



## Caucasus Ecoregion Newsletter

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[www.panda.org/caucasus](http://www.panda.org/caucasus)

### History and Development

The Caucasus, one of the most biologically rich areas on Earth, is included in WWF's list of Global 200 Ecoregions and identified as globally outstanding for biodiversity and is ranked among the planet's 34 most diverse and endangered hotspots by Conservation International. The forests, high mountain and freshwater ecosystems, and arid landscapes of the Caucasus contain more than twice the animal diversity found in adjacent regions of Europe and Asia. The region is distinguished with highest degree of vascular plant diversity in temperate world. The 580.000 km<sup>2</sup> Caucasus Ecoregion/Sub-Ecoregion covers six countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Northern Caucasus part of Russia, northeastern Turkey, and part of northwestern Iran.



© WWF / A. Malkhasyan (Caucasian Brown bear)

Throughout these years WWF has been pursuing the protection of the environment and the life it supports by contributing to an enormous pool of environmental expertise and knowledge and working with governments, NGOs and other organizations, local populations and society. WWF Caucasus Programme Office has been active in Armenia and Azerbaijan since 2002 by establishing offices in Yerevan and Baku.

#### Ecoregional Conservation Plan

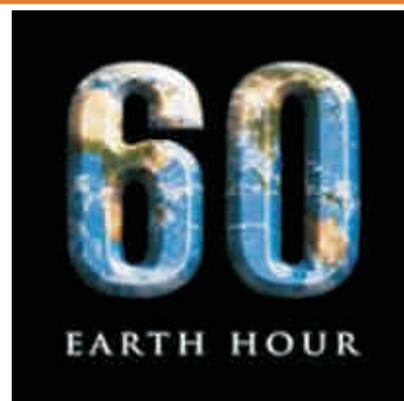
WWF initiated and coordinated the development of an Ecoregional Conservation Plan (ECP) for the Caucasus, a comprehensive strategy for the region that was endorsed by the Environmental Ministers of the South Caucasus countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia) during the Ministerial Conference (Berlin, 2006). The ECP has effectively evolved into the actual framework for governments,

WWF started to run its operations in the Caucasus since early 90th by opening the Project Office in Tbilisi, Georgia, which later was transformed in WWF Caucasus Programme Office. WWF has carried out conservation work such as practical field projects, advising local and national governments on environmental policy, promoting environmental education, and raising awareness of environmental issues in the



© WWF (Conifers, Tusheti region, Eastern Greater Caucasus)

### In Brief



#### Earth Hour in Armenia and Georgia

On March 28, millions of people around the globe united for one hour and switched off their lights to show that they care about our living planet. Caucasus had its own input in "Earth Hour 2009" global action against climate change.

Armenia and Georgia together with the relevant Ministries of Environment Protection supported this initiative first time ever in their countries and called on the publics, business and ordinary citizens to participate in "Earth Hour 2009" global initiative by turning power down locally. For instance Yerevan Municipality joined and supported this initiative by turning the street lights off at some central streets and the suburbs of Yerevan. The TV tower in Tbilisi was switched off for one hour.

Media partnership with Georgian public television ensured extensive coverage of this global event locally and involved people in casting their "vote for earth" in Georgia by broadcasting 'Vote Earth' video for one week in advance to the event.

NGOs, donor agencies and environmental experts to combine their best efforts in solving shared developmental and conservation problems ([www.wwf.de/fileadmin/fm-wwf/pdf\\_neu/Kaukasus\\_OEkoregionaler\\_Naturschutzplan\\_May06.pdf](http://www.wwf.de/fileadmin/fm-wwf/pdf_neu/Kaukasus_OEkoregionaler_Naturschutzplan_May06.pdf)).

### **Caucasus Biodiversity Council**

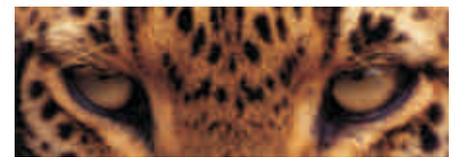
In 2004, WWF coordinated the establishment of the Caucasus Biodiversity Council in response to local requirements. This high-level strategic policy group promotes and monitors the implementation of the ECP. With two representatives one governmental and one non-governmental representing each of the six range countries, the Council host at least two meetings each year.

### **Caucasus Protected Areas Fund**

In spring 2007, Caucasus Protected Areas Trust Fund (CPAF) started its operation as a legally independent entity under German law. The trust ([www.caucasus-naturefund.org](http://www.caucasus-naturefund.org)) is a collaborative initiative of KfW, Conservation International (CI) and WWF. The purpose is to provide a long-term solution to financing biodiversity conservation in the Southern Caucasus.

