



Part I: Project Information

GEF ID

10839

Project Type

MSP

Type of Trust Fund

GET

CBIT/NGI

CBIT No

NGI No

Project Title

Achieving biodiversity conservation through effective management and enhanced resilience to climate change in the existing protected area of the North Albanian Mountainous Region

Countries

Albania

Agency(ies)

UNEP

Other Executing Partner(s)

The Ministry of Tourism and Environment

Executing Partner Type

Government

GEF Focal Area

Biodiversity

Sector

Taxonomy

Focal Areas, Biodiversity, Biomes, Rivers, Temperate Forests, Protected Areas and Landscapes, Terrestrial Protected Areas, Mainstreaming, Tourism, Financial and Accounting, Conservation Finance, Influencing models, Strengthen institutional capacity and decision-making, Demonstrate innovative approaches, Deploy innovative financial instruments, Stakeholders, Private Sector, Capital providers, Individuals/Entrepreneurs, SMEs, Beneficiaries, Civil Society, Academia, Community Based Organization, Non-Governmental Organization, Local Communities, Communications, Behavior change, Education, Awareness Raising, Public Campaigns, Type of Engagement, Information Dissemination, Consultation, Participation, Partnership, Gender Equality, Gender Mainstreaming, Sex-disaggregated indicators, Gender-sensitive indicators, Women groups, Gender results areas, Knowledge Generation and Exchange, Participation and leadership, Capacity Development, Capacity, Knowledge and Research, Learning, Indicators to measure change, Adaptive management, Theory of change, Knowledge Generation, Training, Workshop, Knowledge Exchange, Field Visit

Rio Markers

Climate Change Mitigation

No Contribution 0

Climate Change Adaptation

No Contribution 0

Biodiversity

Principal Objective 2

Land Degradation

Significant Objective 1

Submission Date

7/27/2021

Expected Implementation Start

1/10/2023

Expected Completion Date

1/10/2026

Duration

48In Months

Agency Fee(\$)

134,062.00

A. FOCAL/NON-FOCAL AREA ELEMENTS

Objectives/Programs	Focal Area Outcomes	Trust Fund	GEF Amount(\$)	Co-Fin Amount(\$)
BD-2-7	Address direct drivers to protect habitats and species and improve financial sustainability, effective management, and ecosystem coverage of the global protected area estate	GET	1,411,188.00	8,710,000.00
Total Project Cost(\$)			1,411,188.00	8,710,000.00

B. Project description summary

Project Objective

Project Objective: To strengthen the management effectiveness and sustainability of the Albanian Alps protected areas system and increase resilience to climate change.

Project Component	Financing Type	Expected Outcomes	Expected Outputs	Trust Fund	GEF Project Financing(\$)	Confirmed Co-Financing(\$)
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Project Component	Financing Type	Expected Outcomes	Expected Outputs	Trust Fund	GEF Project Financing(\$)	Confirmed Co-Financing(\$)
Component 1: Establishing an enabling environment for effective management of the Albanian Alps National Park	Technical Assistance	<p>Outcome 1.1: Albanian Alps National Park territory valorized, and effective and adaptive management planning put in place [updated threats, including climate change resilience building</p> <p>Outcome 1.2: Sustainable financing of the Albanian Alps NP in place, including sustainable financing mechanisms tested and functionally established.</p> <p>Outcome 1.3: The systemic, institutional, and individual level capacity needs and gaps for effectively implementing the agreed NP management plan addressed (MP program 1)</p>	<p>Output 1.1.1: Assessment of likely climate change scenarios in the Albanian Alps landscape, implications for biodiversity, land use and livelihoods, and opportunities for mitigation/resilience building.</p> <p>Output 1.1.2: Strengthening the role of the Management Committee for Protected Areas in addressing constructed and planned HPP in and adjacent to the Albanian Alps PA.</p> <p>Output 1.1.3: Support to the field demarcation process of the Albanian Alps NP boundaries and zones following an in-depth review and adjustment of draft NP boundary and zonation plans (based any changes in circumstances since initially developed, stakeholder consultation, and identified climate change factors).</p> <p>Output 1.1.4: Validate, update, and rationalize existing (draft) management plan (including sub-programs) for the Albanian Alps NP</p>	GET	520,000.00	3,212,000.00

Project Component	Financing Type	Expected Outcomes	Expected Outputs	Trust Fund	GEF Project Financing(\$)	Confirmed Co-Financing(\$)
Component 2. Strengthening the practical experience and know-how? of the Albanian Alps NP stakeholders to address threats.	Technical Assistance	Outcome 2.1: Threats to biodiversity in the Albanian Alps addressed through the effective initiation of the updated NP management plan programs, and the development of practical experience of key stakeholders to continue implementation in the long term.	Output 2.1.1: Support the establishment of effective NP biodiversity conservation actions in the NP (law enforcement, sub-programs for targeted conservation of rare species/habitats, fire and invasive species control, human wildlife conflict reduction, fuel wood supply (MP Program 2). Output 2.1.2: Support to sustainable economic development: strengthening regulations and management of sustainable natural resource management, livelihoods, and cultural heritage within communities in the NP in order to reduce pressures on BD and incentivize sustainable use and livelihoods, and encourage maintenance of cultural heritage (MP Program 3) Output 2.1.3: Strengthening of regulation and management of HPPs and other infrastructure,	GET	502,000.00	3,098,000.00

Project Component	Financing Type	Expected Outcomes	Expected Outputs	Trust Fund	GEF Project Financing(\$)	Confirmed Co-Financing(\$)
Component 3. Support to national level adoption and up scaling of sustainable PAs management best practices	Technical Assistance	Outcome 3.1: Lessons learned, and experiences gained in the establishment and management of the Albanian Alps NP captured and applied to the wider national PA system	Output 3.1.1: In depth evaluation of the critical lessons learned during the establishment and initial management of the NP captured and documented Output 3.1.2: Positive experiences and lessons learned from Albanian Alps documented and disseminated to key national stakeholders in order to facilitate national scale application (particularly CC resilience and financing).	GET	212,899.00	1,312,000.00
Monitoring & Evaluation	Technical Assistance	Monitoring & Evaluation	Monitoring & Evaluation	GET	48,000.00	296,000.00
Sub Total (\$)					1,282,899.00	7,918,000.00
Project Management Cost (PMC)						
			GET	128,289.00	792,000.00	
			Sub Total(\$)	128,289.00	792,000.00	
			Total Project Cost(\$)	1,411,188.00	8,710,000.00	

Please provide justification

C. Sources of Co-financing for the Project by name and by type

Sources of Co-financing	Name of Co-financier	Type of Co-financing	Investment Mobilized	Amount(\$)
Recipient Country Government	Ministry of Tourism and Environment	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	3,000,000.00
Recipient Country Government	Ministry of Tourism and Environment	Grant	Investment mobilized	200,000.00
Recipient Country Government	National Agency of Protected Areas	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	1,000,000.00
Recipient Country Government	National Agency of Protected Areas	Grant	Investment mobilized	200,000.00
Recipient Country Government	Tropoja Municipality	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	1,858,000.00
Civil Society Organization	INCA	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	200,000.00
Civil Society Organization	URI	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	252,000.00
Civil Society Organization	TOKA	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	150,000.00
Civil Society Organization	PONT	Grant	Investment mobilized	1,850,000.00
Total Co-Financing(\$)				8,710,000.00

Describe how any "Investment Mobilized" was identified

The Ministry of Tourism and Environment and The National Agency of Protected Areas will support project activities with a total of US\$ 400,000 grant co-financing. Investment from MOTE will be provided from the state budget allocations during the project life-cycle for the activities financed by MOTE for the implementation of the Law on Forestry and Protected Areas. NAPA's cash co-finance contribution will be from the NAPA and Regional Administration of Protected Areas in Shkoder and Kukes for funding workshops, training programs and improvements in PAs.

D. Trust Fund Resources Requested by Agency(ies), Country(ies), Focal Area and the Programming of Funds

Agency	Trust Fund	Country	Focal Area	Programming of Funds	Amount(\$)	Fee(\$)	Total(\$)
UNEP	GET	Albania	Biodiversity	BD STAR Allocation	1,411,188	134,062	1,545,250.00
Total Grant Resources(\$)					1,411,188.00	134,062.00	1,545,250.00

E. Non Grant Instrument

NON-GRANT INSTRUMENT at CEO Endorsement

Includes Non grant instruments? **No**

Includes reflow to GEF? **No**

F. Project Preparation Grant (PPG)

PPG Required **true**

PPG Amount (\$)

50,000

PPG Agency Fee (\$)

4,750

Agency	Trust Fund	Country	Focal Area	Programming of Funds	Amount(\$)	Fee(\$)	Total(\$)
UNEP	GET	Albania	Biodiversity	BD STAR Allocation	50,000	4,750	54,750.00
Total Project Costs(\$)					50,000.00	4,750.00	54,750.00

Core Indicators

Indicator 1 Terrestrial protected areas created or under improved management

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
82,844.00	82,844.00	0.00	0.00

Indicator 1.1 Terrestrial Protected Areas Newly created

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)
0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Name of the Protected Area	WDP A ID	IUCN Category	Total Ha (Expected at PIF)	Total Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)
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Indicator 1.2 Terrestrial Protected Areas Under improved Management effectiveness

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)
82,844.00	82,844.00	0.00	0.00

Name of the Protected Area	WDP A ID	IUCN Category	Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)	METT score (Baseline at CEO Endorsement)	METT score (Achieved at MTR)	METT score (Achieved at TE)
Albanian Alps			82,844.00	82,844.00	0		51.00		

Indicator 11 People benefiting from GEF-financed investments

	Number (Expected at PIF)	Number (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Number (Achieved at MTR)	Number (Achieved at TE)
Female	41,000	41,000		
Male	41,000	41,000		
Total	82000	82000	0	0

Provide additional explanation on targets, other methodologies used, and other focal area specifics (i.e., Aichi targets in BD) including justification where core indicator targets are not provided

Part II. Project Justification

1a. Project Description

Table 1: Changes from PIF

Topic	At PIF Stage	At CEO Endorsement Stage
<p>Outputs of Component 1</p>	<p>1.1.2: Establishment of a committee for the assessment of constructed and planned HPP status in the Albanian Alps PA,</p> <p>1.1.3: Support to the field demarcation process of the Albanian Alps NP boundaries and zones following an in-depth review and adjustment of draft NP boundary and zonation plans (based any changes in circumstances since initially developed, stakeholder consultation, and identified climate change factors)</p> <p>1.2.4: Review after 3 years the overall sustainable financing plan and its adjustment / fine tuning based on practical experience gained</p> <p>1.2.5: Train national financial institutions to enhance their environmental and social safeguards assessments in financing of HPPs.</p>	<p>1.1.2: Strengthening the role of the Management Committee for Protected Areas for the assessment of constructed and planned HPP status in the Albanian Alps PA,</p> <p><i>Since PIF development, several committees addressing HPPs and renewable energy have been created. Thus, in order not to be redundant the MoTE requested that the existing AANP management committee may be strengthened under this so that it can adequately assess and respond to HPPs and other unfractured development issues that may arise.</i></p> <p>1.1.3: Support to the field demarcation process of the Albanian Alps NP boundaries and zones following an in-depth review and adjustment of draft NP boundary and zonation plans (based any changes in circumstances since initially developed, stakeholder consultation, and identified climate change factors)</p> <p>1.2.4: Review after 3 years the overall sustainable financing plan and its adjustment / fine tuning based on practical experience gained <i>Output 1.2.4 removed and placed as an activity under output 1.2.3</i></p> <p>1.2.5 Train national financial institutions to enhance their environmental and social safeguards assessments in financing of HPPs. <i>Output 1.2.5 removed and placed as an activity output 2.1.3 as it is better linked to strengthening the regulation of HPPs than to financing the PA</i></p>

1.1. Global Environmental Problems, Root Causes and Barriers

1.1.1. Background and context

1.1.1.1. Country Context

The Republic of Albania is a small (28,478 km²), mountainous country in the Balkan Peninsula. It shares a border with Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Greece and has a long Adriatic and Ionian coastline (362 km). Albania's terrain is predominantly mountainous, with 70% of the territory above 300 meters, and an average altitude of 700 m.a.s.l. The remaining 30% of its terrain is predominantly alluvial plains that form either fairly arid areas or poorly drained wetlands. The country experiences a continental European climate (mild temperate and wet winters; hot dry summers) to the east, and Mediterranean climate on the coastal plains to the west. Home to a population of almost 3 million, Albania is fairly densely populated for a small country, with 98 people per square kilometer. Administratively, the country is divided into 12 regions and 61 municipalities.

Albania has made remarkable economic progress during the past three decades. It went through a process of transition from a centralized economy to a market-based economy on the principles of the free market, and due to the strong growth performance, Albania grew from one of the poorest nations in Europe to a middle-income country. The country has a high Human Development Index (HDI value of 0.795 and ranking of 69 in 2020) and provides a universal health care system and free primary and secondary education. Over the past decade Albanians have seen impressive gains in life expectancy, education, and parliamentary representation of women. Albania's economy grew by over 2% per year, led by the services sector, especially tourism, agriculture, industry and construction. Despite this progress, poverty remains high at over 23% .

Rural areas and mountains in particular, are poorer than the rest of the country and the incidence of poverty is almost 3 times higher in rural areas compared to Tirana, and twice as high compared to other urban areas. Mountain area poverty is much even more pronounced with a poverty gap index of 11% . Across all rural areas in Albania, there are increasing levels of poverty and mountainous communities in particular, tend to be among the poorest globally. There is a population migration trend (of predominantly men) from rural areas as a consequence of lack of economic development, the limited area of agricultural land, and lack of infrastructure. Across the country, the number of residents in urban areas is significantly higher than rural areas (Institute of Geography and Statistics - INSTAT), which is a significant change compared to the early 1990s, when about two-thirds of the population lived in rural areas.



Map 1: Topographic map of Albania (source asig.gov.al)

The service industry dominates the country's economy, followed by the industrial and agriculture sectors. The economy is mostly in private hands, but the state continues to control key enterprises, particularly in the energy sector. Although foreign direct investment has increased in recent years (notably to fund development of its oil and natural gas resources), overall levels still remain among the lowest in the region. Its transportation and energy infrastructure also remain poor by European standards.

The agricultural sector, primarily driven by small family operations and subsistence farming, employs about half of the workforce and accounts for about 18% of Albania's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Modernization of the agricultural sector is hampered by a lack of modern equipment, unclear property rights, and the prevalence of small, inefficient plots of land. A significant part of Albania's national income also comes from tourism, which accounted for about 16% of its GDP in 2019. Outside agriculture and tourism, the economy is largely dependent on textiles; mining, petroleum, natural gas, coal, bauxite, chromite, copper, iron ore and nickel; lumber; hydropower; and remittances from migrant workers largely residing in Greece and Italy.

The Gender Equality Index for the Republic of Albania scored 60.4 points in 2020 according to INSTAT, which is seven points lower than the average score across the European Union (EU) countries

collectively. Gender gaps in economic opportunities include a lower labor force participation in women compared to men, with a persistent average gap of approximately 18% and a significantly lower participation of women in decision-making regarding the environment, ecosystem services, biodiversity conservation and climate change policies and their implementation. Occupational stereotypes also limit women's choices, with women working predominantly in sectors such as health and social work, education, manufacturing, and agriculture, which are characterized by lower salaries. Agriculture remains the primary sector employing women, with 41.6 percent women compared to 32.3 percent men. Although the National Institute of Statistics has been conducting an Income and Living Condition Survey (SILC) since 2017, it does not capture gender-specific differences and inequalities between female and male household members. Despite this, it is well understood that household resources are not distributed equally among its members, making women an at-risk population for poverty and social exclusion.

Albania is a member of the United Nations (UN), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Council of Europe and the World Trade Organization (WTO), and is one of the founding members of the Union for the Mediterranean. In 2003, Albania started negotiations with the European Union on a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA). In January 2006, the European Council adopted a revised European partnership for Albania, which identifies short-and-medium-term priorities for the country and provides guidance for EU assistance. Albania is an official candidate for accession to the European Union, since June 2014, thus EU integration is a top priority for the Albanian Government. The environmental sector is one of the main pillars in the accession process and the fulfillment of the relevant requirements and achievement of the EU standards is necessary. For more than a decade, Albania has been intensively working on transposing the EU Directives to its national legislation and ensuring that its nature conservation efforts are aligned with EU requirements.

Lying across two bio-geographical regions, the Alpines and the Mediterranean, and encompassing four eco-regions, Albania is considered a biodiversity hotspot in Europe. It is home to a wide diversity of ecosystems: marine and coastal, woodland and forest, high mountain, grassland, heathland, wetlands, rivers, and lakes, as well as diverse habitats that include: coastal and inland dunes, coastal and halophytic, temperate heath and scrub, freshwater, Mediterranean scrub natural and semi-natural grasslands, raised bogs, mires and fens, temperate forests, mountainous beech, and coniferous forests. Approximately 30% of Europe's flora and 42% of European mammals occur in Albania. To date, 3,250 species of vascular plants, 2,350 species of non-vascular plants and 15,600 species of invertebrates and vertebrates have been documented in Albania. Its topography has created the conditions for the existence of a number of endemic and sub-endemic species. 32 endemic and 160 sub-endemic flowering plant species occur in Albania. Approximately 196 invasive species adapted and cultivated in the environment are thought to occur.

Although its fauna is not as well documented as its flora, a considerable number of endemic and ancient species have been recorded such as the Lake Ohrid brown trout (*Salmo letnica*). In addition, at least 72 vertebrate and 18 invertebrate species of global importance have part of their range in the country and for some of them – such as *Salmo letnica* and *Acipenser sturio* – Albania is of critical importance. The National Red List of Wild Fauna and Flora approved in 2013, analyses 405 plant species and 575 animal species, most of which are threatened at national level (323 plant species and 260 animal species). The country is also an important migration route for birds with 91 globally

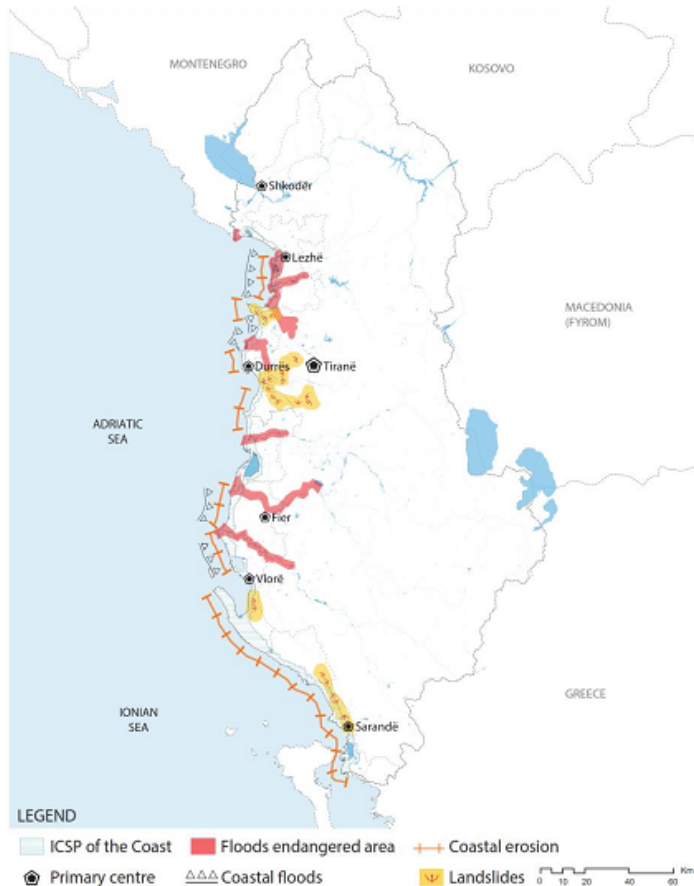
threatened bird species, which include those at a critical risk of extinction (e.g. *Pelecanus crispus*, *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*), finding shelter in the coastal lagoons and large lakes of Albania. There are currently two national databases which are available to track Albania's biodiversity. In 2016/2017 under the framework of the EU funded NaturaAI project, the Biodiversity National Network of Albania (BioNNA ? www.bionna.al/) was established to collect georeferenced point observations on occurrence of flora and fauna species. The National Agency for Protected Areas (NAPA) has also established a Wildlife Information Monitoring System (NAPA-WiMS) . It aims to monitor wildlife trends across protected areas all over the country, covering the territory of all the 12 Regional Administrations of Protected Areas (RAPAs). However, both databases are not fully operational due to lack of maintenance and updated protocols.

The National Forest and Pasture Inventory (NFPI) of 2018 shows that 46% of Albanian territory (or 1,310,000 ha) is covered by forests, a slight decrease from the figure provided by Albanian National Forest Inventory (ANFI) 2003 (1,498,957 ha). The NFPI 2018 reports a total volume of Albanian forests in the amount of 57.7 million m³, a decrease of more than 20% (15.8 million m³) compared to ANFI 2003 (73.5 million m³), or approximately 1 million m³ per year. According to NFPI 2018, Albanian forests are dominated by broadleaved species (80%) and mostly young forests characterized by low productivity and non-uniform distribution of age classes. NFPI 2018 reports an annual growing stock of 1,359,000 m³/year, supported by high forests at 44% (604,000 m³/year), coppice forests at 29% (395,000 m³/year) and shrubs at 27% (360,000 m³). Although the overall annual allowance to cut is calculated at 80% (1,088,000 m³/year) of the annual growing stock, it is worrisome that the annual allowance to cut for high forest is set to 20% (723,000 m³/year) more than the respective annual growing stock. Furthermore, firewood collection is about 2-2.5 times greater than forest annual growth, and about two-thirds of firewood collected on the forests are burned inefficiently at rural households, exacerbating the forest degradation .

