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## **PROJECT SUMMARY**

### **Caucasus Peace Park A Feasibility Study for Georgia and Russia**

**Total budget:** USD 150,000  
**Sector:** Environment  
**Starting Date:** September 2005  
**Duration:** 3 months  
**Project Partners:** Pro-Natura USA, University for Peace (UN)

#### **Background:**

The long-lasting conflict in South Ossetia has had a significant impact on the environment, including the degradation, depletion and mismanagement of natural resources. Local communities living in the vicinity of the proposed Caucasus Peace Park have been forced to adapt to changed political and socio-economic systems in the past 15 years. Armed conflict in the area, along with the transition from collective farms and government-owned enterprises to a more open market system, have transformed traditional lifestyles and environmental behaviour. In addition, neither the prior collectivist system nor the current transition to an open market system conforms to and works with traditional land use practices that were well adapted to local environmental conditions. A mix of related issues, including the following, exacerbates these socio-cultural limitations:

- Recently established local governments do not have the resources, infrastructure, or institutional capacity to effectively manage and monitor natural resources in the region.
- Human population levels have dramatically changed from the pre-Soviet period, with conflict-generated out-migrations leaving some previous agricultural areas to deteriorate, while refugees and poverty cause overuse and destruction of the land and especially forestry resources in other areas.
- Poverty levels have increased to very high levels, and encourage significant social unrest.

**Objective:**

Project partners propose to carry out a feasibility study to determine the social, ecological and political benefits that could accrue from the creation of a Caucasus Peace Park (CPP), which would constitute a Transboundary Conservation Area (TBCA) between Georgia and Russia, linking parts of North and South Ossetia, and the Pik Kazbegi region. The purpose of the CPP would be to establish an institutional and policy space that would enhance economic opportunity, environmental resilience, biodiversity protection, resource conservation, social and cultural integrity, and political stability in this region. The CPP would expand and link three existing conservation areas: the Kazbegi Zapovednyik Preserve in Georgia, the Liakhvy Zapovednyik Preserve in South Ossetia, and the North Ossetian National Park and Nature Preserve in Russia.. These conservation areas in Georgia now consist mostly of patches of protected forests, while leaving out vulnerable mountain trails and passes, pasturelands, mineral springs, lakes, and important transboundary rivers, including the sources of the Terek and the Aragvi. To protect such areas, the existing preserves would be expanded and joined between the Keli Lake district up the ridgeline to the Truso Gorge and on both sides of the Pik Kazbegi massif.

The biodiversity of this area includes forests, glaciers, sub-alpine meadows, mineral springs, pastures, water bodies, as well as wetlands distributed through the whole territory. A wide range of native plant and animal species, many of which are endemic to this region, have been significantly degraded due to overgrazing and poor forest management. The Caucasus region is considered by most experts to be among the 25 richest and most threatened reservoirs of plant and animal life on Earth. The region has also been named a large herbivore hotspot by WWF's Large Herbivore Initiative. Over 6,500 species of vascular plants are found in the Caucasus Region. At least 1,600 plant species are found only here – the highest level of endemism in the Temperate Zone of the Northern Hemisphere.

The terms “Peace Park” and Transboundary Conservation Area (TBCA) are being used almost interchangeably to refer to areas that bridge:

- Frontiers or boundaries between two or more countries, or political boundaries within countries, and
- Cover large-scale natural systems encompassing one or more protected reserves.

A TBCA's effectiveness as a Peace Park stems from the joint development and operation of the conservation area by parties to previous conflicts across or within those boundaries, in such a way as to promote the adoption of peaceful resolution through common commitments to the interest of the whole region.

The designated TBCA or Peace Park ultimately becomes a mix of protected reserves and carefully zoned subsistence and commercially developed areas in the broad landscapes that straddle one or more boundaries between states, provinces, or autonomous areas. To achieve this comprehensive land use zoning Pro-Natura works with a balanced mix of collaborating organizations to facilitate a planning process with governments, NGOs, community-based stakeholders and private sector representatives. These institutions come together to delineate a region where all resource management and development will be done according to principles that will ensure peace, stability, social and cultural respect, conservation, and long-term sustainability of the resources.

The project team will complete a comprehensive study to assess the social, economic, ecological, political and institutional feasibility of establishing a cross border conservation

area in the region of Ossetia on the border of the nations of Georgia and Russia. A team of international and host country professionals with extensive experience in the analysis and design of integrated conservation and sustainable development projects, and with knowledge and experience working with environmental, policy, and institutional programs in the Caucasus region will carry out the proposed Peace Park Feasibility Assessment.

