

Strasbourg, 10 March 2021
[files16e_2021.docx]

T-PVS/Files(2021)16

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

41st meeting
Strasbourg, 30 November – 3 December 2021

Complaint on stand-by: 2016/09

**Possible threat to Svaneti 1 Candidate Emerald
site from Nenskra HPP (Georgia)**

- REPORT BY THE GOVERNMENT -

*Document prepared by
the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia*



საქართველო
GEORGIA

გარემოს დაცვისა და
სოფლის მეურნეობის
სამინისტრო

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION AND AGRICULTURE
OF GEORGIA

946-01-2-202102051417



N 946/01
05/02/2021

To: Ms. Ursula Sticker
Secretary of the Bern Convention

Dear Ms. Sticker,

The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia would like to present its compliments and expresses the deepest consideration to the Secretariat of Bern Convention. Once again we would like to confirm the great effort of the Government of Georgia in terms of active engagement into the Emerald Network development process.

In response to the decision of the Bureau of the Bern Convention on Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (T-PVS(2020)1), we would like to give the update on the activities held in Georgia during 2020. According to the above-mentioned decision, Georgia should update the Bureau on the mapping of freshwater habitats and on the evolvement of the Emerald Network in one year's time. Georgia should also envisage a national plan for the protection of water courses to avoid the situation replicating in other Emerald Network sites.

As it was indicated in the previous letters, the EUNIS classification of Habitats was the new subject for our country, freshwater habitats were understood by our experts not clearly enough, so they were mapped only in the black sea region. This is the reason why there were no freshwater habitats in most of the Standard Data Forms of Emerald Sites.

In spite of Covid-19 pandemic situation in the world, Georgia was able to conduct the following activities to fulfill the recommendations and decisions of the Bureau to the Bern Convention:

Based on the current situation the project "Mapping of Selected Freshwater Habitats on the Emerald Sites of Western Georgia" was implemented by Centre for biodiversity Conservation and Research – NACRESThe projectwasinitiatedfromthe Ministryof Environmental Protection and Agriculture and funded by the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ). The objective of the project was "To assist government of Georgia by providing additional information and creating detailed distribution maps of selected Bern Convention freshwater habitats, namely river gravel banks and adjacent riverine woods and scrubs that are part of the wider forest ecosystems in Georgia, inside the current Emerald Network sites of western Georgia (Imereti, Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, Racha-Lechkhumi-Kvemo Svaneti, and Adjara) through remote sensing and extensive ground truthing and expert evaluation".

Six types of freshwater habitats were identified for the study. The selection was based on the previous reports on the casefile for reduction of Svaneti Emerald site. In particular, habitats, that were lost during the reduction of abovementioned site, were selected:

- 1) C3.62 - Unvegetated river gravel banks
- 2) E5.4 - Moist or wet tall-herb and fern fringes and meadows
- 3) F9.1 Riverine scrub;
- 4) G1.11 Riverine Salix woodland;
- 5) G1.127 Ponto-Caucasian montane alder galleries;
- 6) C3.55 Sparsely vegetated river gravel banks.

In addition to the abovementioned project, to have the clear and complete data, the mapping of the selected habitats was carried out by the team of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture, Biodiversity and Forestry Department on the three sites of Eastern Georgia (KvareliShilda – GE0000029, Alazani – GE0000022 and Gombori – GE0000027). The following rivers were studied on abovementioned sites: Chelti; Duruji; Kisiskhevi; Mgvrie; Turdo; Alazani and Vantiskhevi. At the study area the plant species were analyzed and the habitats types were identified accordingly. The study showed that there are freshwater habitats which were not included in the Standard Data Forms of eastern Emerald sites. In total: three habitats were mapped on the Kvareli-Shilda site and two on Gombori site. Alazani site does not contain selected habitats. New findings also increases the sufficiency status of the protection of mentioned habitats.

The results of the both studies showed that big amounts of freshwater habitats are protected under the Emerald Network in Georgia. The exact areas of the habitats, under the Emerald Network of Georgia, are indicated in the annexes to this letter.