In addition to forest loss, as a result of uncontrolled hunting in the past two decades, there has been a notable decrease in game species with a corresponding increase in hunting (mostly mammals and birds) observed. The government has tried to address these issues by placing a 10-year moratorium on forest and hunting activities in 2016 across the country.

In addition to deforestation and illegal hunting, a number of other issues to Albania's biodiversity were identified in the 5th National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (2014), notably, industrial development, urbanization, soil erosion, uncontrolled pollution, and illegal fishing. Agriculture, energy, mining, transport, and tourism were identified as the sectors that contribute most to negative impacts on biodiversity.

Albania is one of the most vulnerable countries to the impacts of climate change , and future climate scenarios for Albania anticipate an increasing trend in annual and seasonal climate related disasters such as floods, land erosion, decreased precipitation and a reduction of water resources and arable land. A climate vulnerability (map 2 below) was produced mainly for the coastal areas in 2015.



Source: Integrated Cross-sectorial Plan for the Coast, NATP, 2015

Map 2: Climate vulnerability map for Albania's coastal areas (2015)

Studies of climate change for high emission scenarios in Albania, predict that mean annual temperatures in Albania will increase between 1.3°C and 2.2°C by 2059 and 4.4°C by 2100, while precipitation by 2050 is expected to decrease between 2.1% and 4.3%, and by 2100 precipitation will decrease by 1.8% and 12.2%. The country is prone to numerous natural hazards, including, hydro-meteorological hazards: floods, droughts, forest fires, and landslides. Changes to Albania's climate, specifically the frequency of extreme weather events and temperature variations are expected to have the most significant impacts to the country's key sectors, its economy, and population. According to the National Determined Contributions for Albania developed by UNDP in 2022, the agriculture forestry and pasture sectors are highly effected by climate change impacts. For example, crop production has been significantly impacted by floods within the last decade. Floods have resulted in the destruction of about 10,000 ha of wheat, 15,000 ha of fodder crops, 1000 ha of fruit trees, and over 1500 ha of vineyards. The most severely impacted areas were the Shkodra and Lezha regions in the northwest of the country. It is estimated (by agricultural experts in the country) that the cost to agricultural production caused by these floods is about 100 million USD. On the flip side, Albanian summers are becoming drier with rising average temperatures. The effect of this has led to an increase in the demand for irrigation water, as well as the demand for chemical treatments to protect plants from diseases and pests.

Floods have also had a negative impact on livestock numbers in the Shkoder and Lezha regions. Higher summer temperatures and lower precipitation strongly affect grazing systems. The high temperatures during the last few summer seasons are likely to have affected laying hens and dairy cattle production, however no data are available to verify this. The most notable effect of high temperatures observed in the area has been the spread of disease among farm animals. Seven years ago, 900 heads of cattle were infected with the bluetongue disease which resulted in the death of 175. The infection further spread to other livestock infecting 28,176 heads of sheep and 663 heads of goat of which 6,379 and 142 respectively, animals were lost.

Warmer winters also contribute to more disease outbreaks. A warm winter season helps the survival of larvae and rays leading to the spread of CCHF (Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic Fever). Similarly, in 2011, 22% of horses infected with the West Nile virus contracted it from the *Culex pipiens* mosquito, which is adapted to high temperatures.

In addition to higher temperatures and lower precipitation, climate change directly affects the frequency and intensity of forest disturbances such as insect outbreaks, increased presence of invasive species, fires, storms, etc. Coupled with rising temperatures, heat waves and reduced rainfall, climate change effects cause significant stress to trees, directly affecting the productivity of forests. To date, there are no specific studies regarding the impact of climate change on Albanian forests. However, some impacts of those changes are already evident and consist of the following damages:

1. In Kune-Vain (Lezha municipality), about 80 ha of the Mediterranean pines forest belt has disappeared during 1985-2020 as a result of coastal erosion. The belt has a length of about 4 km and a maximum width of up to 400 meters. Coastal erosion in combination with a rising sea level has caused the loss of a significant amount of forested land in this area. The average extinction rate is approximately 2.3 ha/year.
2. In Velipoje (Shkodra municipality), due to coastal erosion, 34 ha of riparian forests was lost during the period 1985-2020. The rate of forest loss in this area is approximately 1 ha/year.
3. Changes have been observed in the vertical migration of forest areas. This has been observed in the upper forest belt of Bosnian pine (*Pinus heldreichii*) and Macedonian pine (*Pinus peuce*) where these forests are moving into alpine pastures. In some areas, a vertical shift of forest vegetation between 50-100 meters has been observed.
4. The high temperatures and heat waves that have invaded the country have led to substantial damage of forests by massive forest fires. The frequency of fires and their resulting damage has increased in recent years. During the period 2011-2019, 760 forest fires were identified, burning an area of 337,800 ha of the Albanian forests. Over the past 12 years, 22% of deforestation can be attributed to forest fires.
5. New pests and diseases are becoming more frequent and causing massive damages to forests, this is particularly prevalent in black pine, chestnut, plane, oaks, and box-tree forests. In total, it is estimated that about 200,000 ha or 20% of the total forest area of Albania is impacted by pests and diseases. Climate change effects on pastures have been evident since the late 1990s, specifically since the snowless winter of 1997. Since 1997, winters in Albania have become shorter and milder, whereas summers have become longer and hotter. The country has observed more frequent droughts in summer and sometimes even in autumn followed by sudden floods. As a result of these extended droughts, the number and the intensity of fires in Albania that negatively affect grassland and pasture ecosystems, has increased.

It is also important to note that women and men are impacted differently by climate change. Women currently face many obstacles in attaining their equal rights, including limited access to assets, which translates into an inferior economic position. This gender gap encompasses salaries, property ownership, pensions, inheritance, and land, all of which significantly hinder their ability to adapt to climate change impacts. Currently, data available on the different effects of climate change on men and women in Albania is limited, and focuses only on the agriculture sector. This is relevant given that agriculture is a labor-intensive sector highly dependent on environmental conditions and is dominated by women across the country, including in the Albanian Alps region. The different vulnerabilities in this sector depend to a large extent on the differentiated roles of women and men in the agricultural value chain. According to surveys conducted in the frame of the Fourth National Communication (4NC) for Albania, 39% of respondents believe there are differences in men's and women's ability to react to climate change, and among them, 53% believe men are more able to address climate change challenges.

Recognizing the important role protected areas have in contributing to biodiversity conservation, Albania has made efforts in establishing and expanding its protected areas network (Map 3). In particular, the country has made significant progress in improving the coverage of its protected area system over the last 15 years, by effectively doubling the extent of the protected area estate from 238,347 ha in 2005, to 460,060 ha in 2015 and to 488,192.31 ha in 2021 (see Table 2 below). The first Marine Protected Area (MPA) in Albania was designated in 2010 as the 'Karaburuni-Sazan' Marine National Park (124.3 km²). In its 2021 Progress Report for Albania, the European Commission (EC) recognized that the country's alignment with the acquis in the field of nature protection, in particular for the Birds and Habitats Directives, is well advanced. It also noted however, that law enforcement in environmental protection remains generally weak.

Table 2. Area covered by protected areas in Albania indicating the increase and changes in the past fifteen years

National Protected areas IUCN Categories	Area (km ²)				
	2005	2010	2015	2021	2022
Strict Nature Reserve (Cat I)	145.0	48.0	48.0	48.0	
National Park (CAT II)	625.3	1,889.4	2,105.0	2,182.8	3,012.0
Nature Monument (Cat III)	34.7	34.7	34.7	19.7	19.7
Managed Nature Reserve (Cat IV)	669.6	674.2	1,271.8	1,475.6	2,223.2
Protected Landscape (Cat V)	726.4	958.6	958.6	973.3	973.3
Sustainable use of resources (Cat VI)	182.5	182.5	182.5	182.5	
Total Area	2383.5	3,787.4	4,600.6	4,882.0	6,228.2

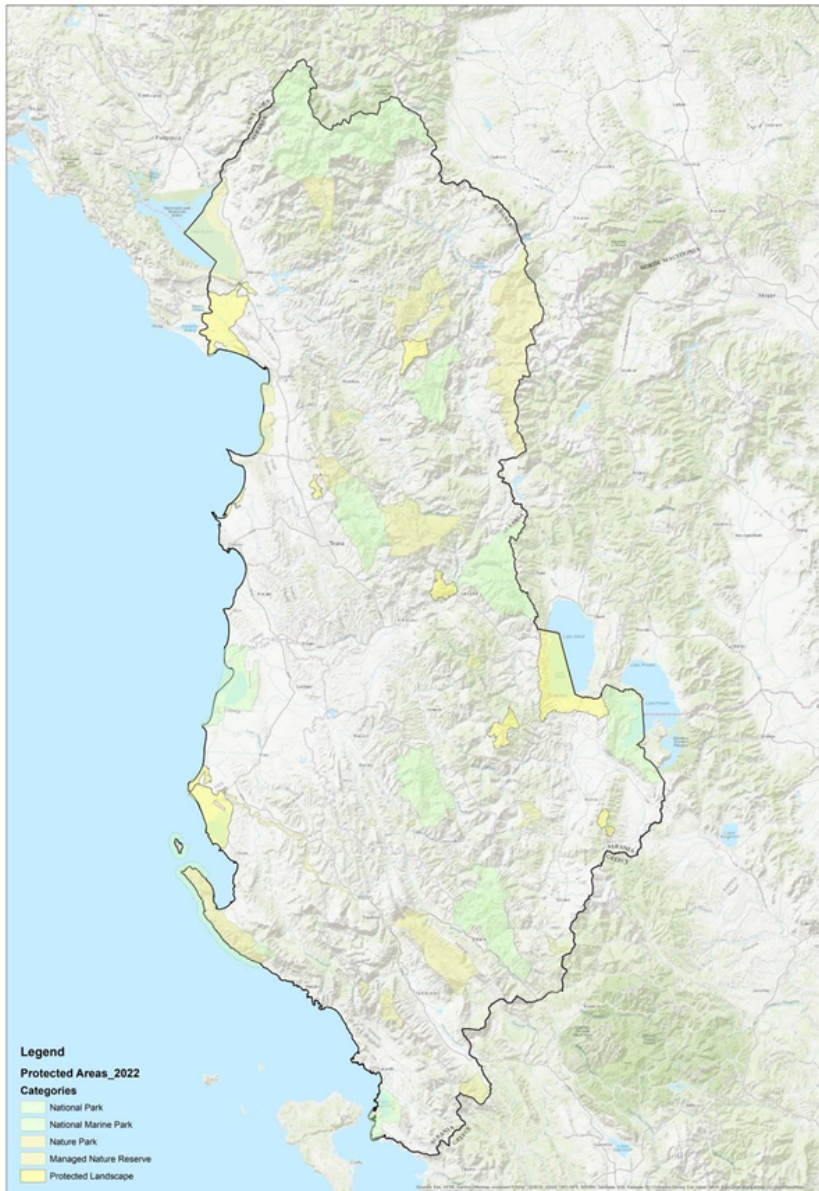
Source: NAPA 2022

The Albanian government continues to demonstrate its commitment and efforts towards protected areas network expansion, and in January 2022, the country further approved a number of decrees revising the boundaries of existing protected areas, while designating a number of new ones, resulting in

approximately 20% of Albania's surface covered in a range of International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) protected area categories.

Recognizing the immense biological importance of the Albanian Alps territory, a decision was made to seek the inclusion of the whole landscape under the National Park (NP) status, in order to more systematically apply integrated biodiversity and rural development planning and management at landscape scale. As such the "Albanian Alps" National Park (AANP) with a total area of 82,844.65 ha, was one of those new protected areas established in 2022. The AANP, in the northern Alps Mountain region of Albania, was established under the DCM no. 59 of January 26, 2022 and encompasses three former protected areas, namely, National Park Thethi, National Park Lugina e Valbones and Strict Nature Reserve Lumi i Gashit.

This new large, landscape level AANP encompasses two districts, Kukës and Shkodra, and three municipalities, Tropoje, Malesi e Madhe and Shkoder. There are 110 small, traditional, and scattered rural settlements occurring within the National Park, located mainly in the valleys and slopes, where there are more opportunities for arable land.

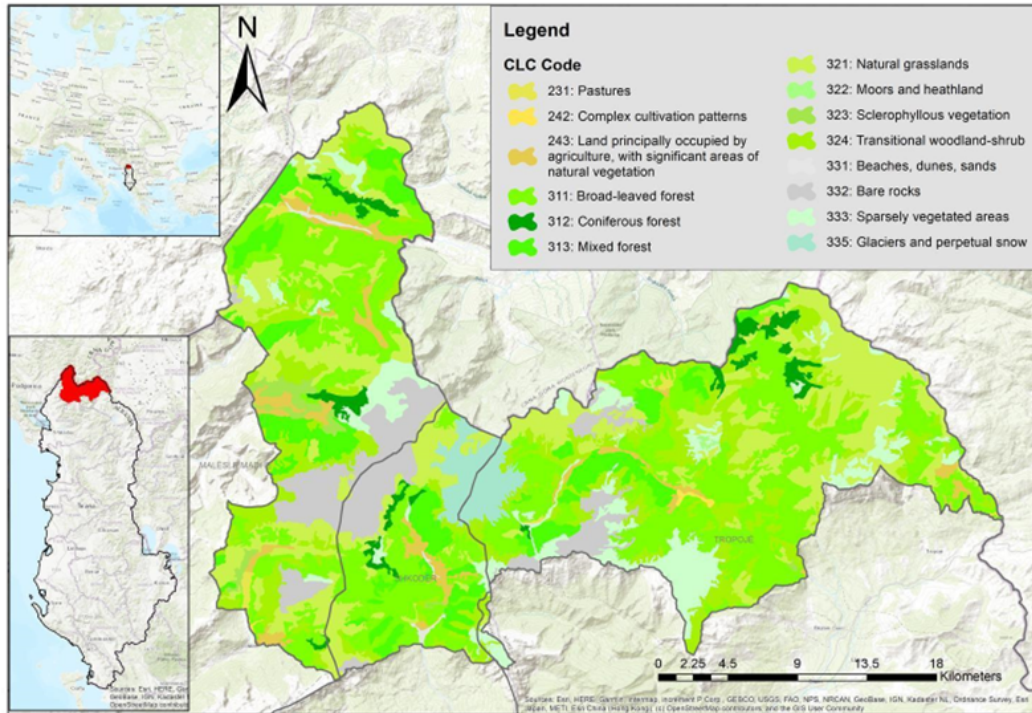


Map 3: Protected areas systems (Decision of the Council of Territory 2022)

1.1.1.2 Albanian Alps

The Albanian Alps are located in the North-eastern part of the country on the state border between Albania and Montenegro (northern border) and between Albania and Kosovo (under UNSCR 1244/99) (Map 4). The Albanian Alps is a region of great biological importance, representing the southernmost part of the European Alps in the line Dinarides Albanides. The Albanian Alps has been included in the EMERALD network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest (Bern Convention) and are part of the European Green Belt. The area is characterized by steep slopes, deep valleys, narrow gorges with numerous rapids and numerous glacial forms, in which there are species rich lakes, forests and pastures. The average altitude is 1500 m.a.s.l but there are numerous peaks with an altitude of over 2000m (the highest one is Jezerca at 2694 m). Due to the mountainous relief, there is more rainfall than anywhere else in Albania, making this region hydrologically very important. It is part of one of the

most important river basins (Drin-Buna) on the Adriatic coast of the Balkan Peninsula, consisting of the largest river in Albania (Drin River) providing water resources to 12 municipalities (Malësi e Madhe; Tropojë; Shkodër; Fushë-Arës, Has; Vau i Dejës; Pukë; Kukës; Dibër; Lezhë; Bulqiz; Pogradec), as well as transboundary to Northern Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo (under UNSCR 1244/99) and Greece.



Map 4: Map showing location of the Albanian Alps National Park and its land cover

The territory of the Albanian Alps is characterized by a diversity of habitats and floristic and faunal species of a national, regional and international importance. Grasslands and sparsely vegetated areas occupy most of the area with forests occupying more than a third of the area. The most common beech forests are often mixed with European Silver Fir (*Abies alba*) and Norway Spruce woods (*Picea abies*), Heldreich Pine (*Pinus heldreichii*), and Macedonian Pine (*Pinus peuce*). Although there are no detailed assessments of the area, experts indicate there are 28 habitats of EU community conservation interest, including four priority habitats, listed in the annex of the Habitat Directive and requiring specific conservation measures.

- ? Bushes with *Pinus mugo* and *Rhododendron hirsutum* (Mugo-Rhododendretum hirsuti)
- ? Species-rich *Nardus* grasslands, on silicious substrates in mountain areas
- ? Limestone pavement
- ? Tilio-Acerion forests of slopes, screes and ravines

The very isolated character of the Albanian Alps, the very high degree of terrain fragmentation, and the big contrasts of their relief, have created special and very diverse ecological conditions relevant for a high number of endemic and sub endemic plants, such as: *Wulfenia baldacci*, *Viola dukagjinica*, *Lilium albanicum*, *Alchemilla albanica* Rothm., *Astrus alpestris*, *Ligusticum albanicum* Jav., *Gentianella albanica* (Jav.) Holub), and relics, for example, two species of willow (*Salix retusa* and *S. reticulata*), and the Yew (*Taxus baccata*). There also exist several plant species that are protected by international

agreements such as the *Ramonda serbica* Pancic, *Geum bulgaricum* Panc., *Gentiana lutea* L., *Galanthus nivalis* L., and *Campanula scheuchzeri* Vill., which are listed in Annexes II and IV of the Habitats Directive (92/43 / EEC).

The alpine pasture floor, extending to altitudes above 2000m, is dominated by primary and secondary plant associations of heather (*Pinetum mughi*, *Vaccinium myrtillus*, *Vaccinium uliginosum*, *Juniperus sibirica* or *Bruckenthalia spiculifolia*). A distinctive feature of some of these pastures is the widespread of blueberry bushes (*Vaccinium myrtillus* L.); with species of shrubs such as *Salix* ssp, *Dryas octopetala*, *Daphne oleoides*, *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*, and Dwarf juniper (*Juniperus nana*).

Sloping rocky outcrops, stony ballasts of various geological origins, are covered by herbaceous and shrubby vegetation, often rich in rare and endangered species, such as *Salicetea herbacea*, *Thlaspectea rotundifolia* and *Drypetea sposa* (*Drypetea* spin). The considerable altitude from the sea level, the high variation of the mountainous terrain and the alpine pastures also make the territory of the park a favorable space for the growth of medicinal plants. There are approximately 500 species of medicinal plants in this territory.

The Albanian Alps territory is distinguished for its faunal diversity, due to its geographical position, geological, pedological, hydrological conditions, relief and climate characteristics. This faunal wealth is as a result of the numerous influences of the Mediterranean, Euro-Siberian and Nordic-Alpine region, as well as the frequent changes of ecological conditions in the past. AANP houses 15 species endemic to the Balkans, 10 globally endangered species and 41 species considered endangered in Albania (Table 3). The territory houses a number of species listed on the IUCN Red Species List, including: Mammals: Eurasian Lynx (*Lynx lynx*), Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), Wolf (*Canis lupus*), Roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*), Chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra*), hare (*Lepus europaeus*); Birds: Eurasian capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*), Red crawler (*Tichodroma muraria*), Mountain partridge (*Alectoris graeca*); Amphibians: mountain frog (*Rana temporaria*), Black salamander (*Salamandra atra*); and Reptiles: Sand lizard (*Lacerta agilis*), European viper (*Vipera berus*), and Meadow viper (*Vipera ursinii*).

Table 3: Evaluation of vertebrates of the Albanian Alps National Park

Group	Species vs Species reported in Albania	Endemic in the Balkan	Endangered Globally (IUCN)	Endangered in Albania	Habitats Directive	Birds Directive
Land Mammals	65/79	4	3	8	56	na
Birds	155 /330		4	29	na	65
Reptiles	29/38	5	1	2	31	na
Amphibians	13/16	4	0		8	na
Fresh Water Fish	8/60	2	2	2	11	na
Total	270 /522	15	10	41	106	65

The karstic nature of the area provides for a large number of caves that are important habitats for several species of conservation interest, including bats, reptiles and amphibians. However, this aspect of the Albanian Alps is largely unexplored. Currently, about 82,000 inhabitants live in the Albanian Alps territory, and the average population density is approximately 0.37 inhabitants per km². The main

traditional livelihoods of the local populations are shaped by limited agriculture land and availability of forests and pasture resources. The scarce agricultural land is mainly used to grow vegetables and orchards (fruit trees). Livestock raising used to be the main economic activity in the Alps area, with families managing mixed flocks of goats, sheep and a few cows. However, this activity is largely impacted by the migration trends in the area (young people leaving) resulting in livestock being reared closer to homesteads thus causing an overuse effect of grazing areas around villages. Collection of medicinal plants and other non-timber forest products is another relevant economic activity for many families in the area. Chestnuts and blueberry are the key natural products already registered as local trademarks providing families in the area with hundred thousand USD per year. Given the dependency of Albanian Alpine communities on the natural resources, their potential for overexploitation is high. According to the National Tourism Sectoral Plan for the Region of the Albanian Alps approximately 55% of available workforce is registered as employed, while 45% of the employed population is self-employed. The main sectors of employment are services (55%), followed by agriculture (34%) and industry (11%). The development of tourism in the area enhances the service sector, and indirectly, the development of the agricultural and industrial sectors, which has a major impact on employment. The employed population across the Albanian Alps region has a relatively low level of secondary education, with an average of 9.2 years in education. This trend is particularly prominent in the administrative units where secondary school facilities are lacking such as Pult, Shosh, Shkrel, Shllak, and Kelmend dhe Shal?. Bajram Curri is the only administrative unit that displays higher levels of secondary and higher-level education in the workforce, with 51% of the population having a secondary education and 17% with higher or postgraduate education.

