for grazing in the reserve;

2. accelerate the drafting process of a comprehensive sustainable grazing management plan, taking into account the socio-economic context and the effects of grazing, positive and negative, on the long-term conservation of the features of the Vashlovani Protected Areas; this plan will have clear objectives, a time frame for implementation and indicators of progress, and will address the matter of dismantlement and relocation of grazing equipment and activities outside the strict nature protection areas and the restoration of degraded zones of the Vashlovani National Park. A draft will be submitted to the Group of Specialists on the European Diploma by the end of 2016, with alternative grazing areas located at a reasonable distance from the borders of the zones where these activities are forbidden; the State Party is also urged to enforce the existing regulation on grazing in the whole Diploma area, without delay, and to limit grazing activities to the carrying capacity for the Vashlovani Protected Areas (to be determined);

**Response:**

1. The Agency of Protected Areas has discussed the above mentioned topic related to the existing shelters in Strict Nature Reserve, hence taking into consideration all the recommendations and the importance of the issue, demarcation of the given area was conducted, based on which the area was excluded as the part of Strict Nature Reserve and was granted the status of National Park – Category II.

2. Pasture Management plan for Vashlovani Protected Areas is in place which was elaborated in 2016. It ensures conservation of natural resources and biodiversity through the ecological management and traditional grazing practice; rehabilitation of grazing areas and introduces sustainable grazing practices on Vashlovani Protected Areas. Monitoring of grazing areas on Traditional use zone, as well as controlling the level of erosions is permanently carried out by rangers, as well as the natural resources specialists who periodically process and update the collected data. The agency together with the administration of Vashlovani Protected Areas actively cooperates with the representatives of municipal government to develop lease agreement form, which will determine lease price and permissions on grazing according to the conditions of pasture management plan.

On the other hand, in the frames of the financial cooperation with EU and UNDP, the Agency of Protected Areas has completed the Project “Sustainable management of pastures in Georgia to demonstrate climate change mitigation and adaptation benefits and dividends for local communities” within which 14149 ha of degraded pastures were rehabilitated, about 480 ha of migratory route was introduced, as well as sustainable pasture management practices among farmers and sheep-breeders in the Vashlovani Protected Areas were implemented.

**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. Develop and fund an operational and comprehensive monitoring programme of the Diploma area; this programme should be focused on the specific natural and landscape features of the Diploma area and the anthropogenic pressures on it;
2. prepare and implement a programme to maintain and renovate field equipment and the infrastructure for tourists and visitors
3. Pursue, update and complement inventories and mapping of species and habitats (distribution, abundance, state of conservation and tendencies), taking into account the Emerald Network’s standards and requirements
4. secure the Vashlovani Protected Areas core budget, from internal sources preferably, and provide funding to ensure that the 2013-19 management plan is fully implemented
5. start the process of drafting the next management plan in a timely manner, so that the whole award period of the European Diploma for the Vashlovani Protected Areas is covered
6. improve further the expertise and skills of the staff members, especially in the field of ecology and the knowledge and monitoring of species;
7. continue and develop cross-border co-operation for the protection of large carnivores