This TBCA would improve the economic livelihood of the peoples living in or near the areas, by attracting donors and international investment into the regional economy through the building of the park transport and trail infrastructure, the ecologically sound exploitation of the region's natural resources (timbering, reforestation, fruit-growing, pasturing, micro hydropower, etc), the establishment of local and cross-border councils for small and medium-size businesses, and the development of eco-tourism and mountain sport facilities. International investment into this region would reduce business risk by enhancing the security of the Ossetian passage of the Caspian gas and oil pipelines through Georgia to Armenia and the Black Sea, which is becoming an increasingly important energy supply route for the West.

Both Georgia and Russia could thereby cooperatively improve their national control in the border areas over illegal smuggling, arms trade and terrorism by improving transportation and communication infrastructure, and by collaboratively deploying a joint service of park rangers and border guards within the park boundaries.

The people of North and South Ossetia could thus increase their transborder cultural and economic interchange, while reducing Georgian or Russian concerns over separatism, terrorism and maintenance of sovereignty. Thus the local populations of North and South Ossetia, as well as the Pik Kazbegi region should get jobs, economic development and cultural cross-border cultural freedoms out of such a joint enterprise. A new joint service of park managers, rangers and border guards would need to be trained and organized. While illegal economies would be curtailed with greater national controls, the legal local economies would be promoted to take advantage of the international investments into the CPP and its adjacent areas.

A key question that the feasibility study will address is how to tie in this local economic development with the conservation goals for the protected areas, while establishing a balance of benefits that can be supported by all sides.

#### **Activities:**

- Conduct consultations and guided interviews with government officials, the private sector, NGO and community representatives from organizations, and other informed individuals.
- Identify and analyse institutional, legal and economic conditions for the development of cross-border cooperation on the proposed Peace Park
- Conduct a consensus workshop in Tbilisi
- Conduct at least one additional consensus workshop in the general area of the proposed North Caucasus Peace Park,
- Validate social, economic, and environmental indicator data; facilitate the identification and prioritisation of key opportunities and constraints in each sector
- After completion of the field data collection period, the feasibility study team will conduct a thorough analysis of results and prepare the deliverable products
- Indicate additional work that must be completed to ensure the accuracy and value of the feasibility study findings.

- On-going dialogue will be maintained with the contracting institutions during this time period to ensure that the final products are in full compliance with our original agreements and the ultimate needs of the governing agencies in Georgia and Russia.

### **Expected Outcome:**

Following tasks will be completed as a result of the feasibility study:

- **Social and Environmental Need Assessment (SNA)** – our team will collect and use existing data on social, economic, and environmental conditions to create a visual and descriptive profile of social and economic context of the region, using numerically weighted criteria to predict probable impacts of an enacted Peace Park on environment.
- **Institutional Affaires** – an assessment of existing institutional assets, opportunities, and risks in order to determine strengthening or capacity building measures that could enhance the proposed TBCA
- **Legal and Policy Analysis** – an evaluation of the legal and policy framework in the a proposed North Caucasus Peace Park would be carried out, including the identification of existing gaps and needs vital for the implementation of the TBCA
- **Accessibility of Technical Information** – the feasibility study will identify and existing information, and determine the information gaps to be specifically addressed
- **Proposed Strategy to Advance a Peace Park Initiative** – the thorough analysis of social needs, environmental impacts, education, the legal and policy context for transboundary conservation and sustainable development, and the availability of technical information will be integrated into a detailed strategy outline for a possible TBCA. The proposed strategy will address the key activities for the planning, development and implementations of the TBCA and identify resources required. Additionally, it will outline the plan for resources mobilisation and provide sustainability assessment.

The project will provide an integrated set of products designed to establish the basis for an action plan that can respond to our findings. Specifically, we will deliver the following:

- **Final Report:** Our final report will include graphic presentation of above themes in the form of information, findings, and recommendations. This will be incorporated in such a way as to facilitate a broader user base.
- **Powerpoint Summary of Findings:** The essential background information, concise overview of methodology, analysis of findings and conclusions will be summarized in a Microsoft Office powerpoint presentation in CD-ROM format.