The territory of the Albanian Alps comprises 10.8% agricultural systems, 78.6% natural systems and 0.85% urban systems. The only urban center is Bajram Currit, which is classified as a secondary urban center. Water systems comprise about 9.5% of the territory including rivers, river valleys and lakes. Only 0.25 % of the territory comprises infrastructural systems. From an infrastructural point of view the Albanian Alps are considered a difficult terrain, with fragmented relief and lack of accessibility to most areas. The infrastructural system consists of secondary inter-urban roads, main inter-urban roads, secondary roads, local paths for pedestrians, and mountain bike trails.

The area's rich biological attributes and natural features has made the Albanian Alps a tourism hotspot for the country and tourism is a growing new source of livelihoods in the area. The data from RAPA in Shkoder and Kukës show that the number of visitors registered in 2019 (before the Covid 19 pandemic) was around 224,000, with Valbona attracting most visitors (116,736). While this growing trend provides a significant opportunity, its growth is largely unregulated and so, it is important that as tourism grows in the area, it is done in a sustainable manner that benefits both residents and biodiversity alike. The area is also rich in cultural heritage, including traditional wood and livestock related handicrafts typically carried out informally by women.

Its wealth of water resources also makes it a highly attractive area for Hydropower plants (HPPs). Currently there are two HPPs being built in the area. The local community has voiced some concerns about the impact HPPs will have in the future development of the area. HPPs can have negative impacts not only on aquatic habitats and species but also on terrestrial ones as a result of the impact of new roads, construction pollution, and increased human presence, some of which are already evident. For example, there are new roads being constructed into previously inaccessible areas occurring in the area. While increased accessibility has potential positive impacts for socio-economic development, the construction process destroys and fragments habitats, increases erosion, and most significantly, in the

longer term, increases access of these areas to people and vehicles which can lead to damaging levels of uncontrolled tourism and other forms of natural resource over exploitation. It is imperative therefore, that the recently declared AANP is considered in infrastructure and other development plans moving forward.

Given the complex and landscape scale of the AANP, ensuring that there is an ecosystem-based approach to its management, that there are appropriate and inclusive policies and plans developed for the area, and that there is sufficient human and technical and financial capacity to manage this important National Park, will be critical if it is to be managed effectively with positive conservation and sustainable development outcomes and not remain a 'paper park'.

1.1.2. Institutional, sectoral and policy context

1.1.2.1 Legal Context

The planning, administration, management and use of protected areas in Albania is guided by the Law on Protected Areas (Law no. 81, dt 2017). This Law establishes the legal context for the declaration, conservation, administration, management and use of the protected areas and their natural and biological resources, based on the principle of sustainable development, to guarantee the fulfilment of functions environmental, economic, social, and cultural, in the interest of the whole society, as well as defining the responsibilities of public institutions and private natural / legal persons for their preservation and sustainable administration. The law defines facilitating conditions for the development of nature-based tourism, public recreation and education, and the generation of direct and indirect economic benefits to the local population, public, and private sectors. The Law on Protected Areas defines six management IUCN categories of protected areas. The law is partially aligned with Council Directive 92/43 / EEC of 21 May 1992, "On the conservation of natural habitats and wild flora and fauna", as amended".

Of significant importance with regards to PAs is the legal basis that enforces a ban on hunting initially approved in 2014 (Law no. 7/2014) later re-confirmed in 2016 (Law no. 61/2016) for a period of 5 years and more recently, on 30th March 2022, a further five-year extension has been proposed by the government through a proposed law 'On Announcement of the Hunting Moratorium in the Republic of Albania'. This law specifies that the use of hunting areas, given for this purpose through public offering, is suspended, and contracts for the breeding of wild fauna are valid, but also in these areas, where the fauna of wild, hunting may not be practiced until the term of this law is completed. Similarly, the logging ban (Law no. 5/2016), is in force in Albania for a period of 10 years from its approval.

Other relevant legislation promoting nature protection in Albania includes:

' Law No. 9587 'On Biodiversity Protection', (amended by law no. 37/2013, Law no. 68/2014, Law no. 41/2020), aims to: ensure the protection and preservation of biological diversity; regulate the sustainable use of biodiversity components; ensure the establishment of the network for the conservation of natural habitats and wild flora and fauna in the territory of the Republic of Albania; determine measures to maintain or restore to a favorable conservation status the natural habitats and species of wild fauna of Albania and of interest to the European Community; ensure that the measures taken, pursuant to this law, take into account economic, social, and cultural requirements, as well as regional characteristics. The law is fully transposing the Directive 92/43/EEC 'On the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora' amended by Council Directive 97/62/EC of 27 October 1997, Regulation (EC) No 1882/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 September

2003, Council Directive 2006/105/EC of 20 November 2006, Council Directive 2013/17/EU of 13 May 2013.

? Law No. 10006 "On Wild Fauna Protection"; Law No.10006, dated 23.10.2008, "On the protection and conservation of wild fauna", as amended by Law no. 46/2019 "On some changes and additions to law no. 10 006, dated 23.10.2008 "On the protection of wild fauna", as amended by Law, No.46/2019. The law aims for the conservation of wild fauna, its protection, management and control, with the aim to preserve the species, populations, habitats, where wild fauna lives, as well as to meet its requirements for food, shelter and reproduction, providing, at the same time, its migratory routes. This law applies to all species and subspecies of wild fauna, including eggs, nests, young, and habitats where they live free, permanently or temporarily, in natural, terrestrial, and aquatic environments, in the territory of the Republic of Albania. This law is partially aligned with: Council Directive 92/43 / EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of Natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, as amended. Directive 2009/147 / EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of Wild birds, as amended.

? Law no. 10 431, dated 9.6.2011 on "Environmental Protection" aims to protect the environment at a high level, preserving and improving it, preventing and reducing the risks to human life and health, ensuring and improving the quality of life, for the benefit of present and future generations, as well as providing conditions for the sustainable development of the country.

? Law for the Environmental Impact Assessment (No. 10 440, dated 07.07.2011) aims to improve the existing environmental impact assessment (EIA) system. The Law aims to ensure a high level of environmental protection by preventing, minimizing and compensating for the environmental harms to be caused by projects not yet implemented, and enabling an open decision-making process during the identification and evaluation of negative environmental impacts. The law has since been amended twice and the latest version (law 128/2020 date 22.10.2020) takes as its objective the development of the full EIA study on projects that are considered to have impacts in protected areas as special areas of biodiversity. It pays particular attention to protected species and habitats, set out in the bylaws which approves lists of natural habitats, plant, animal, and poultry species of interest to the EU and the list of particularly vulnerable wild birds. It fully transposes the Directive of 27 June 1985 "On the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment" as amended by Directive 97/11/EC, Directive 2003/35/EC and Directive 2009/31/EC (Chapter 2).

? Law No.9867 "On rules and procedures for international trade of endangered species of flora and fauna", amended by Law no. nr 5/2015, is transposing the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). This law applies to the species of fauna and flora, listed in the annexes of the Convention, as well as to those listed in the local list, which includes native fauna and flora species approved by order of the Minister. At the suggestion of the relevant research institutions, the Minister approves the addition or removal of a certain species from the local list. This law also regulates the import, export, transit, and re-exportation of species of wild flora and fauna, which are not listed in the annexes of this law, but are subject to ordinary customs control.

? Law no. 10253, dated 11.03.2010, "On hunting", amended by Law no. 43/2013 "On some changes in law no. 10 253, dated 11.3.2010 "On hunting"?. The law aims at a) defining the rules and requirements for the development of hunting, as a traditional activity, sports, recreation, and tourism; b) sustainable hunting management, valuing wild fauna as a national asset that is administered and protected by law; c) ensuring that the principles of hunting are strictly applied, preserving the integrity of the ecosystem and the ecological balance; d) not damaging the species of wild fauna and their habitats during the

hunting exercise; e) respect for the right to hunt and the rights to hunting, trophies, and hunting products and their trade. The law outlines the responsible institutions monitoring infractions as well as measures for infractions.

? Law no. 57/2020 ?On forests?. The law on forests aims to protect forests as an asset of special importance, for the great and irreplaceable values in protecting climate, soil, preserving and improving production potentials, natural environmental balances, biodiversity, genetic resources, and the hydric regime, as obligations of national and international interest. The law provides to preserve, increase the area and total volume of the national forest fund, regulate relations and guarantee financial sustainability, functional organization at all levels of government for the exploitation and sustainable and balanced use of forest resources against the possibility that forests have, without compromising continuity of life and forest cycle. Likewise, the law provides for the guarantee of services quality aiming at proper protection, improvement and regeneration of forest areas. This law is partially aligned with the: European Council Regulation (EC) no 2173/2005, dated 20 December 2005 "On the establishment of a licensing scheme FLEGT on the import of timber into the European Community ?as amended; European Union Regulation no 995/2010 of the European Parliament, dated 20 October 2010 "On the definition of the obligations of operators, which trade timber or timber products", as amended; Implementing Regulation of the European Union Commission No 607/2012, dated 6 July 2012 "On detailed rules in relation to the due diligence system, frequency and the nature of controls over organizations monitoring?, as provided in Regulation (EU) no 995/2010 "On the determination of obligations of operators which trade timber or timber products", as amended.

? Law no. 155/2020 ?On climate change? . Areas of state responsibility, provided in letters "c" and "d" of point 1 of the article 23, include: energy industry, manufacturing industries, construction, fuels, mining and geology, forests, biodiversity and areas of protected, agriculture and livestock, water management, waste, health, transport infrastructure (including road and rail, ports and airports, pipelines, dams, water and wastewater), urban planning, land management, tourism, education , civil emergencies and disaster management. This law supports the promotion of environment / climate friendly investments in the field of nature protection by emphasizing adaptation management practices for protected areas, assessing the importance of biodiversity in relation to the capacity of ecosystems to adapt to climate change, ensuring, at the same time, the level of ecosystem services on which human society depends, the assessment and analysis of the impacts of climate change adaptation and mitigation measures on biodiversity.

1.1.2.2 Policies and Plans

The National Biodiversity Strategy was updated in 2020 following its Midterm Review and clearly identifies the main areas of work, including among others:

- ? Increase of protected areas coverage up to 20% on terrestrial PAs and 10% on marine and inland water?s PAs;
- ? Completion of the legal framework in line with the EU acquis for nature and environment in accordance with the Birds and Habitats Directive;
- ? Strengthening law enforcement by the means of improving legislation and building institutional capacities;

The National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI II), is Albania?s most important strategic document outlining the national vision for social and economic development, while being in

line with the long-standing strategic objective of the country for European integration. The NSDI II vision of "Creating wealth and well-being for a European Albania" specifically through its second pillar, "Sustained Economic Growth - the Vehicle for Albania's Development" considers that economic growth should not be at the expense of the economic and social well-being of future Albanian generations due to unsustainable depletion of natural resources or loss of biodiversity. Achievement of the NSDI II vision through government policies and actions is aimed to prepare Albania for European Accession.

The Document of Strategic Policies for the Protection of Biodiversity in Albania was developed in 2015 as the main instrument for the implementation of the CBD and its Strategic Plan. Article 6 (a) of the CBD requires that all parties should be committed to have their National Strategy on Biodiversity and the Action Plan (NBSAP). The Document of Strategic Policies serves as a guide for the way the country aims to achieve the objectives of the Convention, in the context of its international obligations. In the frame of the Post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, Albania has engaged UNEP in order to update their NBSAPs, policies, as well monitoring systems.

Albania approved its National Strategy on Climate Change and Action Plan (NSCC&AP) in 2019. With the signing of the Paris Agreement by the Government (New York, April 22, 2016), Albania has entered the new era of the international climate policy process, where all parties aim to collectively keep global temperatures rising at 2°C above the pre-industrial level. This document is designed to support the implementation of EU environmental and climate legislation, aiming at strengthening cross-sectoral coordination in Albania on climate measures, environmental protection and sustainable development, in order to respond to the need for approximation to EU requirements, being that currently, Albania holds the official status of candidate country for EU membership (since June 2014). This document has been elaborated in accordance with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) decision 1/CP.16 and Regulation 525/2013/EU for mitigation. Meanwhile, the adaptation process in Albania is oriented by "Technical guidelines for NAP processes", prepared by the Group of Experts of Least Developed Countries by the UNFCCC (LEG) 1 and published in December 2012 (the so-called "Technical Guidelines"). The national adaptation plan (NAP) process has been performed in accordance with the EU Strategy for Adaptation climate change, approved by the European Commission in April 2013. The NSCC&AP document and its mitigation aspects focus on the following four inventory reporting sectors of greenhouse gases in Albania: Energy (with particular focus on Transport), Agriculture and the Land Use and Forestry Change (LUFC), thus covering 80% of land discharges Albania. This document provides guidance and punctual action for the adaptation process in Albania, together with the framework for adaptation to Climate Change (CCA).

The vision of the Albanian National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development 2019-2023 portrays Albania, as a hospitable, attractive, and authentic destination, for the sustainable development of country's economic, natural and social potentials. The strategy identifies ten main sub-sectors out of which mountainous tourism, ecotourism, and cultural tourism, are three types that have an important role in achieving the strategic goals for a diversified, consolidated, and improved tourism sector in Albania.

The National Tourism Sectoral Plan for the Region of the Albanian Alps approved by Decision of the Council of Territory no. 1, dt. 9.12.2017, was developed for the purpose of halting unsustainable and chaotic infrastructure and tourism developments in this area, while raising public and private capacities for more sustainable and competitive tourism developments. The strategy covers the period between 2017 - 2031. After a thorough analysis of the territory as well as the socio-economic aspects identified

in the area this document identifies five types of tourism that should be prioritized namely: natural tourism, rest and relaxation tourism, gastronomic tourism, sport tourism, and cultural tourism. According to local development plans, Tropoja is characterized for activities such as agriculture, tourism, extraction (mining and aggregates), and renewable energy (wood and hydropower) and Malesi e Madhe for economic activities inclusive of agriculture (especially cultivation and trade of medicinal plants) and tourism. A special characteristic of this city is the railroad in Bajze that is seen as an important node for transport and future economic development of the city . The most significant private sectors include nature and cultural tourism and agriculture. Whereas the city of Shkoder is recognized as the main urban center of the North of Albania . Its vision for the future includes strengthening its infrastructure sector as well as its environment and communication sectors with a focus on eco-tourism and artisanal production. Due to a varied natural environment, the city's ambition is to become the "Green Gate of Albania".

Green Agenda for the Western Balkans: In November 2020, the Government of Albania became party to and endorsed the Leaders' Declaration on the Green Agenda that aligns with EU Green Deal.

Through the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, Albania committed to:

- ? Work towards the 2050 target of a carbon-neutral continent together with the EU through mainstreaming a strict climate policy and reforming energy and transport sectors;
- ? The process of transition from linear to a circular economy being fully aware of the necessity for research and innovation system to support this transition;
- ? Depollution of air, water, and soil;
- ? Work towards ensuring the transformation of the agriculture sector, minimizing its negative environmental and climate impact, and safeguarding affordable and healthy food for citizens and export markets;
- ? Work on defining the post-2020 biodiversity framework and developing a long-term strategy for halting biodiversity loss, protection, and restoration of ecosystems and abundant biological diversity.

1.1.2.3 EU Accession

EU integration is a top priority for the Albanian Government. Albania is a candidate country to the European Union. As part of the accession process, for more than a decade, Albania is intensively working on transposing the EU Directives to its national legislation. With regards to "Chapter 27: Environment and climate change", Albania shows progress in aligning the policies and legislation with the *acquis*, in areas such as waste and water management, environmental crime and civil protection. Significant efforts are still needed on implementation and enforcement, especially on waste management, water and air quality and climate change.

Recommendations from the country's 2020 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy Report include:

- align further with key water directives, and accelerate capacity development of the national agencies for Water Resource Management and for Water Supply, Sewerage and Waste;
- take immediate measures to review and improve environmental and strategic impact assessments on existing and planned projects, plans and programs, especially in the hydropower, construction, tourism and mining sectors;
- implement the national strategy on climate change and related action plans on mitigation and adaptation, adopt the relevant legislation and develop its integrated National Energy and Climate Plan in line with Energy Community obligations.

Aiming at EU accession, Albania needs to align its nature conservation efforts with EU requirements, particularly ensuring the implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives. Proper implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directive requires first of all full transposition of their requirements into national legislation. Implementation is also hindered by lack of appropriate monitoring and law enforcement mechanisms.

Detailed habitat maps covering all the country are missing. Knowledge about distribution area of species is limited and/or scattered. The limited level of knowledge on habitats and species distribution hinders the appropriate identification and protection of relevant sites as well as selection and implementation of appropriate conservation measures

The EC Report in 2020 recognizes that alignment with the *acquis* in the field of nature protection, in particular for the Habitats and Birds Directives is advancing. Although the transposition of the respective directives is progressing (86% Habitats Directive, 65% Birds Directive), the implementation of both directives is still at the initial stage. Further, the same report also highlighted law enforcement remains generally weak. The legislation on strategic investment raises concerns for the protection of biodiversity, as it may allow large tourism and industrial investments in protected areas, e.g. the proposed airport in the Vjosa-Narta area. This conflicts with other national laws and with international biodiversity protection conventions that Albania has ratified. It is identified that Albania shall comply with national and international nature protection and water management obligations, ensure public participation and consultation, and guarantee high quality EIA reports that include impact assessments on nature and biodiversity.

1.1.2.4 Multilateral agreements

Albania is a signatory to various international environmental conventions such as the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the Bern Convention, CITES, the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification among others (Table 4). The status of implementation of these agreements varies and some require significantly greater efforts to others for implementing certain measures on the ground.

Table 4. Ratified multilateral agreements of relevance for biological diversity in Albania

Multilateral agreements	Ratification and Implementation
Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)	? Ratified on January 5, 1994 ? First NBSAP adopted in 2000 ? Six national reports prepared and submitted to the CBD Secretariat ? Revised NBSAP prepared in 2015

<p>Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention)</p>	<p>? Ratified 29.02.1996 ? National Report on the Implementation of the Ramsar Convention for the period 2009-2011 was submitted in June 2012 (the 11th Conference of Parties ? Four areas in Albania are included in the Ramsar Sites (wetlands of international importance, as part of important water habitats for water birds including (1) the wetland of Karavasta; (2) wetland of Butrint; (3) Shkodra lake and wetland complex of Buna River and (4) lakes of the area of Prespa as the 4th Ramsar site in Albania through DCM no. 489, of 13.06.2013.</p>
<p>Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (Bonn Convention)</p>	<p>? Ratified by adoption of law no. 8692, dated 16.11.2000</p>
<p>Agreement on the Conservation of Bats in Europe (EUROBATS)</p>	<p>? Ratified with the adoption of law no. 8692, dated 16.11.2000 ? Five National Reports submitted in 2003, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018</p>
<p>Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA)</p>	<p>? Ratified with the adoption of law no. 8692, dated 16.11.2000</p>
<p>Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (UNESCO)</p>	<p>? Ratified with adoption of law no 9490, date 13.3.2006 ? Cultural sites include Butrint (1992, 1999), Historic Centres of Berat and Gjirokastra (2005, 2008) ? Natural sites include Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe in Gashi River, and Rrajca (2007, 2011, 2017, 2021) ? Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid region (1979, 2019, 1980)</p>

<p>Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)</p>	<p>? Ratified with the adoption of law no.9021, dated 06.03.2002 ? Annual reports are regularly submitted to the Secretariat of the Convention since 2003</p>
<p>Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention)</p>	<p>? Ratified with the Law on Ratification on 13 January 1999 ? The Standing Committee of the Bern Convention, in December 2012 accepted the proposal of 25 Emerald Network sites for Albania. ? Three reports on implementation of the Convention for the period 2009-2016 were submitted</p>
<p>United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)</p>	<p>? Ratified with the adoption of law no. 8556, dated 22.12.1999 ? The third National Communication Report was submitted in June 2016 ? Albania's First Biennial Update Report was submitted in July 2021</p>
<p>Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice on Issues related to Environment</p>	<p>? Ratified with the Law No.8672, date 26.10.2000 on Ratification and DCM No.16, dated 4.1.2012 ?On the public right to have environmental information? ? Strategy for implementation of the Aarhus Convention in 2005 ? National reports on implementation of the Convention were submitted on 2005 and September 2020</p>
<p>United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Countries Experiencing Serious Drought or Desertification, particularly in Africa (UNCCD)</p>	<p>? Ratified with the adoption of law no. 8556, dated 22.12.1999</p>

Convention on The Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes	? Signature on 18.03.1992 ? Ratification on 05.01.1994 with adoption of law No.9103, date 10.7.2003
Convention on The Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents	? Signature on 18.03.1992 ? Ratification on 05.01.1994
Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity	? Signature on ? Ratified on 05.01.1994 accession, party since 09.05.2005
Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context	? Signature on 21.05.2003 ? Ratified on 02.12.2005, entry in force on 11.07.2010 with adoption of law no.91 date
Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society	? Signature on 27.10.2005 ? Ratified on 06.02.2008,
Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context	? Signature 26.02.1991 ? Ratified on 12.05.2006 accession, entry in force on 23.10.2017 ? This convention is adopted by law no. 10 440, date 7.7. 2011 amend with law no. 12/2015 date 26.02.2015

1.1.2.5 Institutional

The Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MoTE) is the responsible authority for environmental management and policy at the national level. The MoTE's main tasks include: implementing relevant national policies, defining priority environmental and forestry investments, developing national research programs in the field of environment, and coordinating environmental protection activities with other ministries and local authorities. In terms of organization, the MoTE has four structural functions (policy, inspection, permits and support services) along with four sub-sector functions (environment and pollution prevention, forestry and nature and water protection). Under this Ministry a number of sectors, directorates and agencies occur.