Currently WWF's work in the Caucasus is focused on assisting in development of protected areas systems both on policy and field levels, priority species conservation (leopard and sturgeon group), global climate change issues, including related reforestation activities and some other areas.

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### **Leopard Conservation Initiative in the Caucasus**

WWF Armenia and Armenia Marriott Hotel in Yerevan rolled out "Panda Nights" campaign to help protect the endangered Caucasian leopard (*Panthera pardus*). Guests staying at the Armenia Marriott Hotel in Yerevan during one month were invited to donate US\$1 for every night of their stay. Proceeds from the campaign went to support anti-poaching units that patrol the leopard's natural habitat in southern Armenia, including much-needed materials and training.

Efforts to protect this endangered species in the Caucasus are jointly coordinated on community and national levels. Based on the Leopard conservation regional strategy the relevant National Actions Plans were developed.

The regular workshop to discuss the draft National Action Plan for the Leopard Conservation in Armenia organized by WWF Armenia was held on December 4, 2008 at the Yerevan Aarhus Center.

## **The First Transboundary Project in the Caucasus**

Preserving unique ecosystem calls for a coordinated approach to nature conservation and management across national boundaries and sustainable development. This is why the first transboundary project was initiated in the region to provide a long-term safeguard for the biodiversity of the South Caucasus.

The project was developed by WWF-Germany, WWF-Armenia and WWF Caucasus Programme Office and is funded by the German Government (KfW Development Bank). It aims to conserve the unique biodiversity of the Javakheti-Shirak plateau, which is situated on the border shared by Armenia, Georgia and Turkey. With its mountain steppes, sub-alpine grasslands, lakes and wetlands, the plateau is unique to the Caucasus region. It has been identified as a priority conservation area by the governments and the international community. From Armenian side Lake Arpi National Park ([www.lakearpi-nationalpark.com](http://www.lakearpi-nationalpark.com)) will be established to



© WWF (Lake Arpi, Armenia)

conserve the unique biodiversity and enhance the rural economy by providing livelihood for many local villages. At the same as establishing the Lake Arpi National Park in Armenia, the Georgian Government has decided to set up another protected area – the Javakheti National Park – across the border.

Together, the two national parks will protect more than 30,000 ha of this unique mountain plateau, and this will create the first transboundary protected area in the Southern Caucasus region. Participation of Turkey in this cross-national project is still in the agenda. The project will also explore new development opportunities in the region linked to summer and winter tourism, energy production, and climate change.

The governmental decision on establishing Lake Arpi National Park from Armenian side has been recently made by the Government of Armenia. “Boundaries demarcation of the national park and its registration procedures in the State Cadastre will be finalized as soon as the process of clarification of the boundaries within the project will be completed,” WWF-Armenia Director, Karen Manvelyan says.

By 2010, the National Parks should be transboundary. Not only will these provide a long-term safeguard for the biodiversity of the South Caucasus, but they will also initiate cross-border cooperation among environmental policy actors.

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## Restoration of Forests in Southern Caucasus

Within the framework of the program “Mitigating Impacts of Climate Change through Restoration of Forest Landscapes in Southern Caucasus” financed by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU), forest ecosystem restoration activities are implemented under the coordination and supervision of the WWF CauPO on more than 1,000 ha in Southern Caucasus countries (Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia). The project started in September, 2008 and will end in April, 2010. The activities will be carried out on sites which had been either deforested and where negative impacts of climate

change can be observed or which represent rare and endangered forest ecosystems, floodplain forests in particular. Counteracting these impacts will require the enhancement of ecosystem resilience. As forests also play a vital social and economic role, the measures will follow the principles of *Forest Landscape Restoration*. Therefore, forest rehabilitation and reforestation sites were identified based on intensive consultations with adjacent communities applying participatory rural appraisal (PRA) methods in order to avoid conflicts with existing land uses (e.g. grazing).



© WWF / V. Lukarevsky (Talysh Forest Mountains, Azerbaijan)

The bulk of funding will be used for investments in ecologically sound forest restoration and forest rehabilitation, aiming at increasing the resilience of forest ecosystems to climate change as well as carbon sequestration. Planting will be carried out with indigenous species, preferably a species mix, so as to restore natural species composition. Natural regeneration will be supported wherever possible. Capacity development includes the training and awareness creation of different target groups (communities, field technicians, general public) towards climate change issues and the strategies to fight them. It is expected that improved forest rehabilitation techniques / climate change forest adaptation strategies as developed under this project can provide important inputs for the future projects.

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