The project implemented by Nacres showed that in whole Black sea biogeographical region and partially in Alpine biogeographical region on 16 emerald sites, from selected 6 habitats, in total there are 808 ha freshwater habitats. High amount of freshwater habitats are also represented on the compensatory sites. The study showed that the sites (Samegrelo 2 – GE0000057; RachaLechkhumi-GE0000058 and Svaneti-Racha – GE0000059), which were submitted to the secretariat in 2017 as a compensatory sites for the loss of Svaneti territory, are the adequate compensation, as they contain all the lost futures. We would also like to mention that on the biogeographical seminar held in 2017 in Georgia, three compensatory sites were reviewed and according to the expert opinion, attending the seminar, if Georgia designated those 3 sites, compensation would be enough. The compensatory sites were designated by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture in 2018, with the letter N9638/01. According to all of the above mentioned the compensation for the loss of the habitats is adequate and sites, already included in the Emerald Networks are enough to protect freshwater habitats sufficiently.

Abovementioned decision of the Bureau also invited the authorities to envisage a national plan for the protection of water courses to avoid the situation replicating in other Emerald Network sites. We would like to inform you that the draft law on “Water Resources Management” was elaborated and is planned to be submitted to the Georgian Parliament in 2021, the draft law establishes the regulations for the sustainable use of water resources. Three river basin management plans (Chorokhi-Adjaristkali; Khrami-Debeda and Alazani-Iori) are being developed at present under the projects “EU Water Initiative plus” (EUWI+). According to the Association agreement between EU and Georgia, abovementioned river basin management plans will be adopted in 2024. The issue of the Emerald network is envisaged in all of the management plans.

We would like to highlight the significant processes, ongoing for development of Emerald Network in Georgia:

- Study of 12 proposed Emerald Sites for their nomination was finalized and submitted to the Secretariat of the Bern Convention in autumn 2020, four of them were included in the list of the Candidate Emerald Sites and 8 of them remained as proposed sites, as decided by the Secretariat;

- Management plans for 6 Emerald Sites, were prepared, the process was financially supported by **state budget of Georgia**;
- Management Plans for 3 compensatory sites were prepared in frames of the EU funded project: “Support to Implementation of the Environmental provisions of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement” and will be ready by the end of 2020;
- 7 new sites were selected and submitted to the Secretariat of the Bern Convention. Sites were selected in accordance with the decisions of the previous biogeographical seminars and the new studies. The submitted sites contain significant amount of species and habitats and have the high importance for biodiversity conservation. Tbilisi Otter Island is worth mentioning because this site is the first site in Caucasus region, which is located in the urban area of the country;
- In 2021 at least three additional management plans will be prepared for designated Emerald sites, process will be funded by the **state budget of Georgia**;
- The Standard Data Forms (SDFs) were examined and corrected in accordance with the previous biogeographical seminars and the new studies held in Georgia and final documents were uploaded to the Central Data Repository (CDR) by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture. German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ) financially supported the process.
- It is planned to organize bilateral biogeographical seminar for reevaluation of proposed sites for their further designation in Georgia. As mentioned above, SDFs of Emerald sites were reevaluated and many species and habitats were added to the already existing sites, also additional seven sites were proposed to the Bern Convention for inclusion in the list of Emerald Sites. All of the above, significantly changes the insufficiency statuses for many species and habitats.

In response of the compliant report from the April 2020, the abovementioned studies showed, that freshwater habitats lost during the reduction of Svaneti site are sufficiently present in already designated sites and also in Compensatory sites. Once again, we would like to highlight that Georgia fulfilled the agreement to designate compensatory sites and according to the biogeographical seminar from 2017, they were adequate to compensate the loss. Also scientific studies were held on the compensatory sites in 2018 and submitted to the bureau of the convention. The results of 2018 study also showed their adequacy and the studies held in 2020 on freshwater habitats once again confirmed it.

All of the abovementioned confirms that the state of conservation of habitats and species have changed and we once again ask the convention to organize bilateral biogeographical seminar to reevaluate the insufficient statuses.

According to the about mentioned Georgia took a lot of efforts and actions not only for the compensation of Svaneti Emerald Site, but also for development of Emerald Network and at this moment we are successfully implementing the requirements of the Bern convention in regards of Emerald Network. Accordingly, we expect that the Bureau will close the case.

Despite the satisfactory results of the abovementioned studies, held in the short term period, we are planning to continue the work and studies to gather more scientific data regarding the species and habitats on Emerald sites of Georgia.

The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia is looking forwards to successful and fruitful cooperation with the Secretariat of Bern Convention towards the further development of Emerald Network in Georgia.

Annexes:

1. Study Report of mapping of Freshwater Habitats in the eastern Georgia;
2. Shape files of Freshwater habitats in the Western Georgia;
3. Shape files of Freshwater Habitats in the Eastern Georgia.

Sincerely,

Deputy Minister
Nino Tandilashvili