The Directorate for Environmental Development Programs under the Directory General of Environmental Policies and Development (Figure 1) is the key department within the MoTE responsible for the implementation of directives and regulations related to nature conservation. The Department includes two sectors responsible for biodiversity protection (Sector of Environment Protection and Biodiversity) and forest management (Sector of Forest). The Department has a total of seven people (equally divided across the two sectors and a director). Various people within the Department are responsible for different directives and regulations, while covering a large number of other issues as well.

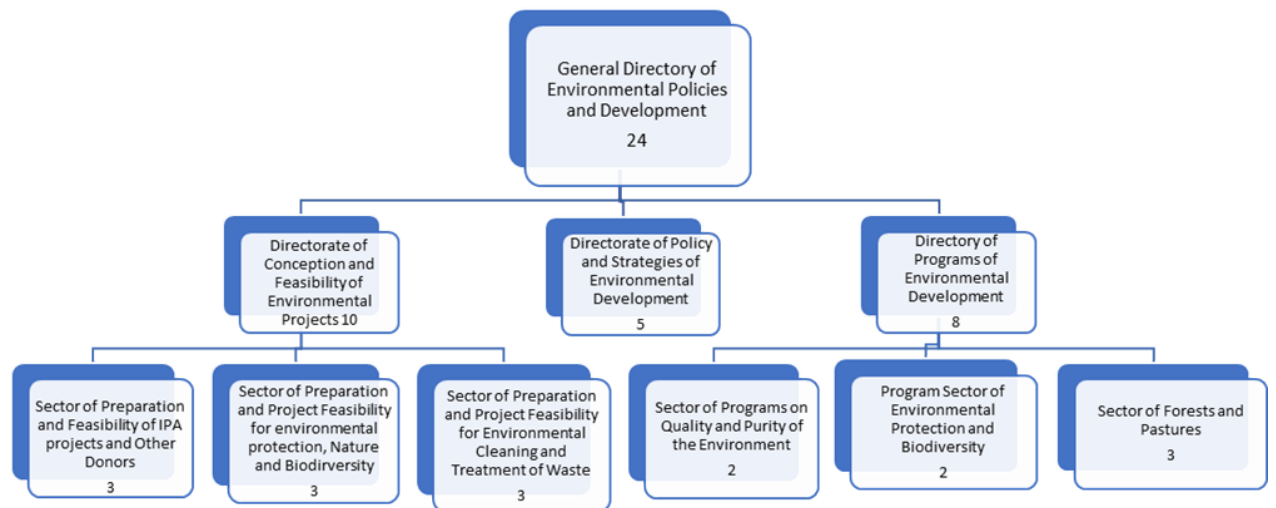


Figure 1: Organizational structure of the General Directory of Environmental Policies and Development under the Ministry of Tourism and Environment

National Environmental Agency (NEA) is a central public institution that is responsible for functioning as the technical arm of the Ministry of Tourism and Environment. It is the main institution responsible for biodiversity monitoring in cooperation with universities, and the assessment and

licensing of activities occurring in natural areas and/or affecting biodiversity values. It is financed by the state budget and its own revenues, and its jurisdiction extends throughout the territory of Albania through its central office and its regional branches, which are referred to as Regional Environment Agencies (REAs). NEA comprises 270 staff, with 47 in the headquarters in Tirana and the rest distributed among 12 REAs. The NEA is suffering from a limited number of personnel concentrated in cities and are more focused on brown environment issues (i.e. business related), limited resources, and limited logistics, for example, vehicles for field-based work. Furthermore, lack of specific skills as well as hard and complex cooperation procedures, hinder appropriate monitoring of biodiversity.

? National Agency for Protected Areas (NAPA), established in 2015, is a public state budgeted entity created as a dependent institution of the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, responsible for the country's protected areas system. It comprises 304 staff, of which 24 are based in the headquarters in Tirana and the rest are organized into 12 regional directorates. Each Regional Administration of Protected Areas (RAPA) has a monitoring and a management section with various numbers of specialists. NAPA is a state budget dependent institution, but is empowered to supplement its budget through donations as well as other legal sources of income such as generating revenue through providing services to third parties. On December 24, 2020, by DCM no 1156, NAPA has been assigned as the responsible institution to manage revenues generated from annual fees in all protected areas. Furthermore, in January 20, 2021, by DCM no. 19, a special environmental fund has been created to help finance protected areas which is administered by NAPA (15%, of the funds to be generated from PA revenues, and 85% from donor contributions and projects supported by international institutions).

? The National Forest Agency (NFA) is another central public institution that was created by Decision of the Council of Ministers in September 2019, as a subsidiary of the Ministry of Tourism and Environment. The mission of the agency is to ensure the good governance of forests at the national level, the preservation and sustainable development of resources included in the forest fund, as a resource of national importance.

The State Inspectorate on Environment and Territory is a recently (2020) established structure under the Ministry of Interior, responsible for surveillance, inspection and overall law enforcement on nature conservation related issues as reported by public or private individuals.

Municipalities: The three municipalities located in and around the AANP, Tropoje, Malesie e Madhe and Shkoder, are also important local institutions that not only dedicate yearly funds to the protection on the environment, but also lead yearly programs and projects. Between 2022-2025, these municipalities collectively spent approximately USD 1,300,000 in the administration of forests and pasture; prevention of fires and other natural disasters; coordinating cultural and tourist activities; and managing environmental pollution.

1.1.2.6 Protected Areas Financing

The GEF financed "Enhancing financial sustainability of the protected area system in Albania" project, initiated in 2015 and implemented by UNDP has identified three major sources of funding for Albania's protected area system:

? Annual allocations from the state budget for the staff costs of NAPA and RAPAs, and operational costs related to administration of PAs (e.g. costs of energy, fuel, office supply and similar). Total allocations from state budget over the period 2016 - 2018, account for 85% - 90% of the total funding allocated to the PA system through NAPA and RAPAs administration. Funding investments and emergency issues is determined separately, by the decision of Minister.

? International financial flows comprising grants from donor agencies and foundations (e.g. Global Environment Facility, German Government etc.) and EU financial mechanisms (e.g. IPA, Interreg etc.) that directly contribute(d) to the implementation of activities under NAPA's areas? of responsibilities (physical and non-physical investments - studies, trainings and similar) is approximately 6% of their total budget.

? User fees, conservation taxes, fines, and other self-generated income in the analyzed period (2016 - 2018) has been generated from the sale of wood and wooden materials; hunting; pasture leasing, rent, and land use; and revenue from entrance tickets. Revenues from entrance tickets for 2018 amounted to only 3% of its total revenue. That said, according to tourism statistics of the country and the upward trend of travelling at the global level, this revenue source represents the biggest potential opportunity for income generation for the protected area system in Albania.

Despite these funding sources, serious finance gaps remain for achieving effective on-the-ground management of Albania's protected areas network. The financial sustainability of protected areas in Albania continues to be one of the most significant challenges of the Ministry of Tourism and Environment and the National Agency for Protected Areas, particularly considering the gradual expansion of the system of protected areas.

1.1.3 Global significance

The establishment of the AANP and its subsequent effective management, supported by this project's interventions, will help protect a number of endemic and globally threatened species. Through a number of interventions the project will create an enabling environment and build capacity for its effective management thereby strengthening the protection of a number of globally threatened species listed on the IUCN species Red list: Mammals: Eurasian Lynx (*Lynx lynx*), Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), Wolf (*Canis lupus*), Roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*), Chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra*), hare (*Lepus europaeus*); Birds: Eurasian capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*), Red crawler (*Tichodroma muraria*), Mountain partridge (*Alectoris graeca*); Amphibians: mountain frog (*Rana temporaria*), Black salamander (*Salamandra atra*); and Reptiles: Sand lizard (*Lacerta agilis*), European viper (*Vipera berus*), and Meadow viper (*Vipera ursinii*); as well as 15 species endemic to the Balkans, and 41 Albanian endangered species. The project will also help improve the conservation status of the Key Biodiversity Areas, of unique systems, important ecological corridors and priority habitat types, extending over an area of 82,844 ha.

1.1.4 Threats, root causes and barrier analysis

1.1.4.1 Threats

The draft management plan for the AANP has identified the key values for the park as exceptional biodiversity, magnificent scenery, rich traditional and historical values and great opportunities for nature-based tourism. These values were re-confirmed in the project preparation Inception meeting (February 2022). Although the status of natural values in the AANP is still considered quite good, in the past decade, the development of certain activities has posed some severe threats to those values.

The main threats to the AANP's natural values are habitat change (loss, degradation and/fragmentation), overexploitation of resources, pollution and climate change.

Habitat Loss/Degradation and Fragmentation: Although there is no artificial land cover category found within the AANP boundaries, there are clear signs of habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation occurring in the park. A simple comparison of Corine Land Cover maps from 2000 and 2018 are shown in Table 5. The biggest changes are seen in the transitional woodland-shrub category with an overall loss of 128 ha followed by a loss of the broadleaved forest cover of 94 ha. However, there is an

increase in the area of conifer forest by 108 ha and mixed forest by 90 ha. The increase observed in ?areas principally occupied by agriculture, with significant areas of natural vegetation? is an additional sign of migration and land abandonment. Thus, terrains previously used for agriculture are transforming to natural vegetation. Overall, the analysis shows a dynamic land cover pattern with changes affecting all categories.

Table 5: Land cover change analysis for AANP (2000-2018)

Land cover categories	Gains	Loses	Balance
Pastures	45.49	81.45	(35.96)
Complex cultivation patterns	14.84	44.84	(30.00)
Land principally occupied by agriculture, with significant areas of natural vegetation	173.33	114.78	58.56
Broad-leaved forest	486.56	580.66	(94.10)
Coniferous forest	138.50	31.03	107.47
Mixed forest	230.48	140.73	89.74
Natural grasslands	533.13	458.08	75.05
Moors and heathland	4.04	31.81	(27.77)
Sclerophyllous vegetation	67.91	21.07	46.85
Transitional woodland-shrub	487.41	615.52	(128.11)
Beaches, dunes, sands	24.18	59.46	(35.28)
Bare rocks	125.81	134.56	(8.75)
Sparsely vegetated areas	256.53	300.63	(44.10)
Glaciers and perpetual snow	26.41	-	26.41

The modification and/or the damage of natural habitats observed can be attributed to a number of drivers and is linked to the increased construction of infrastructure and development in the region, illegal activities, overexploitation of resources and changes in agricultural production. Along with the increasing poverty in rural areas and the migration of youth from the area, the extent of agriculture land also increased in the area over the decades. In addition, there is a notable reduction in the use of distant pastures from homesteads for grazing leading to the abandonment of traditional pastoral systems which in turn is causing drastic change in the structure and floristic composition of the habitats and thus impacts species diversity negatively. These shifts in grazing systems have resulted in excess of grazing occurring in a more concentrated areas of the park, and as such along with the prolonged stay of grazing animals and an increase in their numbers in a confined area, grasslands are being degraded and soil erosion increased, especially in the most mountainous areas of the park. Illegal wood cutting and degradation of forest in areas with high slopes gives rise to further erosion as well as degrading and fragmenting forest ecosystems. Due to its significant water resources, the area has also seen rapid increase in the construction of medium size hydroelectric power plants (HPPs) in addition to other infrastructure development as tourism grows in the region. Such infrastructure development and the associated construction of access roads, create significant habitat loss and fragmentation in the region. Fires, forest fires, in particular are causing significant alteration of habitats and even destruction.

Overuse of natural resources: As in most of the more remote and rural areas in Albania there has seen a steady trend of migration by younger people away to larger urban areas in order to seek employment and economic opportunities. On the one hand this has positive effects in terms of decreasing pressures on local resources ? however, on the other hand, it does bring some changes to traditional use patterns that have negative effects. Increased poverty and an ageing population can lead to actual over utilization of some resources nearer to settlements as traditional systems start to break down and lack of resources leads to over intense utilization of nearby local natural resources (firewood and Non timber forest products (NTFP) for example). The collection of medicinal and aromatic plants is a valuable source of income for local people (over a hundred tons of blueberries are collected every year). Livestock grazing is a very important livelihood for the people of the area; however, this is largely unmanaged and uncontrolled and is thought to result in overgrazing in some areas of the park. Fuel wood collection is also relevant and is causing significant damages to forest resources in the area, particularly to the oak and beech forests. Each family collects a minimum of 10 m³ of fuel wood per year. Although in limited quantities, there is some selective cutting of spruce (*Picea abies*) and fir (*Abies alba*).

Pollution: Environmental pollution, particularly due to human activities, has become a cause of global concern and is considered one of the most important universal challenges affecting greatly environmental health of people all over the world. Improper solid waste management and lack of wastewater treatment are the main cause of pollution in the Albanian Alps area. This issue is further exacerbated by the development of new tourism related facilities in the area. Nutrient loading, primarily of nitrogen and phosphorus pollution, is a major and increasing cause of biodiversity loss and ecosystem dysfunction. Atmospheric nitrogen deposition represents a major threat to biodiversity and a serious challenge for the conservation of natural habitats and species. In addition, nitrogen compounds can lead to eutrophication of ecosystems and for many ecosystem types, studies have concluded that nitrogen deposition results in a loss of species richness. An important area for agricultural, the potential for pollution from fertilizers and pesticides is evident, however since no monitoring activities are

occurring currently, the extent and impact of pollution from agricultural activities is not yet fully understood.

Climate change: Albania is one of the most vulnerable countries to the impacts of climate change . The future climate scenarios for Albania anticipate an increasing trend in annual and seasonal climate related disasters such as floods, land erosion, decreased precipitation and a reduction of water resources and arable land. Mountainous ecosystems are among the most sensitive to climate change and are being affected at a faster rate than other terrestrial habitats. Changes in climatic conditions can lead to changes in altitudinal zonation across ecosystems. This can lead to rare plants and animals struggling to survive over increasingly limited ranges and can lead to mountain people, already amongst the worlds? poorest citizens, facing even greater hardships as food and fuel grow scarce. Elevated atmospheric CO2 concentration affects global temperatures and temporal and spatial precipitation which in turn affects the distribution and ecology of species and influences watersheds by altering the frequency of floods and droughts. As a result, the occurrence of soil erosion and landslides will increase and irrigation will be affected making life increasingly difficult for subsistence farmers and other local and downstream users. The current and predicted impact of climate change on AANP ecosystems and species, and on communities residing in the Alps is not yet fully documented and understood.

1.1.4.2 Root causes

Touched upon in the previous section several root causes of these threats have been identified:

- ? Infrastructure development (HPPs, roads)
- ? Unsustainable development (urbanization, tourism)
- ? Unregulated use of resources;
- ? Forest fires;
- ? Waste management

Infrastructure development: Various forms of infrastructure development in the target area have been increasing in recent decades with detrimental effects on habitats. Perhaps most serious of these has been the rapid increase in the construction of medium size HPPs and the planning of more in the future.

The rivers of the Albanian Alps are part of the Drin-Buna water basin which is the most important of the seven river basins in Albania. According to its water basin management plan (approved by DCM no. 849, date 4.11.2020), there are four large HPP with a capacity between 48 and 500 mW, and 47 concessions for a total of 121 small HPP (below 8mW).

Table 6: Situation of HPPs in the Albanian Alps region

River	HPP operating	HPP under construction	HPP planned
Valbona	1	1	4
Bradoshnica	1		
Ceremi		1	
Thethi	1		1
Cemi	2		
Cemi i Vuklit			3

Source: Riverwatch study

These HPPs of varying capacities, have negative impacts not only on aquatic habitats and species but also on terrestrial ones as a result of the impact of new roads, construction pollution and increased human presence. For many years, various national and international NGOs have voiced the concerns of local communities on the adverse impacts of HHP development. Recognizing this, in 2019, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy, as the institution granting contracts formed a commission for a re-evaluation and monitoring of 317 HPP contracts, out of which 80 HPPs were stopped as their work was found to be outside of the terms of their contract .

Based on the data from the National Agency of Natural Resources, in 2020 in the Districts of Kukes and Shkoder there were 49 active contracts for 139 HPPs. According to information from the Albanian Water Cadaster, developed by the Agency of Water Resource Management, there are currently 17 active permits for HPPs, 1 permit for tourism water use facilities, and two permits for bottled water businesses, in and around the AANP.

The local community in Tropoja has been highly concerned about the construction of two HPPs on the Valbona river in particular. After a long judicial process, in July 23, 2021, the Albanian Supreme Court issued a 'stop work' order for two HPPs in Cerem and Dragobi, hence accepting the claims of 27 local citizens of the Albanian Alps and two local NGOs.

Additional to hydropower plants, new roads have been constructed into previously inaccessible areas. Though this has potential positive impacts for socio-economic development of the area, the construction process destroys and fragments habitats, increases erosion, and most significantly, in the longer term, increases access of people and vehicles to these pristine areas leading to increases in exploitation of natural resources from previously untouched areas and damaging levels of uncontrolled tourism. For example, there has been a request by the municipality for a road to be constructed in inaccessible areas on the Gashi River. The road poses a potential risk to the unique remnants of the virgin beech forest, or other high value species of biodiversity and landscapes. In this instance, due to lack of funds, the national government rejected this request. There is an urgent need however, to better regulate and mitigate the impacts of such infrastructural / industrial activity in the area to ensure natural values are not lost.

Unsustainable development: The process of urbanization for touristic resorts and housing is one of the important root causes of multiple threats to the AANP. Tourism is one of the few newly emerging economic opportunities in the area. Given the high levels of local poverty, tourism has been enthusiastically perused by local entrepreneurs. However, so far, the development of tourism in the area has been virtually unregulated and occurring without any strategic framework or knowledge for ensuring sustainability and preservation of the key values of the area (i.e. the natural, cultural and historical values and assets). Key threats in this regard include the rapid and inappropriate construction of tourism facilities without due consideration given to the impacts or aesthetics/tradition, a rapid increase in waste and pollution from increased numbers of visitors, and increased disturbance of previously untouched or little visited areas. The increasing urbanization and frequentation linked to tourism expansion, as well as some recreational activities, such as outdoor sports and leisure activities (hiking, mountain bike, etc.) can also be considered threats.

Unregulated resource use: Although Albania's advance towards its acquis in the field of nature protection, has been recognized by The European Commission, it also noted that law enforcement in environmental protection remains generally weak. Several legislation regulating the use of medicinal plants, NTFPs and grazing, for example are lacking, and there has not been a forest management plan in AANP municipalities since 1985 . Further, despite the recent logging and hunting bans, these are not

being effectively enforced and illegal hunting and logging is still occurring in the area. There is a need for improved legislation surrounding the regulation of resources, and equally for enhanced human and financial capacity for their enforcement.

Forest Fires: In Albania fires are currently a major threat to forests. For the most part, forest fires can be considered human- and climate induced impacts, their prevalence can largely be attributed to:

? Lack of active and effective fire management, largely due to low capacities, inadequate equipment for firefighting, and a high dependence support from neighboring countries

? Lack of awareness about forest fire risks and prevention measures among local residents.

? Carelessness of local population and tourists.

Studies have shown that 29 percent of forest fires in Albania were caused by negligence; 61 percent by unknown factors; 9 percent by arson; and only 1 percent by unusual events and lightning. However, it should be recognized that even those forest fires classified as "caused by unknown factors" can be considered to have been started as a result of human activity. Although they are classified under "unknown factors" as the precise cause is not known, but it can still be concluded that a large proportion of forest fires in Albania are started by human activities. Although the extent of fires in the Albanian Alps is not fully known, several stakeholders have cited fire occurrence, and the limited capacity to deal with, it as a threat.

Waste management: Albania still lacks a comprehensive solid waste management system. An assessment conducted in 2019 by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) based on the percentage of untreated plastic waste as a share of the total waste streams, ranked Albania third among the Mediterranean countries that have mismanaged solid waste (73 % of all waste mismanaged). Waste management services are not offered for slightly over 30% of the population of the country, particularly those living in remote mountainous areas. Waste infrastructure is insufficient to cover the entire country. The bulk of municipal solid waste, including plastic/packaging waste is disposed of in landfills or old dumpsites, and often dumped in river gorges or lakes. There is no waste segregation at source, and implementation of extended producer responsibility or deposit refund schemes stipulated by law is delayed.

Recently there is an observed increase in urban waste water pollution in the area caused by tourism development. During the last twenty years tourist constructions in the area have not been preceded or accompanied by necessary waste management infrastructure such as water supply and sewerage, collection, transport and sanitary disposal of solid wastes, resulting in an increasing threat of pollution in the AANP. Still today, most of the waste waters are discharged without treatment in the surface waters (rivers and lakes).

1.1.5 Long-term solutions and barriers

In order to address the threats and their root causes as described above it is necessary for national, regional and local stakeholders to effectively implement the identified management programs, once they have been updated. However, a number of critical barriers stand in the way of achieving this, which are as follows:

Barrier 1: Limited national and local systemic, institutional and individual capacity to effectively establish a landscape scale and complex national park.