**Response:**

- The management of Vashlovani Protected Areas is implemented according to the Management Plan (2014 - 2020) which together with the operational plan represents one of the important guidelines for defining the further action steps of the Administration. Besides, Comprehensive Monitoring Program is also in place and the administration actively uses the above mentioned software to conduct monitoring on the relict, endemic and "Red Listed" species spread on the given area and periodically updates the data. Furthermore, determination-identification of the places with anthropogenic influences of Vashlovani Protected Areas have been implemented, based on which new patrolling routes were defined. At this stage eight daily standing ranger protection stations are in place.
- For maintaining and renovating field equipment and infrastructure financial resources are allocated from state budget as well as within the financial cooperation with international donor organizations, whose support is extremely crucial for PA development. For instance, 3-year project is implemented for Vashlovani Protected Areas in Cooperation with CNF, which is regularly updated after each 3 year. Herewith, with the support of WWF in the frames of TJS program construction and arrangement of new eco-tourist infrastructure is implemented. This year, for better protection of environment and improving the patrolling system on VPA, two more new ranger shelters have been built within the TJS/WWF financial support.
- Monitoring on species and habitats is constantly carried out by the natural resources specialists of the administration, whereas the rangers are patrolling on every day basis to remain the high conservation status of unique flora and fauna and to protect the distinct nature of Georgia. Collected data on key habitats, "Red listed," endemic and relict species are periodically processed, updated and sent to the agency within the quarter, as well annual reports on implemented monitoring. Furthermore, Vashlovani Protected Areas are designated as the Emerald Network Site, for this special monitoring activities is defined in Vashlovani annual plan 2020, as well as will be integrated in the new management plan. The information regarding the key species and habitats of Vashlovani Protected Areas according to the Bern Convention is uploaded on the Emerald Standard Data Form.
- Financing the budget of VPA is implemented through the allocated funds from the state budget, as well as within the international funds of the following donor organizations: Caucasus Nature Fund (CNF), WWF/TJS, Global Environmental Facility (GEF), UNDP, EU within the ENPARD program assisting the administration to ensure the attainment of core objectives envisaged within the management plan and provide an efficient management performance of Vashlovani Protected Areas.
- The existing 6-year Management Plan is valid till 2020. The agency has already started working on the further steps for updating management document with 9 years validity. Currently, the agency together with the administration of VPA conducts the assessment of implemented activities under the current management plan and reveals those objectives that should be integrated as the further priorities within the frames of new management plan in a full accordance with the existing needs. Though, the active working phase on updating the MP will be undertaken from the beginning of year 2020.
- Qualification enhancement and capacity building of administration staff is an important component which is defined as one of the important priorities in the management plan, as well as within the ongoing international programs and projects under the donor support. Various knowledge enhancement trainings for VPA employees on local as well as on international level are conducted within the technical and financial support of CNF, WWF/TJS, GEF, UNDP, EU. For 2020 seven different types of trainings will be held for Vashlovani Protected Areas staff within UNDP ongoing project: "Enhancing Protected Areas system capacity for performance improvement and increased awareness," another huge project that started this year is supported by US National Park Service with financial support of the Department of Interior and envisages capacity development and institutional strengthening of Vashlovani. It's noteworthy that with the financial support of UNDP, an appropriate training course has been conducted for VPA employees to increase their capabilities and experience in monitoring of Emerald Sites.
- The Agency is successfully implementing cross-border partnership with international organizations and representatives of neighboring countries. For instance, with the close cooperation with WWF Caucasus Office the "Transboundary Joint Secretariat" project is carried out. The project supports development of ecosystems in the South Caucasus eco-region. One of the most important components of the project is reintroduction of gazelles. The transfer of gazelles from Shirvan National Park of the Republic of Azerbaijan to Vashlovani Protected Area has been made. Their equipment with satellites has been undertaken. The gazelle reintroduction has been introduced on Samukhi Valley. The number of gazelles have increased and reached from 100 up to 120 individuals in 2019. Moreover, TJS and WWF are planning

to establish a protected area on the part of the Samukhi Valley to be protected as Gazelles as well as large predators. As a result, of the monitoring, it is confirmed that Samukhi Valley is the best habitat for Gazelles, as well as ideal migration area for other species.

- 2. 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.

Within the reporting period no important negative terrestrial impact has been revealed. Advancements have been occurred in terms of park finances: during the reporting period, salary of rangers and other staff of administration has been increased. The remuneration growth is an important tool to provide the high working motivation of the employees and to decrease the rotation of qualified staff. In addition to fixed salary, CNF has been providing salary supplements and food allowances for all the staff of the park. From 2020, both benefits are planned to be increased with 50%. Agency of Protected Areas together with CNF is also providing life and health insurance for all the staff of the park. In terms of staff policy, the number of employed people in the administration has increased by 6 personnel. Contracted staff is hired during the high touristic season (from April to November).

- 3. 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.

Amendment of the boundaries of Vashlovani Protected Areas has not been undertaken for the current reporting period.

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

Taking into consideration the unique biodiversity of Vashlovani, currently there are number of studies undertaken that assess the potential of creating Biosphere Reserve at the base of Vashlovani and Tusheti Protected Areas in Kakheti region. The initiative is highly supported by municipality, local communities, all the stakeholders. In 2020, the studies will be finalized and Georgia will have important tool to initiate establishment of first biosphere reserve in the country.

