

Strengthening Public Participation in the Management of Protected Areas

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Annotation

Protected areas play an important role in the conservation of biodiversity. Protected area ecosystems have a number of important functions, they are the sources of water, food, energy, recreation, pharmaceuticals and etc. These functions are important factors in the country's socio-economic development. In order to ensure the functioning of the ecosystems in protected areas, it is important to manage them wisely and sustainably. One of the important conditions for effective management of protected areas is the involvement of interested parties in the management of protected areas.

The importance of the involvement of stakeholders/interested persons in the management of protected areas is recognized by the many international conventions to which Georgia is a party (Aarhus Convention, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Program of Work on Protected Areas (PoWPA), etc.). The issue of the engagement of interested parties is weakly but partially represented in the Law of Georgia on the System of Protected Areas. One of the goals of the draft document prepared by the Agency of Protected Areas "Strategy for Development of Protected Areas of Georgia and National Action Plan" is involvement of the interested persons and raise their awareness. Therefore, is some legislative base, political will and institutional framework in Georgia, but still implementation process is weak.

The low environmental awareness of the population in Georgia, and consequently the low degree of public participation in planning and management of protected areas, often leads to overlapping interests of the population and protected areas and in some cases to conflicts that affect the management of protected areas. In addition, the sense of responsibility and perception of ownership over protected areas in stakeholders/interested persons is weak. Also it is difficult to resolve the conflicts over the use of resources. Consequently, the full conservation of biodiversity, the welfare and the increase of incomes of local people in protected areas can not be ensured.

The one of the ways of solving the existed problems is an engagement of the interested parties in the management of protected areas with implementation of new, effective and transparent mechanisms.

Our thesis aims to introduce stakeholders/interested parties the issued related to the management of the protected area, provide information and current international experience on public involvement in protected area management.