As discussed in prior sections, Albania has shown a commitment to undertaking deep and ambitious changes from the past communist era management approaches and systems to natural resources management and conservation. However, the very extent and ambition of these changes, and the fact they have occurred frequently since the 1990's has resulted in low systemic, institutional and

individual capacity to actually translate into practical management in the field. The regional branches of the National Agency of Protected Areas (NAPA) have limited human capacities (either in numbers or skills) and financial resources to effectively grapple with new legislation, ambitious management plan requirements and new operational procedures, among others, that have recently been introduced, while at same time facing rural socio-economic decline, shrinking budgets and rising needs of local communities. For example, the Regional Administration for Protected Areas (RAPA) in Kukes, responsible for the management of 39,018 ha of the newly established AANP, has 8.5 full time equivalents (FTEs) dedicated to the area and only 4 of them are rangers. Similarly, RAPA Shkoder, responsible for the management of 43,827 ha of the AANP, has 7.1 FTEs and only 4 rangers. The budget available to them in 2021 for the management of former protected areas (National Park Thethi, National Park Valbona and Strict Reserve Lumi i Gashit) now part of the AANP was about 108,432 Euro (RAPA Kukes 67,551 Euro; RAPA Shkoder 40,882 Euro). This budget is covering mainly salaries and operational costs, with very little amounts spent for investments. Thus, even once the AANP management plan is updated, there will be significant systemic, institutional, individual and gender specific capacity barriers, to its effective initiation and the establishment of a sound basis for its long-term effective management and sustained financing.

Barrier 2: Lack of practical experience and know-how to manage and sustainably finance a landscape scale multi land use protected area.

Even if the systemic, institutional and individual capacity needed to effectively initiate the management planning is created, the fact that almost all the planned actions are relatively new and innovative in the Albanian context, means that little practical experience and 'know-how' exists on how to realistically and pragmatically put into action in the field the planned activities in a way that is most feasible and sustainable. As has been demonstrated in many past projects, a large gap exists between the planning process and the actual implementation of plans and policies. The long-term success in terms of establishing effective PAs relies heavily on how well initial strategic plans and actions are inclusive, adapted and applied in practice in the field. Thus, the lack of existing institutionally and individually practical experience on how to practically implement the NP management plan programs within all stakeholder groups (from NAPA down to local communities) present a significant secondary barrier to the longer-term success and sustainability of the Albanian Alps NP.

While there is a modern national policy setting, and enabling legislation, in place to support the diversification of the funding base for nature protection in Albania, this still remains a new area of development for the country. There is currently limited use of strategic planning and business-oriented financial planning tools and approaches to ensure optimal use of available financial resources and to source additional funds to fill financing gaps for protected areas.

Most protected areas have little or no direct control over their budgeting and financial management, with the administration of budgets and funding typically implemented at the level of the NAPA. While management plans, and linked business planning, processes are under development (or have been completed) in a number of national parks, many of these processes are still donor-driven and are often not fully aligned with the practical and financial constraints faced by the operational staff in the protected areas. Many protected areas are being run by administrators who have limited or no training in budgeting, strategic planning, financial management systems and cost-effective approaches to PA operations. The links between aspirational management plans and actual state budget allocations remains somewhat tenuous, with the suite of activities undertaken in each protected area largely still determined by the state budget allocation constraints, and not by any strategic prioritization process.

Although management plans for protected areas are adopted by the Ministry, this is however no guarantee of adequate funding for their implementation.

NAPA annual budget allocations (equating to approximately USD 1.89 million/annum in total for 2021) for human resources (51% of total), operations (13% of total) and capital (36% of total) budgets of most protected areas are not adequate to meet the requirements for even basic standards of management, or sufficient to maintain the existing infrastructure and equipment.

Currently the only mechanisms to generate revenue for the protected area system is the income accrued from entry fees and land rental. In 2018, protected areas generated an income of only USD 135,000, considerably lower than the actual costs of generating that income (let alone the recurrent operational costs of conservation management).

The annual funding gap (under a 'functional operational management' scenario calculated at the mid-range for the scenario of USD15/ha) for the AANP is conservatively estimated at USD 1.13 million/annum (i.e. ten times more than the current investment by the state in the protected area system). There is thus a critical need to increase, diversify and stabilize the financial flows to the protected areas - through the implementation of a more diverse portfolio of financing mechanisms - to address this substantial funding gap.

Access to donor funding for Albania's protected areas still remains opportunistic, and donor agencies tend to 'drive' the priorities for investment in protected areas. There is limited capacity in the NAPA and MoTE to secure funding from multilateral development agencies, international conservation organizations and private donors for the protected area system in a coordinated and structured way. Without ongoing donor funding to supplement existing state budget allocations, the planning, expansion, research and monitoring support functions for the protected area system will continue to remain under-resourced, in the absence of other funding options.

A strong business case needs to be developed to motivate an increase in government funding of the expanded protected area estate, notably through investments in the infrastructure and facilities that could contribute to improving the long-term financial sustainability of the protected area system. Underpinning this business case is a need to better understand the value of the goods and services provided by the protected areas so that decisions about investment in protected areas are made by government with the full understanding of the costs and benefits involved.

Barrier 3: Limited understanding on relevant socio-economic contexts and poor coordination and collaboration with stakeholders on a local and national level.

In the past, the development of plans and policies in Albania have typically had limited engagement with stakeholders and are based on limited evidence-based datasets. For example, poor coordination and consultation with stakeholders in the Albanian Alps region with regard to infrastructure development, in particular HPPs, has resulted in a legal case brought forward by local NGOs and communities who were concerned about the negative impacts of these HPPs. Although successful, and the HPPs were issued a 'stop order', such actions and associated costs may have been avoided if appropriate consultations were held with stakeholders during the HPP development planning phases. Generally, stakeholders (especially women) are neither involved nor informed about protected areas management decisions that could affect their livelihood or use of natural resources. This in turn results in poor community support for nature conservation activities and limited local buy-in for environment-based initiatives. The draft AANP zonation and management plan for example, was developed with little stakeholder consultation and knowledge of the biological, socio-economic and cultural context of the area. The AANP area incorporates 110 villages and many local communities whose livelihoods are

strongly connected to the use of natural resources. This dependency of Albanian Alpine communities on the natural resources, means the potential for resource overexploitation is high. In order to identify conservation priorities that reflect the needs of both biodiversity and local communities, there is a need to better understand the level and impact of socio-economic activities on the conservation of natural values, and vice versa. This general lack of engagement with stakeholders for policy and planning, may also be one reason why illegal hunting and logging is still occurring in the area, despite the recent national logging and hunting bans.

Natural resource management falls under the remit of several government agencies with (more often than not) overlapping mandates, legislation, and policies. For example, NAPA is the agency responsible for protected areas, the National Forest Agency for forest governance, the State Inspectorate on Environment and Territory for law enforcement on nature conservation, and the National Environmental Agency for biodiversity monitoring, to name a few. During the development of the PPG and the inception meeting the coordination, information sharing and cooperation across the natural resource sector as well as with other sectors, has been repeatedly cited as mostly lacking and/or very limited.

In order to try and improve this situation, specifically relating to protected areas, a Management Committee for protected areas has been legally established to support and strengthen coordination and cooperation among various institutions. However, this MC is not yet fully performing its role and function. It is essential that critical stakeholders are included and cooperate in a meaningful way from the planning process to implementation, as their buy-in, and support, is essential to ensuring the effective management and long-term sustainability of the AANP.

It is not just natural resource-related institutions however that need to be engaged and appropriately coordinated. The modification and/or the damage of natural habitats observed in the AANP can be attributed to a number of drivers and is linked to the increased construction of infrastructure and development in the region, illegal activities, unregulated tourism development, overexploitation of resources and changes in agricultural production. Agriculture is a very important livelihood in the Albanian Alps, especially for women. However, most of the family-owned farms produce quantities that are too small and of insufficient quality to compete on the market. Similarly, rural tourism is dominated by smaller, largely informal family businesses and often there is a lack of institutional tourism structures in regions and communities makes it more difficult to develop differentiated, quality-oriented tourism services. As business consolidations can be expected in the context of European Union (EU) accession preparations, there is a growing need for small family businesses to capitalize on alternative income opportunities. There is a need therefore for greater cooperation and support by all actors for sustainable land use, sustainable economic development, and the introduction of new technologies/methods to reduce impact on the environment.

It is clear, that in order to ensure the long-term integrity of the AANP so that it meets the needs of both biodiversity and communities, understanding fully the ecological, social and economic context of the area, and strengthening multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral engagement and cooperation will be critical.

1.2. Baseline analysis and gaps

Albania has taken significant steps to increase the coverage of its protected areas and to introduce more sustainable multiuse and larger scale protected area approaches (such as zonation of protected areas) that seek to combine biodiversity conservation with sustainable livelihoods and cultural preservation within traditional landscapes. However, the implementation of these new approaches requires a radical

change of deeply embedded working models, institutional setups, legal structures, and most significantly of all, people's mindsets. As a result, generally, there is low systemic, institutional, and individual capacity to actually translate existing policies and legal requirements into practical management activities in the field.

A draft management plan for the AANP was prepared in 2015. However, the plan was never officially approved or implemented. The plan is now out of date and does not adequately reflect changes that have occurred in the area in the past seven years. The plan is also limited in terms of content and feasibility. It was largely based on expert guessing and literature data.

Typically, in Albania, engagement with stakeholders is merely a formal part of planning and management processes, such as in the development of management plans, mostly when demanded by donor driven processes. Often stakeholders are neither involved nor informed about protected area management decisions that could affect their livelihood or use of natural resources. This in turn results in poor community support for nature conservation activities and limited local buy-in on initiatives undertaken by projects. Furthermore, the limited relevant experience within all stakeholder groups (from NAPA down to local communities) on how to practically implement the management programs in a way that achieves real impact, sustained conservation objectives, and rural development benefits, significantly undermines the likelihood of success.

There are currently two national databases which are built to track Albania's biodiversity. In 2016/2017 under the framework of Natura 2000, the Biodiversity National Network of Albania (BioNNA ? www.bionna.al/) was established to collect georeferenced point data on the occurrence of wildlife species. NAPA has also established a Wildlife Monitoring System (NAPA-WiMS), which aims to monitor wildlife trends across the country, using onsite observations from rangers patrolling in all the 12 RAPAs. However, neither of these databases is adequately updated or maintained to include the most recent datasets on the flora and fauna for the whole country. Actually, several gaps still exist in baseline knowledge about the AANP in particular. There are no detailed habitat or land cover maps for the area, limited knowledge about the distribution area of species and no systematic evaluation of ecosystem services values to the country. Despite threats being identified for AANP, the lack of formal monitoring means the full extent and impact of these threats to biodiversity and the livelihoods of communities are not yet fully understood. For some species, there exists long term monitoring programs in the region. The Balkan Lynx Recovery Program (BLRP) for example, a partnership project implemented in the Western Balkan Peninsula (Albania, North Macedonia, and Kosovo) has installed surveillance cameras (in 2006 and 2019) to monitor the Balkan lynx ecology in the Gashi River Reserve, which is part of the Albanian Alps National Park.

As a mountainous region, the area and its residing communities are particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts. Despite this, climate information is limited for the region and no climate change vulnerability analyses have been carried out. Country-wide experience of weather-related disasters, previous floods, the recent earthquake, and the COVID-19 pandemic show that Albania is ill-prepared to adequately respond to natural disasters and to support the most vulnerable citizens, including rural women who lost their subsistence agriculture production, single mothers who went homeless, and women who face domestic violence . Without adequate assessment and identification of climate change impacts, resilience options for both conserving biodiversity and maintaining sustainable resource use will be unlikely to be applied in time to avoid negative impacts.

There are several laws and policies in support of nature conservation in the country. As a candidate for EU accession, Albania is intensively working on transposing the EU Directives to its national

legislation. Of particular relevance, the Birds and Habitats Directives needs full transposition of their requirements into national legislation and then its subsequent implementation. While Albania's progress in this regard has been recognized, the implementation of both directives is still at the initial stage.

Housing some of the county's poorest communities, the AANP is an area where natural resource use is prevalent and necessary to support people's livelihoods, although in some instances it is thought to be unsustainable. Grazing, NTFPs and medicinal plant collection, all important livelihoods, are generally unmanaged, unmonitored and uncontrolled, thus little information exists for the extent and impact of resource use across the area. Although there has been a nationwide moratorium on hunting and logging, compliance and impacts of such bans have not been appropriately monitored.

The planning, use and management of natural resources is the responsibility of a variety of institutions at central, regional and local level (i.e. agriculture, tourism, water management, infrastructure and energy, culture heritage, education, and research). Across the country, the coordination, information sharing and cooperation among these institutions is mostly lacking and/or very limited. Infrastructure development is also on the increase in the region and the engagement and collaboration across these sectors will be crucial to ensure the sustainable development of the area. In addition to limited cross sectoral collaboration, as noted in the 2020 EC Report, law enforcement in environmental protection remains generally weak across the country.

The ongoing GEF financed "Enhancing financial sustainability of the protected area system in Albania" project has demonstrated that there are severe financing gaps for achieving effective on-the-ground management activities of Albania's protected areas network and meeting these funding needs continues to be one of the most significant challenges of the Ministry of Tourism and Environment and the National Agency for Protected Areas. Approximately 80-90% of PA financing comes from State funds. Recently NAPA has been empowered to supplement its State budget and in 2020 new legislation adopted allows them to retain and manage revenues for all protected areas. In addition, a special environmental fund, administered by NAPA, was created to help finance protected areas. The challenge now remains to increase revenues from PAs by piloting initiatives identified in the National Financing Strategy for PAs developed by the ongoing GEF project, and developing a business plan for the AANP. If AANP was to continue under the "business as usual" financing scenario, it will fail to generate sufficient sustained financing to be able to maintain effective management.

Without building on the current "business as usual" for PA management, it is likely that the baseline scenario for the AANP will be to either remain essentially a "paper park" or fail to be able to deliver effective management programs and thus fail to address either biodiversity conservation goals or support the sustainable livelihoods and cultural heritage of local communities. Furthermore, resilience to mid / long term climate change will not be adequately integrated into conservation or sustainable rural development planning and management and financing will remain precarious and insufficient to ensure the NP fully meets its objectives.

Table 7. Key identified gaps in the baseline scenario

Type	Gap (in baseline <i>status quo</i> scenario)
Policy framework	Although the Albanian Alps National Park has a draft management plan this plan is outdated, lacks the sufficient engagement of key stakeholders in planning or decision-making processes required to ensure buy-in and support for conservation actions, and lacks detailed information to be able to develop appropriate conservation programs that respond to the priority conservation objectives.

Legislative context	The key pieces of legislation (laws) are in place and sufficient (approximating EU directives and regulations), although a little complex. There is some overlapping and/or no clear definition of competences for various institutions in respective laws (State Inspectorate of Territorial Protection vs NAPA/RAPA rangers). Bylaws and regulations enabling proper implementation of laws are mostly missing (resources use regulations). Law enforcement is weak, particularly in remote areas (like AANP).
General institutional issues	Institutional capacities are low. There is no institutional development plan. There are a limited number of staff and, those that do occur can face motivational challenges. Limited equipment is available to staff, particularly field equipment and there lacks an appropriate monitoring and evaluation tool/program. Generally, cooperation and interaction with other relevant institutions is limited and there is little exchange of data and information. There are limited capacities to develop and implement financial/business plans.
Specific Technical issues	<i>There exists limited practical know-how for the implementation of conservation programs such as biological monitoring (habitats and species), enforcement, stakeholder engagement. In addition, the large area with a number of inaccessible sites, poses even more challenges to implement many of the activities. .</i>
Data	Significant data is lacking for the area. There are no habitat or species? distribution range maps, and limited data on the amount of available and collected firewood as well as other threats, socio-economic development, and livelihoods in the area, including tourist visitation. Although there are existing databases (BIONNA, WIMS), these are not fully functional (not update or maintained). Further, there lacks site specific data on climate change and its impacts.
Research and development	Limited research has been carried out in the wider area. Most of the research to date has been carried out by foreigners or funded by donors. Universities lack financial capacities to carry out regular research and scientific monitoring in the area.
Management practices	As a newly established protected area, there are few management practices ongoing. Capacities (human and financial) remain low to commence implementing management practices.

1.2.1 Linkages with non-GEF interventions

Table 8 provides a description of current non GEF projects and interventions with which this project is aligned and will collaborate or build upon.

Table 8: List of baseline projects

Name of the project, Duration	Description of activities and envisaged outcomes
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<p>Support Protection of Irreplaceable Nature ? SPIN (Enhancing national efforts on nature protection) ? IPA 2021 2022-2026</p>	<p>The ?Support Protection of Irreplaceable Nature ? SPIN (Enhancing national efforts on nature protection)? project is estimated to start implementation in 2022 with an end date in 2026. The project aims for the enhancement of biodiversity conservation by supporting the establishment of the Natura 2000 network and strengthening national capacities necessary for proper management of Natura 2000 sites through: 1) provision of full transposition of the Birds and Habitats Directives; 2) improvement of the institutional set up and strengthening of capacities of the relevant authorities (including NAPA?s and the RAPAs of Kukes and Shkoder) in preserving important habitats and species, including proper inspection and enforcement; 3) significantly improving knowledge on the distribution and status of important habitats and species, as well as developing appropriate monitoring protocols/procedures; 4) identification and potential implementation of selected conservation measures; 5) improve understanding and awareness on the importance and functioning of the Natura2000 network. The project?s contribution to the Albanian Alps is an estimated amount of USD 800,000 for the entire project duration.</p>
<p>Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust (PONT) 2015 - 2025</p>	<p>The Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust (PONT) is a transboundary conservation trust fund established in 2015 with funding from MAVA Foundation and the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), which is working through KfW Development Bank to support the increasing environmental needs of the Prespa Ohrid region and respond to the lack of sufficient funding for conservation efforts. As a conservation trust fund, PONT will be able to provide long-term sustainable financing to the region?s national parks and local environmental actors. PONT provides grants to the national parks and civil society organizations working to conserve the Prespa Ohrid ecoregion. Recently the geographical scope of PONT interventions has been enlarged to cover other transboundary areas, including the Albanian Alps National Park. The new areas will be supported with competitive and performance based awarded funds for RAPAs and local NGOS for the next 10 years.</p>
<p>ADAPT: Nature-based solutions for resilient societies in the Western Balkans 2020 - 2023</p>	<p>The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) founded ?ADAPT: Nature-based solutions for resilient societies in the Western Balkans? is an initiative, started in 2020, and is anticipated to be completed in 2023. Its aim is to increase ecosystem and community resilience to climate change and disaster risks by applying nature-based solutions in the Western Balkan countries. ADAPT further provides solutions for disaster risk reduction, increases knowledge and awareness of nature-based disaster risk reduction solutions among decision makers, natural resource managers and local communities and scale-up activities. It offers opportunities to analyze national ecosystem management and biodiversity policy from a climate change perspective, and adaptation indicators, which will have implications for the actions taken in the Albanian Alps, related to the revision of policy and institutional arrangements, accounting to a value of \$ 500,000.</p>

<p>Sustainable Rural Development (SRD) 2019 - 2022 <i>Extension approved till 2025.</i></p>	<p>This GIZ program aims to improve the performance of the relevant rural development stakeholders. To achieve this, it develops needs-based strategies and policies for EU-compliant, environmentally sound rural development. The Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Tourism and Environment receive assistance in setting up efficient working mechanisms, improving cross-sectoral and interdepartmental planning, and implementing strategies and support programs. The project also improves the performance of selected value chains (fruit and nuts, vegetables, medicinal and aromatic herbs and small ruminants). Based on successful examples from previous projects, the project supports small farmers and small and micro enterprises in the pilot regions in modernizing agriculture, expanding rural tourism and using Albania's great (agro-)biodiversity in order to secure income. Last but not least, improving knowledge regarding long-term rural development among representatives from all the relevant interest groups is an additional field of action.</p>
<p>NATURALBANIA - Protection and growth of Albania's natural heritage 2019-2022</p>	<p>NaturAlbania project, financed by AICS and implemented by a number of Italian NGOs, aims to strengthen the role of national and regional institutions and local communities in managing protected areas, paying particular attention to areas characterized by water basins. Fostering the country's sustainable development entails rediscovering the role of the agricultural sector, which still mostly engages family-run businesses. Offering technical support to small local producers, the project aims to enhance their products. Rural areas and mountainous landscapes are also an important tourist destination for those keen to explore the country. Crossed by countless hiking and trekking paths, the protected areas offer excursions that attract tourists from all over the world. There is however a lack of adequate accommodation facilities. The project aims to refurbish traditional ones and build new ones. The areas of intervention are the municipalities of Përmet, Gjirokastra, Vlora, Tirana, Shkodra and Malësi e Madhe. This project contribution is estimated to about USD 200,000, until the end of the project. Although close to ending, this project will be replicated in Peja, Decan and Junik in the Bjeshket e Namuna National Park area for the period 2022 - 2024, with an approved amount of 1,800,000 Euros.</p>

ADF ? Investments under the National Tourism Sectoral Plan 2017- 2030

The Albanian Development Fund (ADF) is implementing several projects in the Albanian Alps Region, executing national and local government funds.

With regards to the Albanian Alps, the ADF is currently investing in the area in accordance with the National Tourism Sectoral Plan for the Region of the Albanian Alps approved by Decision of the Council of Territory no. 1, dt. 9.12.2017. In this context there are a few programs active in the area, such as the program for works in the community, the program for water supply infrastructure, the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB) Alps program.

In accordance with the regional plan there have been two Destination Management Organizations established for the Albanian Alps area (Vermosh, Valbona). Three more structures are currently being supported (operational since August 2020), as centers for building partnerships for development, standardization and capacity building.