- 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 – The organization which has the responsibility of permanent monitoring of climate change in Georgia is National Environmental Agency (NEA), which gathers information from different organizations, structures and makes researches in order to evaluate overall climate environment of the country. Agency, within its competencies, is gathering data and periodically provides NEA with relevant information.
- 6.2. Flora and vegetation: changes in the plant population and in the vegetational cover; presumed causes – No changes
- 6.3. Fauna: changes in the sedentary or migratory populations; congregating, egg-laying and breeding grounds – The Gazelle Reintroduction Project has been successfully implemented. As a result, number of individuals has increased from 52 to 120 for the moment at Vashlovani Protected Areas.
- 7. Cultural heritage and socio-economic context**
- 7.1. Cultural heritage –No cultural heritage monuments are represented on Vashlovani Protected Areas. According to Georgian legislation, cultural monuments can not be presented at protected areas (they are excluded), unless this is Protected Landscape (IUCN category V).
- 7.1.1. Changes concerning cultural heritage – N/A
- 7.2. Socio-economic context- development of Protected Areas and increased attractiveness of VPA has a huge positive influence on the population and is one of the key factors for improving the social and economical conditions of local communities around protected areas.

- 7.2.1. Changes concerning the socio-economic context - after the establishment of Vashlovani Protected Areas, the social conditions of locals have greatly changed for the better with the development of local small and medium scale businesses: new guesthouses, cafes, restaurants, shops have been built and their quantity (as illustrated in the table) is increasing every year. New employment opportunities have emerged as well. All the above-mentioned factors have a very positive impact on the development of the region overall.

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Guest house	6	5	7	9	11	17
Market	20	20	20	23	30	30
cafes	7	8	10	15	17	20

## 8. Education and scientific interest

- 8.1. Visitors – Information policy - Visitor outreach policy is defined within the Tourism Strategy, Marketing strategy and Management plans of Vashlovani Protected Areas. Administration of Vashlovani PA provides visitors, tour agencies and all the other interested people with the relevant information regarding the unique biodiversity of Vashlovani. Besides, information is provided by email, social network, phone call, etc.
- 8.1.1. Arrangements for receiving and informing the public (building, booklets, maps, cards, etc.)- Visitor center represents the special space where the guests of Vashlovani protected areas are fully informed by the visitor specialist about the importance and uniqueness of Vashlovani. Informational brochures, leaflets, maps, booklets are printed every year and is placed on the stand for the visitors. The exhibition hall of Visitor Center has been renovated by CNF in 2019 and is fully equipped with modern and interactive technologies. Furthermore, construction of a new multifunctional museum on VPA is planned for 2020 which will serve as an educational center about environment and protected areas integrated awareness increasing and interactive exhibitions about Protected Areas.
- 8.1.2. Frequentation by visitors and behavior (number, distribution in time and space) - during the reporting period the number of the visitors who spend two or more days inside the park has increased. Consequently, the income of the National Park has also increased (50041GEL in 2016; 93520 GEL till November 2019).
- 8.1.3. Special visits (distinguished persons, groups, etc.) – Promotional video clips about Vashlovani Protected Areas are prepared together with the financial support of Wissol Group in which famous people, bloggers and influencers are participating. Media tours involving representatives of diplomatic corps, media, international guests and etc. are regularly being held. The president of Georgia has visited Vashlovani Protected Areas this year and she actively encouraged others to visit the unique biodiversity of Vashlovani.
- 8.1.4. Eco-education – eco-education is one of the important directions of protected areas and is defined within the management plan according to which specialists of eco-education are regularly conducting environmental seminars, trainings, presentations and lectures. Eco-educational activities are also carried out in schools and institutes as well with the active participation of young generation. From time to time, environmental campaigns and cleaning activities are organized by the Agency of Protected Areas.
- 8.2. Scientific research- Various scientific researches by national as well as international experts are held regularly. From 2015 to 2019 up to 40 scientific research have been conducted on Vashlovani PA. From scientific researches zoological, botanical and forests researches are dominated.
- 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.)- In 2019 National Botanical Garden conducted research on *Cerasus Silvestris* of Vashlovani PA. In May Institute of Zoology and St. Petersburg scientists have conducted Entomological studies. The scientific research on Taxonomic identification of Georgian maple and Georgian almonds have started in 2019 and will be implemented till the end of 2020.
- 8.2.2. Scientific publications- Various scientific publications have been prepared reflecting the unique flora, fauna and distinct landscapes of Vashlovani.  
“Desert flora and vegetation of Georgia”- By N.Lachashvili, M.Khachidze;  
Publication on “Genetically important species of forest species and Taxonomic identification” have been prepared by the scientific-Research Center of the Ministry of Agriculture within the agro-forestry Service project in 2019. Author: N.Goginashvili.