### **Added Value:**

This proposal was developed during spring and summer 2004 and submitted for consideration and possible support to several international agencies. Due to the highly uncertain security situation with respect to South Ossetia it was held back, in spite of positive evaluations and support received from the relevant local, national and international stakeholders. The OSCE, UNDP, USAID, and World Bank missions all viewed our initiative favourably. In particular, it was actively supported by the OSCE, which plays an important role in the region, participating in the Joint Control Commission for South Ossetia (JCC) together with Georgia and Russia. During its recent meeting (June 2005) in Moscow, the JCC approved the OSCE

proposal to launch a three-month Needs Assessment Study (NAS). The NAS aims to provide an international assessment of the needs to rehabilitate basic infrastructure and to prepare proposals for economic development in the zone of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict. Nevertheless, the planned NAS does not address environmental concerns of the region in question or, more specifically, its protected zones and national parks.

UNEP activities in Georgia have also been affected by an uncertain political situation and ongoing conflicts. Apart from having recently completed the Georgian National Biosafety Framework together with GEF, UNEP supports several smaller-scale projects, including the Global Resources International Database GRID-Tbilisi. A report on “Environment and Security: Transforming risks into cooperation: The case of the Southern Caucasus” was released in October 2004 in the framework of the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) for South Caucasus as a joint effort of UNEP, UNDP and OSCE. NATO, which has now joined the ENVSEC initiative as an associated member, did not participate at that stage. This report identifies the region of and adjacent to South Ossetia as one of the areas “where environmental degradation poses potential threat to human security and contributes to instability”, thus inviting actions to address such threats. At the same time UNEP/ENVSEC environmental activities or assessments in South Caucasus will not include Russia, which is not a member of this initiative. Another important added value with respect to the UNEP proposed follow-up environmental assessment in the zone of the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict, is that the “Peace Park” integrates its strong focus on preserving trans-frontier natural areas into a broader programme for economic and social development among conflicting communities, as a means for preventing inter-ethnic and cross-border conflict. This approach can thus build mutual confidence and transform the strategies of both local and national leaders by generating new sources of economic wealth and sharing economic benefits within the overall goal of the preservation of nature.

The proposed feasibility study builds upon the activities of the main regional stakeholders and takes into account their results to date. At the same time it constitutes a concrete step in implementing priority actions identified and agreed as a result of international consultations. This initiative also brings to the region the best world experience in the joint operation of conservation areas by parties of previous conflict, which would diversify the arsenal of instruments and approaches aimed at reducing tensions around South Ossetia. The proposed project would actively develop the basis for further international peacebuilding in South Ossetia by including Russia in the process of reducing tensions, thereby building mutual confidence and stability, as well as promoting sustainable development in the region. The proposed Peace Park could provide a foundation for and engage both local and national leaders in the political acceptance of the strategic task of transforming this area of notorious conflict into a region where cooperation, good will and concerted joint efforts of neighbouring countries and international donors consolidate to ensure mutual benefits for all parties involved. All relevant international and domestic stakeholders like OSCE, UNEP, UNDP, World Bank, WWF, EU, etc., together with Georgian, Russian and local South Ossetian authorities, will be invited to participate in the planned project activities.



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**  
**Mission to Georgia**

**007086**

Tbilisi, 03 August 2005

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

My Mission is now launching a 3-month Needs Assessment Study (NAS) aimed at identifying measures for the rehabilitation of infrastructures in and the economic development of the zone of the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict. The OSCE believes that economic rehabilitation can strengthen confidence between the sides and create more favourable conditions for a constructive political dialogue towards the full scale settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict.

I am aware of the joint proposal of PRO-NATURA USA and the UN University for Peace to conduct a feasibility study for the creation of a Caucasus Peace Park, a transboundary conservation area (TBCA), linking the national park of the Kazbegi region of Georgia and nature preserve areas in South and North Ossetia. The advance team of this project consulted my Mission during its visit to Georgia in August 2004, though the potential implementation of this project was delayed by the acute deterioration of the situation in the conflict zone during the summer of 2004.

My Mission views this project favourably and considers it as a valuable effort to restore confidence between the conflicting sides through international collaboration on environmental conservation, policy planning, biodiversity and cultural integrity. The TBCA, pursuing both environmental and conflict prevention goals, is very reciprocal and complementary with the OSCE efforts in the framework of its Needs Assessment Study.

Sincerely yours,

Ambassador Roy Reeve  
Head of the OSCE Mission to Georgia

CC: Vera Narodnitzkaia, Programme Director, University for Peace

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