The entry road infrastructure for the region has been completed. This year the ADF is working on improving the interior connectivity of the region with gravel roads (Lekbibaj - Nderlysj as well as, Nic, Tamare, Podgorice)

The town centers of Vermosh and Tamare are finalized while Lepushe is under development. Other works in Lepushe include the improving of the paths and the construction of a winter sports center. The improvement of paths is also ongoing in Valbona and Lepushe. Other works in Theth include riverbank reinforcements, urban re-qualification of the village, building of bridges and parking. Sub-local development plans (PDV) are also ongoing in several villages. With regards to tourism, the work is concentrating on four main thematic pillars, namely mythology, "Kanun" (Local law), events, and natural tourism. In Selce, a boot-camp is being developed for youth.

The organization is also developing a seven-year strategic operational plan with an investment budget of 100 billion Albanian Lek. The operational plan is in line and in response to chapter 22 "Regional Policy and Coordination of Structural Instruments" of the Stabilization and Association Agreement aiming to reduce socio-economic disparities among regions within the same country and to ensure both socio-economic integration and cohesion. The ADF is currently working on approving the first draft of the plan along with agreements with development partners for future investments in the plan.

1.3 Intervention strategy (Alternative)

1.3.1. Project goal and objective

The project will reach its objective ?To achieve biodiversity conservation through effective management and enhanced resilience to climate change in the North Albanian Alps Mountainous

Region? through the following three components: 1) Establishing an enabling environment for effective management of the Albanian Alps National Park, 2) Strengthening the practical experience and ?know-how? of the Albanian Alps NP stakeholders to address threats, and 3) Supporting national level adoption and upscaling of sustainable PA management practices.

The project?s Conceptual Model (Figure 2), linked to its Theory of Change, reflects the project?s integrated approach to tackle the present drivers of natural habitat degradation, changes in species? numbers, overexploitation of resources, and related negative impacts on ecosystems, biodiversity, and livelihoods, as well as addressing key barriers to effective protected areas management in Albania. In order to establish an enabling environment for effective management of the AANP, the territory of the park will be valorized, including an update of threats and an understanding of different potential climate scenarios for the area. This will enable more effective and adaptive management planning to occur and help build climate change resilience. Sustainable financing of the AANP will also be addressed, including sustainable financing mechanisms tested and functionally established. Such outputs will result in a sufficient and sustainably financed AANP that is effectively managed in an inclusive, participatory and agreed way forward. Additionally, the systemic, institutional, and individual level capacity needs and gaps for effectively implementing the agreed NP management plan will be addressed. The practical experience and ?know-how? of the Albanian Alps NP stakeholders to address identified threats and implement the management programs of the revised management plan will be strengthened through effective capacity building for the initiation of the updated management plan programs by key stakeholders, and by gaining practical experience to continue implementation in the long term. Uncontrolled and unregulated infrastructure development has been identified as a major threat to the AANP. Current legislation and the recent declaration of the AANP however, clearly provide for controlled infrastructure development in the AANP, for example no new HPPs will be allowed within the boundaries of the park. To support the implementation of relevant legislation, the project will strengthen the regulation and management of existing HPPs and other planned infrastructure development in and around the AANP, by building the capacity of the management committee for protected areas to effectively assess and engage with infrastructure development issues and institutions and building capacity in financing institutions and law enforcement for the application of EIAs. Such activities will support other enforcement and monitoring efforts by AANP management to reduce threats to the areas globally important biodiversity and habitats. Lastly, the national level adoption and up scaling of sustainable PA management best practices will be supported through capturing lessons learned and experiences gained in the establishment and management of the AANP and applying them to the wider national PA system.

The Theory of Change is based on a number of key assumptions, including: (i) Political will and stakeholder engagement are maintained, (ii) Local communities remain committed to roles in the AANP management framework and there is sufficient buy-in and commitment of local communities for MP programs, (iii) Capacity and institutions? frameworks are established with support of all stakeholders, (iv) Private sector participation and acceptance of NP regulatory controls, (v) Pragmatic and feasible management programs are consensually agreed by all stakeholders and there is flexibility and adaptive management applied in response to challenges, and (vi) Covid 19 is under control. The project?s Theory of Change is considered a tool requiring regular review and evaluation and should be adjusted or improved and integrated into the monitoring and evaluation efforts and adaptive management approach of the project (e.g. during annual reviews, the Mid-Term Review (MTR) and Terminal Evaluation (TE)).

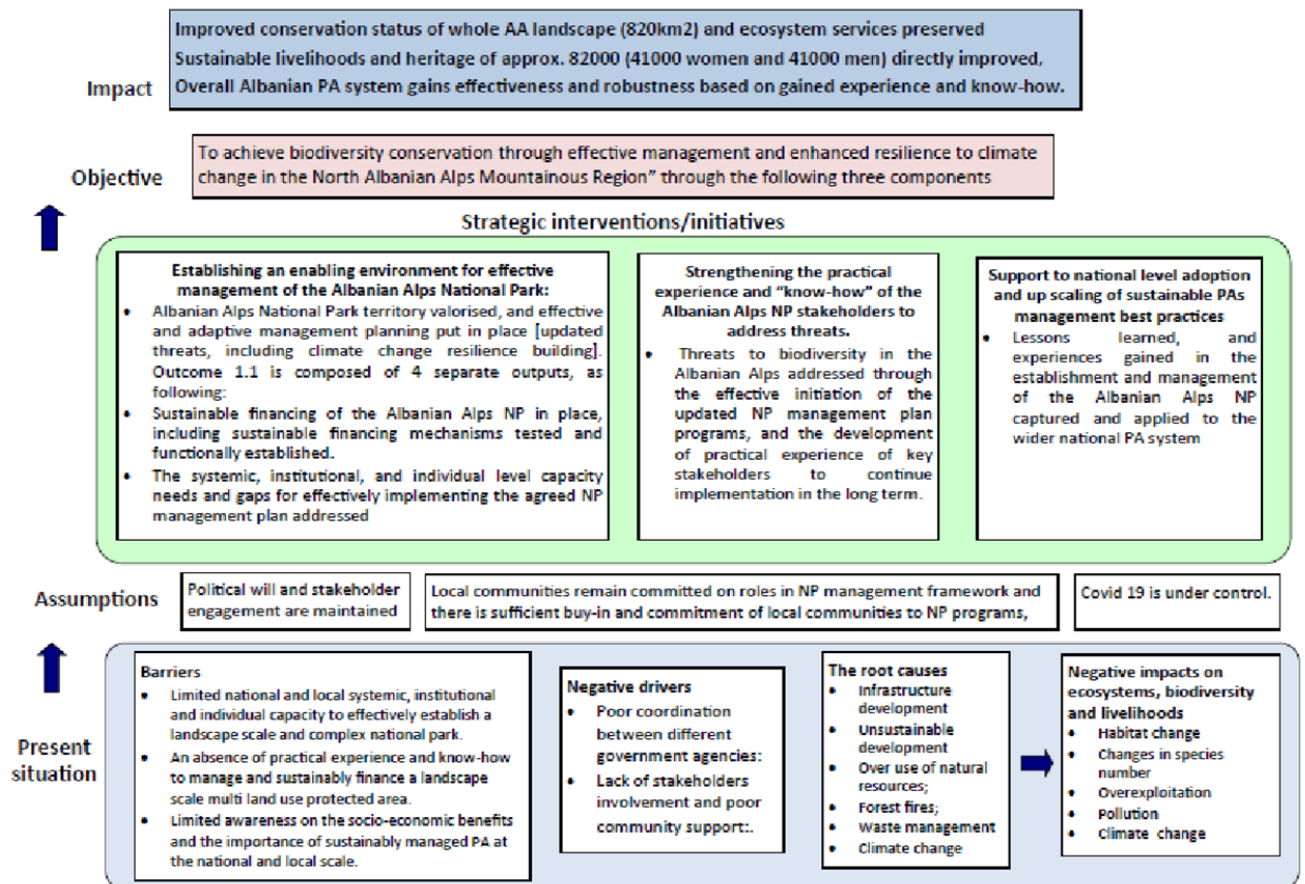


Figure 2: Project's conceptual framework

1.3.2. Project components and expected results

Component 1. Establishing an enabling environment for effective management of the Albanian Alps National Park:

With GEF support, the project will support the Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MoTE), in particular the National Agency for Protected Areas (NAPA), to effectively manage the newly established Albanian Alps National Park (AANP) through valorization of its natural resources, updated assessments of values and threats, and re-defining management measures. In order to clearly define actions that will ensure the preservation and sustainable use of natural resources of the area, it is important to have good inventory data e.g., geographic distribution and connectivity of habitats, status and distribution ranges of key species, and the ecological services they provide. Although some baselines are established for the area and former protected areas in the region, a detailed inventory and classification of habitats and species is still missing for the AANP specifically. A detailed inventory is an essential pre-condition to identify actions towards sustainable utilization of natural resources. The project will finalize the inventory and mapping of habitats occurring within the AANP. A second set of necessary information is related to the ecosystem services provided by the AANP, with a special emphasis on climate change mitigation and resource degradation avoidance. The project will work on building climate change resilience through the identification and assessment of different climate change

scenarios and their impact on local biodiversity values and livelihoods. It will especially identify carbon storage potential of forests as well as potential carbon losses caused by different land uses. Emission reduction potential from habitat restoration or the application of climate-smart land management solutions, will also be assessed.

In order to support the effective implementation of the management plan and building on the results and recommendations of the GEF financed project 'Enhancing financial sustainability of the protected area system in Albania' implemented by UNDP, the project will strengthen sustainable financing for the AANP. Particularly, the project will build capacity in NAPA to develop and pilot sustainable financing mechanisms so that available funds and revenue flow back to the AANP are increased. These interventions will ensure that the recent government decision providing for the use of incomes generated by activities occurring within protected areas, is fully and effectively realized.

Lastly, the project will work towards building the systemic, institutional and individual capacities necessary for functional and effective management of the AANP. Capacity gaps will be identified, an institutional development plan compiled, and its implementation by NAPA/RAPA as well as other relevant stakeholders, supported. This will be done through demonstration pilots and developed guidelines on best practices for planning, implementation and reporting on conservation measures.

Component 1 is composed of three Outcomes as described below:

Outcome 1.1 Albanian Alps National Park territory valorized, and effective and adaptive management planning put in place [updated threats, including climate change resilience building].

Outcome 1.1 is composed of four separate outputs:

Output 1.1.1: Assessment of likely climate change scenarios in the Albanian Alps landscape, implications for biodiversity, land use and livelihoods, and opportunities for mitigation/resilience building.

Various models indicate that Albania is one of the most vulnerable countries to the impacts of climate change. The future climate scenarios for Albania anticipate an increasing trend in annual and seasonal climate related disasters such as floods, land erosion, decreased precipitation and a reduction of water resources and arable land. Studies of the climate change scenarios in Albania, predict that the mean annual temperatures in Albania will increase between 1.3°C and 2.2°C by 2050 and 4.4°C by 2100, while precipitation is expected to decrease between 2.1% and 4.3% by 2050, and between 1.8% and 12.2% by 2100. A warmer, drier climate is likely increase fire risk. Further impacts are likely to lead to a decline in forest productivity and total biomass with a corresponding acceleration in tree mortality in particular for moisture dependent species (e.g., silver fir). Being among the ecosystems that are among the most sensitive to climate change, mountains are affected at a faster rate than other terrestrial habitats. Large and effectively managed protected areas can be important nature-based solutions to help combat the effects of climate and enhance resilience of biodiversity and communities. However, no data or models have been developed to determine climate change scenarios for any specific site in Albania and there have been no assessments of the potential implications of such scenarios on biodiversity and livelihoods of local communities. This project will work on developing models to define likely climate change scenarios within the AANP by identifying the data needed for developing such scenarios and supporting the collection of such data. Models will be used to assess the impact of climate change scenarios on biodiversity, land use patterns and livelihoods of local communities.

Recognizing that women, especially at a local level, are often disproportionately affected by the negative

impacts of climate change, particular attention will be given to assessing the impact of different climate change scenarios on women and other marginalized groups and in identifying targeted resilience building measures that can be applied. In addition, considering the need to apply proactive management measures in order to respond to climate change related changes, such as increased risk of fire and disease, the project will identify any opportunities for mitigation and resilience building measures. Such measures will ensure more effective support is provided to local communities to maintain traditional and sustainable forest and pasture use practices in order to preserve the unique natural and cultural values of the area and will be considered in the revision of the management plan

Output 1.1.2: Strengthening the role of the Management Committee for Protected Areas in addressing constructed and planned HPP in and adjacent to the Albanian Alps PA.

Currently there are two HPPs being built in the area with eight more planned. Additionally, many other HPPs exist or are planned very close to the border of the AANP, possibly impacting the management of natural resources within the park. These HPPs of varying capacities, have negative impacts not only on aquatic habitats and species but also on terrestrial ones as a result of the impact of new roads, construction pollution and increased human presence. The local community, supported by various national and international NGOs, has voiced some concerns about the adverse impacts HPPs will have in the future development of the area. In response to this, after a long judicial process, on July 23 2021, the Albanian Supreme Court issued a 'stop work' order for two HPPs in Cerem and Dragobi (tributaries of Valbona River), accepting thus the claims of 27 local citizens of the Albanian Alps and two local NGOs.

Considering the urgent need to better regulate and mitigate the impacts of such industrial activity in the area, the project will support the elaboration of an assessment of the existing legal and institutional frameworks regulating HPP development within protected areas in Albania including proposals for any needed revisions to be submitted to the national authorities responsible for energy in Albania. This will be followed by a study combining a desk review and field exploration will include a comprehensive analysis evaluating the potential impact on biodiversity and local livelihoods of existing and planned HPPs in the area with proposals and suggestions for proper measures to be presented to national authorities. Further training will be provided and stakeholder meetings held in an effort to clarify the status of planned HPPs within the AANP.

The Management Committee (MC) for Protected Areas is a formally established consultation and advisory body responsible for the implementation of the management plan of protected areas. The project will support and strengthen the role of the MC for protected areas in evaluating all current and planned HPPs in the Albanian Alps through site visits, meetings with experts and the community. The project will ensure an active participation of local communities, especially women, and NGOs in the MC meetings. In this regard, the project will support the establishment and functioning of a consultation forum for NGOs and representatives of local community interest groups to properly voice their concerns on the infrastructure developments in the area, aiming for more sustainable HPP infrastructure development and ensuring proper information dissemination. It will facilitate, through meetings, a link between the Forum and the Inter-Ministerial Energy and Climate Committee (IECC). The project will support the development of Terms of Reference and clear Rules of Procedures for a smooth and effective functioning of such a consultation forum.

Output 1.1.3: Support to the field demarcation process of the Albanian Alps NP boundaries and zones following an in-depth review and adjustment of draft NP boundary and zonation plans (based any

changes in circumstances since initially developed, stakeholder consultation, and identified climate change factors).

The zonation of protected areas is an essential management tool to help reduce conflicts between protected area managers and natural resources users. A protected area zonation plan aims to divide protected areas into zones of differing protection status in order to ensure adequate conservation of valuable natural ecosystems while still allowing some sustainable economic activities that support local livelihoods to be performed. A zonation plan clearly explains all rules and restrictions regulating the extension and intensity of human activities within a protected area, ensuring their impacts are not jeopardizing the conservation objectives of the area. The Law No. 81, dated 04.05.2017 'On Protected Areas', and the DCM no. 57, dated 6.2.2019 'On the criteria and procedures of the zonation of the territory of protected areas' provide the regulatory framework defining the process of zonation. A zonation plan will consider the various characteristics of a natural area, including biophysical features, socio economic patterns, and administrative arrangements as well as the functions of the protected area (e.g., conservation, research, education, recreation, cultural, sustainable development). Zonation is a complex process and requires adequate scientific and technical support along with a comprehensive consultation process to integrate general territorial planning policies, nature conservation programs and known best practices with the existing socio-economic conditions and local development priorities.

Although a zonation plan for the AANP, with support from GIZ (CABRA project) was developed in 2014, and the government decision establishing the AANP includes indications on the zonation of the park, given the time passed, and the limited amount of data available at the time, the project will support a thorough review of the existing zonation plan(s). Through stakeholder consultations and considering real data from site expeditions, on the values and threats to those values, (to be obtained from the activities conducted under Output 1.1.4 and 1.2.1) including climate change, (as identified in output 1.1.1), the project will relook at the draft zonation plan and identify and map using remote sensing a revised and agreed zonation plan. The project will ensure that the revised zonation plan entails a wide and inclusive stakeholder consultation process so that the implications of zonation to local livelihoods, traditional land use patterns, women and other marginalized groups are carefully considered.

Even when agreed, a zonation plan will not be functional if boundaries remain digitized and are not properly recognized and easily identified on the ground by all relevant stakeholders and local residents. In this regard, the project will support the field demarcation of the boundaries and zonation of the park, using standards (signs) approved by the National Agency for Protected Areas. The project will demarcate approximately 100 km of the park boundary that lies solely in Albania, since the national borders between Albania and Kosovo and Montenegro mark the remaining approximate 124 km of AANPs boundary. To promote wider understanding and knowledge of the park and its zonation boundaries, the project will support the development of public awareness raising materials and will carry out a public awareness campaign.

Output 1.1.4: Validate, update, and rationalize existing (draft) management plan (including sub-programs) for the Albanian Alps NP based on any changes in circumstances since their initial development, consultation with all stakeholders, identified CC responses.

Management Planning is an essential step towards ensuring the proper management of protected areas. It is a 'tool' to guide managers and other interested parties on an agreed way forward for the management of the area, today and in the future. The process of developing a Management Plan (MP)

is complex depending upon the objectives of the protected area, the risks or threats to these objectives, the number of competing interests, the level of stakeholder involvement, and the issues arising from outside the protected area.

Article 42, Paragraph 4 of the Law on protected areas (No 81/2017) defines that the structure of the PA management plan, the planning process, management objectives for the plan and standards to be applied. Criteria for plan revision are defined by the Minister Order on the "Approval of Structure of the Management Plan Content and Criteria of its Review".

A draft management plan for the AANP has already been developed in 2015 by the Institute for Nature Conservation in Albania (INCA) with the support of MoTE and the Environment and Climate Change Regional Accession Network (Technical Assistance and Information Exchange Instrument of the European Commission) (ECRAN (TAIEX)). However, this plan was developed with limited data availability, particularly on the status and distribution of relevant habitats and species. The project will update and fill any gaps in the baseline data and threat analysis conducted for the draft management plan. This will involve a full valorization study for the entire area of the AANP which includes detailed ecological and socio-economic studies. The project will carry out a habitat mapping and assessment based on methodologies and interpretation manuals developed at EU level for the establishment of the Natural 2000 network. Similarly, the project will support research work and collect field data on key species occurring in AANP while assessing their distribution and conservation status. Such data will also contribute to filling the significant knowledge gap concerning habitat and species distribution across the whole country. The project will also strengthen the capacities of relevant institutions (MoTE, NAPA), universities, and local CSOs working in botany, zoology, and nature conservation, in understanding the principles and methods for the identification, conservation, and management of relevant habitats and species. The project will further support a detailed threat analysis of the AANP and identify appropriate conservation measures to ensure species and habitat conservation by addressing the root causes of identified threats.

The AANP area incorporates a significant number of villages (110) and local communities whose livelihoods are strongly connected to the use of natural resources. In order to better understand the level and impact of socio-economic activities on the conservation of natural values, and vice versa, the project will carry out a socio-economic assessment of the local community livelihoods and development opportunities within the AANP.

The data and information, as well as results and recommendations from the whole array of studies and assessments carried out by the project, will contribute to reviewing and updating the management plan, making sure it incorporates any changes in circumstances that have occurred in the area since its initial development in 2015. Through significant and inclusive stakeholder consultations, the project will ensure that the voices of women and other marginalized groups are heard and considered in the revised plan. In this regard, the project will develop and implement a solid, gender responsive, stakeholder consultation plan. Reviewing the overall strategy of AANP management and the MP programs and clarifying and simplifying as far as possible the planned actions in order to ensure they focus on the priority threats and conservation priorities, including increasing climate change resilience, as well as maximizing benefits to local communities.

Outcome 1.2: Sustainable financing of the Albanian Alps NP in place, including sustainable financing mechanisms tested and functionally established.

This outcome will build on the existing results of the GEF financed project 'Enhancing financial sustainability of the protected area system in Albania' (UNDP), to address the long-term sustainable financing of the AANP. Outcome 1.2 comprises four outputs:

Output 1.2.1: Comprehensive ecosystem services valuation of the Albanian Alps landscape and assessment of potential options and opportunities for sustainable financing of the Albanian Alps NP. Human well-being and long-term economic success depend on ecosystem services, however often the benefits derived from these services are not well-understood and therefore are often overlooked in everyday planning and decision-making.

So that AANP can be managed effectively and sustainably, and given greater consideration at a landscape production scale, it is necessary to link the protection and the conservation of biodiversity (genetic, vegetal, and animal) with their productive, social and cultural aspects. Critical to this, is empowering local communities to recognize their rights and responsibilities in the management of the natural resources. As per the Convention on Biological Diversity, the project will model its integrated management of the protected areas using a participatory approach at all stakeholder levels.

An ecosystem is usually defined as a complex of living organisms with their (abiotic) environment and their mutual relations. Although this definition applies to all hierarchical levels (from a single water drop with its microorganisms to Earth's biomes), for the practical purposes of mapping and assessment, an ecosystem here is considered at the habitat/biotope or landscape scale. The health of the ecosystem is directly linked to the quality of the Ecosystem Services (ESs) they provide. Pressures impacting ecosystem status will be identified, detailed and quantified. Data collection will follow specific monitoring protocols in order to ensure the systemization and consistency of data to be collected.