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

- 9.1. Changes in legislation or regulations - Internal regulations were updated referring the management plan- validity time period has been changed, demarcation of the area based on which certain area was excluded from the Strict Nature Reserve and was granted the status of National Park – Category II. Eco-tourist strategies have been elaborated
- 9.2. Changes in ownership title (conversion to public property, rentals, etc.) – No Changes

9.3. Extension or transfer, new uses (for example, conversion into total reserve) – No changes

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

10.1. Improvements made – Waste Management plan have been elaborated, Vashlovani PA have been designated as the Sites of Emerald Network. For better protecting the unique biodiversity, new ranger stations have been constructed and eco-tourist infrastructure has been renovated.

10.1.1. Ecological action affecting the flora and biotopes; controls of fauna- monitoring activities and assessments are constantly conducted and the given data reflected in the reports and integrated data base.

10.1.2. Protection against the elements (fire, water regime) – preventive measures like - Preventive measures of fire are constantly held. Administration of the park is equipped with appropriate fire equipments. From time to time appropriate trainings are conducted to prepare rangers for emergency fire incidents.

10.1.3. Approaches and thoroughfares (paths, roads, car parks, signposting, fencing, etc.)– renovation of existing trails have been carried out, new tourist trails have been arranged and marked, new interpretation boards have been installed, new signpost on and around protected areas have been arranged.

10.1.4. Field equipment (hides and study facilities) – field equipment is periodically upgraded and new eco-tourist infrastructure have been arranged in accordance with a sustainable management of natural resources.

10.1.5. Waste management - Waste management plan for VPA does not exist at this stage but is on the further agenda of the Agency to start working on this issue together with international donor organizations in the nearest period.

10.1.6. Use of renewable energy systems- Solar power system is used at protected areas. All rangers stations are equipped with the solar panels. In Mijnskure of Vashlovani Protected Area, solar water heater for tourist shelters is provided

10.2. Management – existing management plan was elaborated in 2014 and is valid till 2020 which also includes 1year action plan and 3 year operational plans. Management plan will be renewed in 2020 and will be valid for the next 9 years.

10.2.1. Administrative department: changes made – for 2020, improvement of working conditions (increasing salaries, ensuring additional office equipment, international study tours) of the employees is foreseen, as well as adding new rangers for the administration is planned.

10.2.2. Wardens' department: changes made – No changes

10.2.3. Internal policing measures - Trainings in law enforcement are regularly held which address to the rules of GPS usage, rules of rangers' behavior, rules of behavior in case of emergencies, first aid in the field, as well as rules for filling in administrative protocols, technical regulations, relevant articles of the Administrative issues.

10.2.4. Infringement of regulations and damage: legal action – law violations (poaching, illegal cutting, hunting etc.) represent one of the main challenges, however, statistical data showcases that the number of illegal activities have been decreased in last years. Rangers are effectively patrolling on every day basis, camera traps are arranged, old ranger shelters have been renovated and 2 new stations have been built in 2019.

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

Vashlovani Protected Areas represent the unique biodiversity of Georgia distinguished with important and rare species, landscapes and ecosystems of high national importance. Granting the European Council award of “European Diploma” for Vashlovani Protected Areas has greatly contributed to the increased recognition of unique Georgian nature on international level as well, which means that outstanding value of Vashlovani Protected Areas is appreciated not only by locals, but by foreign nature lovers as well. The number of visitors and accordingly revenues of the administration is increasing year by year which in turn contributes to the accomplishment of main objective of management plan to ensure the better protection of biodiversity and increased level of management performance. Moreover, visitation and development of protected areas has a tremendous effect on improving the socio-economic conditions of local communities for the better. International Recognition of “European Diploma” has facilitated the awareness raising of the locals in terms of the importance of protected areas which consequently facilitated to make them more friendly with the natural treasure of Vashlovani.