Ecosystem mapping will provide the spatial delineation of ecosystems following an agreed ecosystem typology (ecosystem types), which strongly depends on mapping purpose and scale. Mapping ecosystems requires the preliminary collection and organization of relevant available data and maps. The project will follow the Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystems and their Services in the European Union (MAES) guidance document and the Common International Classification of Ecosystem Services (CICES) classification will be instrumental in providing an appropriate and consistent framework for the assessment of ecosystem services provided by both work areas. The CICES (2018) categorizes Ecosystem Services into three classes used in the MAES: 'provisioning', 'regulation', and 'cultural' that can be described as follows:

1. Provisioning services: mainly related to the production of high variety of food, feed, fibers or other goods, delivered by different managed systems such crops, livestock, aquaculture. They involve the production of renewable resources (e.g., food, wood, fresh water), , .
2. Regulating services: those that regulate environmental changes, they are largely associated with agriculture (e.g., climate regulation, pest/disease control, fluctuation in water provision and temperature)4,6, .
3. Cultural services: benefits obtained from ecosystems through spiritual enrichment (religion or heritage value or natural) recreation, aesthetic experience and education opportunities5.7

For each of the ecosystems identified in the AANP, a list of potential Ecosystem Services will be selected based on the most feasible ones for that area. They will be deemed feasible if the financial benefits outweigh the costs for their implementation and will provide a relatively significant amount of income for PA management, tapping into their potential requires actions that are not in conflict with the objectives of the AANP, and they will provide additional co-benefits to the surrounding populations.

This list will provide the basis for further work and result in a first concrete step towards mapping Ecosystem Services in the assessed territories and the first step towards the involvement of the key stakeholders in the process of building a participatory integrated model of governance for the AANP. The project therefore, will undertake a comprehensive assessment of selected ecosystem service values of the AANP in order to identify the real values to various stakeholders and the country as a whole. Relevant ecosystem services valuations will be accomplished through site expeditions comprised of local experts (university professors and PHD students) and led by an international expert, for a period of 1-2 years. During the inception phase of the project and in consultation with stakeholders the scale and the types of ecosystems services will be identified, including the stakeholders that will be the primary beneficiaries of these ecosystem services. Depending on the ecosystems selected, best practices will be explored and they will be evaluated for most effective application in the AANP context. This will provide an economic rationale for justifying state financing inputs, as well as highlighting the stakeholders with the highest economic dependency on maintaining healthy and functional ecosystems, and thus the greatest incentive and interest to ensure this.

Based on the information gathered in previous activities, the project will also support the development of several scenarios for the use of natural resources, considering variations along the elements of the assessment. Variations may be, in fact, triggered by variations in natural capital (changes in ecosystem extent or condition) reverberating through the system and leading to changes in the ecosystem services provisioning or, on the other side, variations may be due to changes in the provisioning (changed exploitation conditions) leading to effects on the natural capital.

All the above assessments and models will be further used to identify opportunities for the long-term sustainable generation of financing for the management of AANP, including potential mechanisms and partnerships for income generation.

Output 1.2.2: Updating and adjustment of the draft Albanian Alps NP Financing plan to incorporate the financing opportunities / mechanisms identified under Output 1.2.1 (i.e., a budget and sustainable finance plan for the NP)

The Government of Albania (GoA) is currently engaged in improving the management effectiveness of the country's system of PAs. However, the current funding baseline for the PA system, and the capacities to administer and improve PA revenue streams, are still well below the levels required to ensure that the PA system can properly serve its function. The MoTE and its agencies are not yet able to: (i) secure sufficient, stable and long-term financial resources for protected areas; and (ii) allocate these resources in a timely and appropriate manner to cover the full costs of conservation actions in protected areas.

The GEF funded project "Enhancing financial sustainability of the protected area system in Albania", implemented by UNDP, is assisting the MoTE and NAPA in addressing existing funding gaps for the system of PAs and improving the management and cost-efficiencies of individual PAs. The project is also building the financial management capacities of PAs nationwide by increasing the capacity of the central and local staff, focusing relevant activities at two levels of support: (i) building the financial management capacities of the agency responsible for administering the system of protected areas (NAPA/RAPAs); and (ii) demonstrating the efficacy of different financing strategies in a sub-set of individual PAs. The UNDP project has developed and tested some mechanisms for increasing income from conventional financial sources for PAs and innovative means of revenue generation in three PAs, namely Mountain Dajti NP, Divjake - Karavasta NP and Llogara-Karaburun Sazan Ecosystem, essentially involving three main instruments: sustainability of the PAs system, co-management models,

and business planning. This progress followed the development of a strategic and financial plan for the PA system, with advice and counselling provided for the criteria on tariffs and revenue sources for PAs, creation of the special PA fund and contributing to improvement of the capacity of the NAPA to mobilize funding ? at the protected area system level ? from different sources.

Recently, the Government of Albania has approved two important decisions relevant for the long-term financial sustainability of nature conservation efforts and effective management of protected areas in the country, namely:

? Decision no. 1156, dated 24.12.2020 On defining the revenues generated by fees paid in protected areas, the extent and criteria of their use

? Decision 19, dated 20.1.2021 On the extent of the special fund for the environmental protected areas, on the sources of its creation and the rules of its use

These DCMs approved by the government at the end of 2020 and in January 2021, address the financial operation and income generated in protected areas. The first DCM deals with capacities to administer and improve PA revenue streams, whereas the other DCM provides for NAPA to source funding from the state budget, donors, delivery of ?services? and ?other legal sources. These two instruments strengthen NAPAs mandate to fulfil several PA management financial obligations and enable it to secure sufficient, stable and long-term financial resources for protected areas, while allocating these resources in a timely and appropriate manner. The fees established by the DCM 1156 reflect the ecosystem services approach and pinpoint some of the services that PAs provide. NAPA is elaborating respective financial mechanisms to those ecosystem services already identified and earmarked for revenue generation.

The appropriate implementation of the DCM will fill a pivotal niche in bridging national conservation priorities and local community needs, and in using expert local knowledge to deploy national funding in field programs that achieve objectives for conservation, livelihoods, community governance, and sustainable resource management. However, this requires a careful review of NAPA capacities on financial management as well as a thorough review of various available financing mechanisms. In this regard, the project will consider the following issues:

? Building a diverse, stable, and secure funding portfolio: minimizing funding risks and fluctuations.

? Improving financial administration and effectiveness: ensuring that funding is allocated and spent in a way that supports PA finance needs and conservation goals.

? Taking a comprehensive view of costs and benefits: covering the full range of PA costs, ensuring that those who bear PA costs are recognized and adequately compensated, and that those who benefit from PAs make a fair contribution to their maintenance.

? Creating an enabling financial and economic framework: overcoming market, price and policy distortions that undermine PAs or act as obstacles to PA financing.

? Mainstreaming and building capacity to use financial tools and mechanisms: factoring financial analysis and mechanisms into PA planning processes.

Considering the pragmatic experience of what works in practice in Albania and recommendations of the above mentioned GEF project, this project will carry out an assessment to identify opportunities for sustainable financing and work out in detail mechanisms for practically capturing this income for the management of the Albanian Alps National Park.

The project will develop a business plan in close collaboration with stakeholders, that elaborates the required budget for the implementation of the Albanian Alps National Park management plan. The business plan shall also explore the source of the funds for this budget and mechanisms for its

generation. Furthermore, the project will identify and promote business models that contribute to sustainable financing of protected areas? conservation activities.

Once the Financial Plan has been prepared and implementation under way (see output 1.2.3), progress will be monitored and reviewed in order to:

- ? identify whether the plan is being implemented effectively and the objectives are being met;
- ? learn from observation of the impacts of management; and
- ? adapt the management actions accordingly.

This review will enable any challenges to be identified and will enable lessons learnt to be fed back to management and for the plan to be adapted accordingly. The project will support monitoring and revision of the financial plan for the AANP within the time frame of project implementation.

Additionally, the project will build necessary capacities at NAPA/RAPA level to regularly carry out such monitoring activities and support their implementation.

Output 1.2.3: Support to the practical setting up and implementation of at least 3 demonstrations for generating sustainable income for the NP (depending on those identified as viable under Outcome 1.2 and incorporated into NP financing Plan)

Following on the results of activities carried out to achieve output 1.2.2, the project will identify and support all steps required to functionally establish at least three demonstrations of the most viable financing mechanisms, considering but not limited to:

- ? fees related to tourism access and use (entrance fees, concession fees, etc.),
- ? productive land use rents and tenancy agreements, natural resource sustainable harvesting (pasture user fees, fuelwood, hunting/fishing licenses, etc.), and
- ? payments for ecosystem services (hydropower entities and others), among others.

The project will provide on-going support and guidance to implementing parties (RAPA, private businesses, local user groups) on the management and longer-term development of these financing opportunities. The process of identification and implementation of the financial mechanisms will include significant stakeholder consultation, as well as an evaluation of the success of previously tested models developed by other partners in similar settings such as (UNDP in Dajti Mountain and Llogara Mountain respective PAs and GIZ work from the SRD project). During the inception phase of the project, in consultation with project partners and beneficiaries, the project will identify a list of mechanisms that will be best suited to the AANP context, identify potential locations for pilot sites, define relevant stakeholders and beneficiaries as well as the resources required for their implementation, e.g. training, equipment, drafting of business plans and guidebooks, promotional material etc. The results of the pilots will be constantly monitored, evaluated and amended depending on the situation and the context in the Albanian Alps.

Outcome 1.3: The systemic, institutional, and individual level capacity needs and gaps for effectively implementing the agreed NP management plan addressed (MP program 1).

Outcome 1.3 is composed of three separate outputs, as follows:

Output 1.3.1: A detailed ?fit for purpose? assessment carried out of NP management and governance institutions and their legal/operational framework (in the context of the agreed management plan).

Over the years, relevant institutions responsible for nature conservation and sustainable use of natural resources have been set up and efforts through various donor funded projects, to build their capacities have been made. However, their capacities remain weak both in numbers and skills, particularly related to monitoring, law enforcement, and the implementation of conservation measures. The project will

focus on ensuring the sustainability of activities by encouraging the institutionalization of conservation measures, and by building on existing country-driven initiatives.

The proposed project will improve the institutional set up and strengthen the long-term capacities of relevant institutions (MoTE, NAPA/RAPA, Municipalities) to preserve important habitats and species, including proper inspection and enforcement. The project will complement MoTE activities by conducting a functionality analysis of the relevant authorities responsible for nature conservation and in developing clear duties and responsibilities, as well as identifying the skills and capacities necessary at various levels.

The project will develop an institutional development plan that will include the following:

- ? Identification of clear responsibilities (organization) of institutions involved in particular for NAPA/RAPA;
- ? A gradual plan for increasing the number of staff and competencies;
- ? Budget planning and expenditure;
- ? Technical needs assessment and develop technical specification for supply of equipment;
- ? Identification and promotion of mechanisms to consult the public

The institutional development plan will consider the gender assessment of women employment in the sector, with concrete activities presented in the plan for balancing the number of male and female staff and taking into consideration their respective competencies.

To develop this plan, the project will first assess in detail the institutional requirements to implement the programs and actions articulated in the MP such as which institutions are required, their mandates and structures, the legal instruments necessary, staffing requirements (numbers and skills), equipment and the role of local community structures, non-government organizations, the private sector, and other stakeholders in the specified program. Once a thorough understanding of the institutional requirements have been identified, these will be compared with the current context.

Output 1.3.2: Reforms and adjustments of the NP management and governance institutions and legal/operational frameworks carried out, and key equipment provided, to enable effective implementation of management plan.

Using the pragmatic gap analysis carried out as part of Output 1.3.1, the necessary adjustment / refinement of existing institutions (structure, mandates, staff, operational procedures, equipment, community roles, etc.) will be identified. The project will then provide recommendations to improve/clarify the legal framework for their activities and collaboration. In addition, feeding into Output 1.3.3, the project will provide insights on priority areas for building institutional and individual staff competencies to match the needs for proper PA management and implementation of the MP programs. Appropriate community-based structures, with agreed roles and involvement of non-government and private sector entities, will also be established and communities will be trained to participate in the management and sustainable use of natural resources. In addition to capacity building (output 1.3.3), the project will support the procurement of critical equipment for example, drones for aerial mapping and observation, optical and auditory devices, real time remote sensing devices, management software and programs for data collection. However, a critical equipment needs assessment will be carried out with stakeholders during the inception phase, that is aligned with, and continuously reviewed and revised in conjunction with the aims and objectives of the project and its ongoing activities.

NAPA/RAPA is lacking specific capacities in terms of biodiversity conservation management, particularly on biodiversity monitoring planning and implementation, data analysis and reporting, and

the development of evidence-based conservation measures. The project will support NAPA/RAPA in identifying the required positions for biodiversity conservation, and will support the development of job descriptions and qualification requirements for such positions.

Output 1.3.3: A comprehensive capacity development program for the NP management staff and other relevant stakeholders (based on an assessment of the gaps in skills/experience for effective implementation of the agreed MP), provision of key equipment

As mentioned under Output 1.3.2, the project will conduct a training needs assessment for protected area management and governance (including inspection and law enforcement). Based on these assessments, a tailor-made comprehensive training program (short- and long-term) will be developed. The project will support the delivery of capacity building activities on selected priority topics, which will also include other more general capacity needs related to PA management, such as those already identified as potential areas for intervention:

- ? Preparation of management plans and identification and implementation of conservation measures;
- ? Applying conservation measures for species and habitats in selected sites;
- ? Conducting appropriate surveillance and monitoring of activities and relevant reporting;
- ? Data collection, monitoring and reporting on conservation status of habitats and species;
- ? assessing the introduction of species in local flora and fauna
- ? Assessment of development plan and programs;
- ? surveillance and monitoring of activities;
- ? Conducting routine research and monitoring activities related to naturally occurring wild species;

Considering experiences from other projects, providing training and/or capacity building events to government institutions can lead to concerns about the benefit and long-term sustainability of such efforts. The project will pay careful attention to the assessment conducted ensuring priority capacity gaps are targeted, and will consider a variety of training tools (including on job training, field exercise, peer learning, exchange visits, etc.) in order to select the most appropriate ones for the selected beneficiaries, to secure the sustainability of the results achieved within the project implementation. A series of manuals, guidelines and tool kits will be further developed in support of the training activities, so that training can be repeated even beyond the project timeframe. The project will support information systems for monitoring and reporting on the habitats and species with the use of IT and GIS tools.

Component 2. Strengthening the practical experience and ?know-how? of the Albanian Alps NP stakeholders to address threats.

Lessons learnt in past GEF projects have shown the transition from planning and initial capacity building to practical management, necessitates adaption and adjustment to respond to the on-ground realities and issues faced, and is often extremely challenging for inexperienced stakeholders. Despite the creation of a positive enabling environment in Component 1, adaptive management and pragmatic flexibility will be essential during this phase to ensure the subsequently evolved management system is robust and sustainable. In that context, the NP institutions and stakeholders will require a substantial combination of ?in-process? advice and guidance while at the same time initiating practical action. Component 2 of the project focuses on supporting the transition from the planning and preparation undertaken in Component 1 to on-the-ground implementation of the NP management and, thereby, practically addressing priority threats facing the Albanian Alps National Park territory. Component 2 is composed of one Outcome as described below:

Outcome 2.1: Threats to biodiversity in the Albanian Alps addressed through the effective initiation of the updated AANP management plan programs, and the development of practical experience of key stakeholders to continue implementation in the long term.

The implementation of activities under this outcome is expected to achieve, by the end of project, a functionally established and effectively managed Albanian Alps NP. Specifically, and critically, it aims to ensure an established system whereby adequate and sustainable technical and practical experience exists within the key stakeholders, so that they can adapt and adjust future management as required, to achieve the NP objectives. Outcome 2.1 is composed of four separate outputs, as follows:

Output 2.1.1: Support the establishment of effective NP biodiversity conservation actions in the NP (law enforcement, sub-programs for targeted conservation of rare species/habitats, fire and invasive species control, human wildlife conflict reduction, fuel wood supply (MP Program 2).

Activities under this output will center around practical actions required as indicated in the updated and revised management plan for the AANP developed under component 1. The project will support the implementation of selected activities focusing in particular on issues related to:

- ? specific species and habitat restoration/rehabilitation sub-programs,
- ? effective establishment of mechanisms for monitoring and enforcement of the new regulations and rules to be applied in the different management zones of the NP;
- ? human / wildlife conflict reduction activities,
- ? fuel wood extraction management and NTFP regulation, and,
- ? fire, disease and invasive species management sub-programs;

Based on results and recommendations from the valorization study and thus the revised management plan (output 1.1.4) a list of priority species and habitat conservation and restoration measures will be identified for implementation that will be supported by the project. The project, with the participation of RAPA staff and other relevant stakeholders, will develop technical specifications for the implementation of these measures and support (fund) their implementation. RAPA will provide technical supervision of the implementation process. Furthermore, the project will identify rare species and habitats, and develop two conservation management action plans (1 for habitat; 1 for species).

Capitalizing on activities and results from Outcome 1.3 (building institutional capacities) under this specific output, the project will provide on-the-job training and build capacities for establishing key mechanisms for monitoring and enforcing the new regulations and rules to be applied in the different management zones within the AANP. Based on the monitoring needs identified, the project will develop/improve monitoring protocols and provide training to RAPA staff in the implementation of these protocols, including ecological and threat monitoring. In cooperation with RAPA staff, the project will identify specific monitoring equipment needs relevant to the protocols developed and support the procurement of critical equipment accordingly. Additionally, the project will provide training on data storage and analysis from monitoring activities, to both RAPA and NAPA staff.

Cooperation with other law enforcement and judicial institutions (state police, prosecution, judges) is very important to improve the prosecution of environmental crimes. Clear indicators and monitoring procedures should be developed to support proper reporting on the results of law enforcement.

Therefore, the project will contribute to and strengthen the capacities of relevant and key institutions for effective environmental law enforcement. The project will hold joint training events with representatives of the judiciary system, inspectorate and RAPA staff on surveillance and law

enforcement of environmental crimes, including providing evidence to facilitate easier and faster resolution of court cases related to the environmental legislation for nature protection.

During these initial years of the new national park, it is essential to place a large emphasis on building awareness across AANP stakeholders on the rules and regulations, rather than punishment. The project will promote and ensure collaboration with local communities, to minimize conflict in this regard.

Collaboration with communities will be vital to ensure the impacts of stricter land use controls do not result in an overall negative impact on their livelihoods, in particular for women. Hence, the project will support activities related to minimizing any negative costs for communities as a result of new rules and regulations, for example, ensuring essential resources such as fuel wood supplies are maintained and human-wildlife conflicts (wildlife damage to agriculture or livestock pushing locals to kill wildlife) are properly addressed/reduced. Moreover, the project will develop and support the implementation of three threat management plans focusing on invasive alien species, human wildlife conflicts, and wildfires.

Considering experiences and examples from other comparable protected areas, and through strategic guidance, the project will support the process of establishing an enforcement presence of the NP administration in the most sustainable manner. In this regard, the project will support the implementation/delivery of a ranger training program and develop a patrol plan in cooperation with RAPA staff.

Output 2.1.2: Support to sustainable economic development: strengthening regulations and management of sustainable natural resource management, livelihoods, and cultural heritage within communities in the NP in order to reduce pressures on BD and incentivize sustainable use and livelihoods, and encourage maintenance of cultural heritage (MP Program 3)

The second Output, which corresponds to program 3 of the draft Management Plan, aims to address the most crucial root causes of threats in the AANP territory (i.e., those related to inappropriate and unsustainable economic development and rural livelihoods). The project will be critical in bringing international experience to the issues and ensuring transparency and opportunity for all stakeholders to play a role in their solution. Briefly there are two key areas that will be addressed under this output, these are:

a) sustainable tourism development, with the main focus on community benefits and cultural heritage conservation, and,

b) sustainable land use (pasture, arable and forestry) with focus on supporting and strengthening rural communities to add value to traditional land use products in order to help preserve the cultural landscape while maintaining or improving livelihoods.

Albania's rural regions, characterized by high unemployment, are particularly hit hard by population migration to cities and abroad. Agriculture is an important economic sector in the AANP area.

However, most of the family-owned farms produce to serve their own needs. Many farms produce quantities that are too small and of insufficient quality to compete on the market. There are virtually no formal alliances in the form of producer groups or cooperatives. Agricultural diversity, including agro-biodiversity, environmental services, landscape protection and direct marketing, are neither sufficiently promoted nor used to generate income. As business consolidations can be expected in the context of European Union (EU) accession preparations, there is a growing need for small family businesses to capitalize on alternative income opportunities. Support for sustainable land use to maintain traditional landscapes and agro-biodiversity will focus on adding value to traditional products and the introduction, where appropriate, of new technologies/methods to reduce impact on the environment by

local communities (fuel wood demand reduction and improved waste management, for example). The project will carry out an assessment on the energy efficiency potential in the area, assessing the feasibility of renovating houses/business structures and introducing alternative renewable energy sources (solar panel, biogas). Additionally, the project will assess opportunities for an improved waste management system in the area, promoting in-farm composting and biogas production.

Tourism is becoming an increasing economic opportunity in the AANP area. However, rural tourism is dominated by smaller, largely informal family businesses (for example, offering accommodation). The lack of institutional tourism structures in regions and communities makes it more difficult to develop differentiated, quality-oriented tourism services. Regional tourism and agricultural partnerships have not been used effectively enough to deliver a diverse income strategy. However, Albania, with its diverse natural and cultural landscapes, its particular (agro-) biodiversity and historical traditions, as well as its direct links to Europe, has enormous potential for developing an environmentally friendly rural tourism industry. Sustainable tourism development will focus on ensuring that the currently unregulated and unplanned, but accelerating sector is redirected in order to maximize longer term sustainable benefits for rural communities in the NP, private sector entities that provide the bridge between the market and the area, and the NP authorities themselves. In this regard, the project will support the development of a sustainable tourism development guidelines for the AANP, including rules and criteria for sustainable tourism development, with the main focus on community benefits and cultural heritage conservation. The project will support organization of local festivals (at least three) promoting products and cultural traditions of the area.

Capacity building will be provided to small farmers and small and micro/medium enterprises in addressing biodiversity conservation and sustainable land use issues when applying for rural development support schemes (National schemes, and/or IPARD).

To ensure project interventions are effective, a monitoring program for natural resource use levels and resource status will be developed and implemented together with NAPA/RAPA. An assessment of the status of cultural values in the area, with the aim to promote such values, will also be carried out.

Given the growing development in the Albanian Alps region, the project will further enhance technical and methodological capacities of public and private stakeholders, including universities and professional networks to improve their knowledge on rural development issues. These actions will be supported by using a future national knowledge and innovation system as envisaged by the EU to facilitate knowledge transfer and innovation regarding agricultural and rural development issues.

Output 2.1.3: Strengthening of regulation and management of HPPs and other infrastructure, through capacity building on EIA and SEA and training law enforcement officers, private sector and community representatives on sustainable natural resource management in order to reduce pressures on BD, and of CC (MP Program 3).

Improved regulation, mitigation and management of existing and planned infrastructural development in the AANP area, in particular HPPs and road construction, will likely be the most challenging activity of this project. In this context a key role of the project will be to ensure regional and international best practices in assessment, mitigation and management of such infrastructure developments are applied and balanced and pragmatic solutions that reflect the inputs and interests of all parties are implemented, particularly those at local level. Solutions will need to combine the strengthening and proper application of both pre-existing and new regulations for such developments that adequately reflect their environmental and local socio-economic / cultural impact, as well as pragmatic efforts to mitigate the impacts of existing and future approved development.

The efficacy of Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIA) will be strengthened by training and educating national and local law enforcement officers, the private sector, and community representatives, on how to better use ESIA guidelines in their planning and implementation. The project will support the analysis of existing legislation (regulations) on EIA and SEA and based on international best practices, provide recommendations on how to improve existing regulation(s) and enable the proper identification and implementation of mitigation measures, where necessary. The project will further support the organization of public consultation meetings on the issues related to infrastructure development in the area.

National financial institutions provide financial support to companies and businesses planning to or building hydropower plants all over Albania. As legally required, these institutions have their environmental and social safeguards when assessing the feasibility of financing such activities. However, some assessments show that due to lack of capacities in understanding and analyzing the assessment of these safeguards, financial institutions often fail to foresee any breach of environmental and social safeguards. As such, the project will develop training material and deliver training to representatives of the key financial institutions to properly integrate considerations on environmental and social safeguards on their financing feasibility assessments, aiming to reduce impacts on natural resources and biodiversity. The project in cooperation with relevant institutions (MoTE, NAPA) will carefully identify relevant financial institutions and banks which are pivotal to the development of important infrastructure projects in the area of AANP, including the building of HPPs.

Output 2.1.4: Support to the development of educational and awareness building, and scientific research sub-programs, and support a long-term NP monitoring system including a gender-specific and sensitive approach (MP program 4)

The importance, values and perspectives of protected areas are part of our common heritage, an important message that needs to be shared widely in order to gain support and collaboration from the community living close to the areas and the general public. This will require significant effort through activities and campaigns that encourage people to support the common goal of protected areas ?to promote and protect? irreplaceable values. Communicating and interacting with stakeholders to share positive results and challenges that need to be addressed with the interested and target parties, is a very important task that needs to be further developed by RAPA staff. The project will carry out awareness raising activities for local stakeholders and residents, visitors to the area, and national audiences, on the values and importance of the biodiversity and landscape of the AANP.

RAPA practice both internal communication (within the NAPA network) as well as external communication. External communication requires them to engage a wide range of stakeholders from organizations and institutions, the general public, youth, and tourists, among others, on a diversity of topics. Often, they are responsible for developing communication and visibility projects from working with schools on environmental education, giving talks and leading guided nature walks for visitors, or organizing events and awareness campaigns. At the same time, it is crucial that they maintain a good relation with the media in general, and ensure the appropriate promotion of the PA during all activities and events. Recognizing these important activities, the project will help build communication and outreach skills across RAPA, support the development and dissemination of outreach materials, and will develop and deliver environmental education programs in cooperation with local schools.

A ?Junior Rangers? program initiated by the NaturAl project in concomitance with environmental education initiatives, is being carried out in schools, targeting both school children and youth. As part of this program, youth between 10 and 20 years old were recruited by RAPA to become part of a

national unit that support the various work carried out by the Rangers, for example awareness and cleaning up campaigns, afforestation, and to a certain extent also monitoring (as simplified ways to provide data on species occurrence). The project will support the establishment of a ?Junior Rangers? program for the AANP area.

Without a reasonable understanding of the value, threats, status of the protected area, and communities? interactions with the PA and its resources, effective management for enhanced conservation outcomes will be difficult to achieve. RAPA currently monitors biodiversity as well as human activities impacting the natural values of the area, the project will help enhance their monitoring efforts by supporting research activities in the park. Scientific research is important to development and implementation of programs that address conservation targets and priorities, by providing evidential information on needs, threats and impacts. In order to ensure that research outputs are useful, appropriate data storage and analysis systems need to be in place. The project will support RAPA in identifying research priorities and in promoting and facilitating the use of the NP for scientific and socio-economic research. In addition, the project will facilitate the development and maintenance of a RAPA Management Information System. Furthermore, to enhance the monitoring activities in the protected areas, the project will strengthen NAPA?s capacities for evaluating MP implementation in particular related to surveillance and law enforcement activities, through increased reporting of patrol data and indictments.

All necessary elements for establishing an appropriate Performance Monitoring System reinforced by a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan, will also be supported by the project through the exploration of potential Information Systems that will organize a data repository (often geo-referenced), and will manage key numeric information.

Component 3. Support to national level adoption and up scaling of sustainable PAs management best practices

The third component aims to ensure lessons learned and experiences gained during the project?s life time are captured in a meaningful and accessible way so that they can be institutionalized and replicated in other Albanian PAs. Component 3 is composed of one Outcome as described below:

Outcome 3.1: Lessons learned, and experiences gained in the establishment and management of the Albanian Alps NP captured and applied to the wider national PA system

While many lessons will be learned during this project, all lessons will specifically incorporate and pay particular consideration of two cross-cutting elements. Firstly, due consideration will be given as to the replicability and upscaling of the relevant activities, and secondly, focusing on experiences and lessons learned in how activities and outcomes can ensure gender inclusivity and responsiveness. Outcome 3.1 is composed of 2 separate outputs, as following:

Output 3.1.1: In depth evaluation of the critical lessons learned during the establishment and initial management of the NP captured and documented

This output will support the effective and systematic creation, documentation, and knowledge sharing of the project?s results with outside experts, policy-makers, scientists and other stakeholders from across the region and beyond. A gender-sensitive/responsive knowledge management and communications strategy will be developed at the start of the project to support implementation and replication of project activities. Knowledge management activities will include, among others: i) dissemination of best practices, cross-site visits at local and national levels; ii) regular coordination

meetings with other projects and institutions working on similar issues at national/regional level, and; iii) information exchange with other protected areas related projects at the regional level. Moreover, the knowledge management strategy will guide how to collect and analyze the information, and make them available for the participating local communities and beyond.

The project will establish an online information portal/knowledge management platform. The platform will generate and systematically document lessons learned that will contribute to the understanding of the complex dynamics of ecosystems, their values and the multiple demands placed upon them. In particular, the project will aim to keep the platform alive and active by sharing lessons, knowledge products and become a repository for all information that can be viewed publicly.

Output 3.1.2: Positive experiences and lessons learned from Albanian Alps documented and disseminated to key national stakeholders in order to facilitate national scale application (particularly CC resilience and financing).

A high-level priority for all project actions will be to capture good practices, lessons learned, disseminate these lessons, and establish protocols for this adaptive learning to continue well beyond project implementation. The project will develop promotional materials and create pathways to share project results to inform local and national stakeholder groups. This effort will include collecting relevant information and lessons learned from the project at regular intervals, guided through the Communications and Outreach Strategy and Knowledge Management Strategy, organizing and delivering national workshops on traditional knowledge and use, natural resources, biodiversity conservation, protected areas management, and sustainable livelihoods.

A key channel for communication (project reports, newsletters, blogs and reports, social media feed, relevant news articles, photos and videos) will be via partner websites. Moreover, social media such as partners? Facebook, Twitter and Instagram will be used actively to feed information out and as a means for project staff and participants to communicate effectively with each other. A number of short promotional movies will be developed to showcase the project achievements.

In addition to making outreach material available through partner project websites, the project will support participation at international workshops to share and discuss project findings, and make presentations at relevant international/national conferences organized by others.

1.4 Alignment with the GEF-7 Focal Area Priority Programming Areas

The project will contribute to the GEF-7 Focal Area ?Biodiversity? mainly under the Priority Programming direction ?Address direct drivers to protect habitats and species? by improving financial sustainability, effective management, and ecosystem coverage of the global protected area estate. The project aims to strengthen three elements of a sustainable protected area system: 1) effective protection of ecologically viable and climate-resilient representative samples of the country?s ecosystems and adequate coverage of threatened species at a sufficient scale to ensure their long term persistence; 2) sufficient and predictable financial resources available, including external funding, to support protected area management costs; and 3) sustained individual and institutional capacity to manage protected areas such that they achieve their conservation objectives. The GEF-7 strategy prioritizes the development and implementation of comprehensive, system-level financing solutions. Based on experience from previous GEF projects that have too often been focused on business plans and strategy development, this project will dedicate adequate project resources and/or time to actual implementation of the financing strategies through piloting. Further, in line with GEF priorities, the project will support the development and integration of adaptation and resilience management measures as part of protected

area management projects. Through this project the effective and sustainable management of one of Albania's newest and largest national parks will be strengthened. All four outcomes listed below will contribute directly to the GEF BD 2-7 Objective:

Outcome 1.1: Albanian Alps National Park (NP) territory valorized, and effective and adaptive management planning put in place [including climate change resilience building, and practical implementation];

Outcome 1.2: Sustainable financing of the Albanian Alps NP in place, including sustainable financing mechanisms tested and functionally established;

Outcome 1.3: The systemic, institutional and individual level capacity needs and gaps for effectively implementing the agreed NP management plan addressed (MP program 1);

Outcome 2.1: Threats to biodiversity in the Albanian Alps addressed through the effective initiation of the updated NP management plan programs, and the development of practical experience and know-how of key stakeholders to continue implementation in the long term.

The project also contributes to the GEF 7 Biodiversity Focal Area wider strategy in the following areas:

1) Effective protection of ecologically viable and climate-resilient representative samples of the country's ecosystems and adequate coverage of threatened species at a sufficient scale to ensure their long-term persistence. The project will achieve this through:

a. Output 1.1.1: Assessment of likely climate change scenarios in the Albanian Alps landscape, implications for biodiversity, land use and livelihoods, and opportunities for mitigation/resilience building, and

b. Output 1.1.3: Validate, update and rationalize existing management plan programs based on Climate Change findings, consultation with all stakeholders, and any changes in circumstances since their initial development.

2) Sufficient and predictable financial resources available, including external funding, to support protected area management costs. The project will achieve this through:

a. Outcome 1.2: Sustainable financing of the Albanian Alps NP in place, including sustainable financing mechanisms tested and functionally established.

3) Sustained individual and institutional capacity to manage protected areas such that they achieve their conservation objectives. The project will achieve this through:

a. Outcome 1.3: The systemic, institutional and individual level capacity needs and gaps for effectively implementing the agreed NP management plan addressed.

The project will also ensure the participation and capacity building of local communities, especially women (at least 25%), in the design, implementation, and management of protected areas.

Conformity with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

In a broad sense, the current project contributes to many sustainable development goals. Nonetheless, its contribution to four SDGs stand out. These include SDGs 5, 9, 13 and 15 (see the table below).

SDG	Justification
Gender Equality (SDG 5)	The gender equality approach in the project is described below.
Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure (SDG 9)	Introduction of best practices in nature conservation sector
Climate Action (SDG 13)	Sustainable management of protected areas contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Life on Land (SDG 15)	Sustainable management of protected areas contributing to the provision of ecosystem services and biodiversity conservation in these areas.
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The project will also contribute to the national efforts toward achieving the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (1st draft), specifically target 3, ensuring protected areas are effectively and equitably managed.

1.5 Incremental cost reasoning

The incremental cost reasoning and the expected contributions from the baseline, the GEF financing and co-financing for each component is described below.

Table 9: Incremental reasoning

Baseline Scenario B (Business as Usual)	Alternative Scenario A (with project interventions)	Local/National and Global Environmental Benefits (A - B)
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Component 1. Establishing an enabling environment for effective management of the Albanian Alps National Park:

Baseline:

The Albanian government has taken significant steps to increase the extent of protected areas estate and to introduce more sustainable multi use and larger scale protected area approaches. However, under the 'business as usual' scenario, the draft Management plan (prepared in 2015) will not be updated to adequately reflect changes that have occurred in the past 6 years and would continue to contain limitations in terms of content and feasibility. As a result, selected conservation measures may not truly reflect the current situation and they would likely be significant challenges to effectively implementing the management plan and in establishing a functional NP. Without GEF support, likely climate change scenarios and their

The GEF incremental funding will support the valorization and effective and adaptive management planning of the AANP. The GEF support will help in assessing likely climate change scenarios and their implications for biodiversity, land use and livelihoods and identifying opportunities for mitigation/resilience building. This information will enable a revision of the management plan to truly identify the current conservation measures necessary to tackle existing and emerging issues of the AANP. The role of the Management Committee for protected areas in addressing constructed and planned HPPs in the AANP will be strengthened, enabling a stronger stance against unsustainable development in the region. The zonation plan will be carefully revised and adjusted, and boundaries of the AANP properly marked on the ground. These zones and boundaries will be reviewed in consultation with stakeholders. With the incremental GEF funding the project will support the update, validation and rationalization of the existing management plan for the AANP based on any changes in circumstances since their development and in consultation with all stakeholders. The incremental GEF funding will also support the comprehensive ecosystem services valuation and assessment of potential options and opportunities for sustainable financing of the AANP. The GEF funding will support the updating and adjustment of the draft financial plan for AANP, to incorporate sustainable financing mechanisms. Practical setting and implementation of at least 3 demonstrations for generating sustainable income flows for the AANP management will be supported as well. Furthermore, the incremental GEF funding will support a detailed fit for purpose? assessment of NP management and governance institutions and their legal/operational framework. Reforms and adjustments to the NP management and governance institutions will be carried out and key equipment to enable effective implementation of the management plan will be provided. A comprehensive capacity

Local/national benefits:

- ? Updated threat levels, including climate change resilience building
- ? 3 climate change scenarios
- ? Revised, updated and refined Zonation and Management Plan addressing key threats to biodiversity and sustainable livelihoods
- ? Approx. 100km of demarcated borders
- ? Surveys carried out in three municipalities (80% of those surveyed (50% M; 50%F) are aware of park boundary)
- ? 25 representatives of financial institutions trained in enforcement of environmental and social safeguards?
- ? At least 2 ecosystem services evaluated
- ? 3 financial mechanisms implemented and reviewed
- ? 20% increase in funds available to AANP management from baseline
- ? 50 stakeholder representatives of financial institutions trained in sustainable financing mechanisms piloted (At least 30% Female)
- ? 40 staff trained (at least 30% female)
- ? Institutional development plan developed
- ? # of reforms/ adjustments to government institutions identified and implemented
- ? Best practice guidelines developed/recommendations provided
- ? Improved METT score

Global benefits:

- ? Address direct drivers to protect globally important habitats and species,
- ? Improve the financial sustainability, effective management, and ecosystem coverage of the global protected area estate.

Component 2. Strengthening the practical experience and ?know-how? of the Albanian Alps NP stakeholders to address threats.

Baseline:

Under baseline conditions there will be limited or no implementation of biodiversity conservation measures in the AANP therefore threats to biodiversity will not be addressed. The existing regulations on the use of natural resources will be weakly enforced and the economic development of the area will put further pressures on natural resources. Weak capacities of law enforcement officers, private sector and community representatives on sustainable natural resource management and on the use of EIA and SEA, will continue to jeopardize implementation of regulations and management of HPPs and other infrastructure. NAPA/RAPA monitoring activities will be limited in selected areas within the park

GEF funding will address threats to biodiversity in the AANP through initiation of the updated management plan and development of practical experience of key stakeholders to continue implementation in the long term. The GEF incremental funding will support the establishment of effective biodiversity conservation measures in the AANP for example, developing appropriate monitoring protocols, threat management plans, and conservation action plans. It will support the sustainable economic development of the area through strengthening regulations and management of sustainable natural resources, livelihoods, and cultural heritage within communities in the NP in order to reduce pressures on BD and incentivize sustainable use and livelihoods, and encourage maintenance of cultural heritage. The GEF funding will strengthen regulation and management of HPPs and other infrastructure, through capacity building on EIA and SEA and training law enforcement officers, private sector and community representatives on sustainable natural resource management. Furthermore, it will support the development of educational and awareness building, and scientific research sub-programs, and support a long-term NP monitoring system including a gender-specific and sensitive approach.

Local/national benefits:

- ? 3 regulations enforced
- ? 300 people reached by awareness raising campaigns
- ? 5 monitoring protocols initiated
- ? 1 educational program implemented
- ? At least 82,000 ha of habitats targeted by conservation actions
- ? 250 ? 300 stakeholders gaining practical experience and know how (disaggregated by gender, sector, age group)
- ? 30 law enforcement officers trained on EIA/SEA
- ? At least 15 finance experts trained on EIA, SEA and additional social and environmental safeguards.

Global benefits:

- ? 82,000 ha of Terrestrial protected areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use
- ? Mainstreaming biodiversity safeguards across all economic activities
- ? community empowerment, enabling the participation and capacity building of local communities, especially women (at least 50%), in the design, implementation, and management of protected areas.

<p>Component 3. Support to national level adoption and up scaling of sustainable PAs management best practices</p> <p>Baseline: Under ?business as usual scenario? there will be no lessons learned and no best practices in the establishment and management of PA to promote at a national level.</p> <p>Probable results: ? No lessons learned ? No best practices to disseminate at national level ? Limited local knowledge build up and used for sustainable management of natural resources. ? No improvement on management across the entire PA estate</p>	<p>The incremental GEF funding will be used to capture and critically evaluate lessons learned in establishment and management of the AANP. Furthermore, positive experiences and lessons learned from Albanian Alps will be properly documented and disseminated to key national stakeholders in order to facilitate national scale application, particularly on climate change resilience and sustainable financing. The GEF funding will be used to organize and deliver national workshops on traditional knowledge and use of natural resources, biodiversity conservation and protected areas management, and on sustainable livelihoods.</p>	<p>Local/national benefits: ? 5 awareness materials disseminated ? 3 replicable good practices documents produced ? 50 key national stakeholders reached</p> <p>Global benefits: ? Improved protection of globally important habitats and species in Albania</p>
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1.6 Global environmental benefits

The project will support the efforts of the Albanian government to protect biodiversity of global importance by improving the management effectiveness of protected areas in the country. It will contribute to the valorization of the natural capital of the AANP and provide opportunities for sustainably financing the protected area's management and implementation of adequate conservation measures. The testing of pilot sustainable financing models/mechanisms will provide useful insight into the successful implementation of such mechanisms and will provide many lessons learnt for scaling up

at a national level. In addition, the experience built during the implementation of this project, such as building PA management and local communities' capacities to participate in natural resource management, and strengthening inter-institutional dialogue, can also be used for replication at a national and regional level.

Supporting Albania's biodiversity protection agenda and ensuring the sustainable and effective management of the AANP, a biologically important area, will help the country advance towards the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). Although not yet finalized the "First Draft Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework" identifies three long term goals for 2050. The project's interventions will specifically contribute towards two of them: Goal A: The integrity of all ecosystems is enhanced, with an increase of at least 15 per cent in the area, connectivity and integrity of natural ecosystems, supporting healthy and resilient populations of all species, the rate of extinctions has been reduced at least tenfold, and the risk of species extinctions across all taxonomic and functional groups, is halved, and genetic diversity of wild and domesticated species is safeguarded, with at least 90 percent of genetic diversity within all species maintained by conserving and protecting key habitats on which the AANP's biodiversity depends particularly through its Outcome 2.1. Alongside this, output 2.1.2 specifically will support the sustainable economic development of communities in and around the protected area which helps Albania's contributions to both the First Draft Post-2020 GBF Goal B: Nature's contributions to people are valued, maintained or enhanced through conservation and sustainable use supporting the global development agenda for the benefit of all as well as Goal 15 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: to develop and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

Specifically, and directly, by ensuring the inclusive and effective management of this globally important area, the project will support the country's contributions to the First Draft GBF's Target 3. Ensure that at least 30 per cent globally of land areas and of sea areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and its contributions to people, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes.

The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 contains specific commitments and actions to be delivered by 2030, including establishing a larger EU-wide network of protected areas on land and at sea, building upon existing Natura 2000 areas, with strict protection for areas of very high biodiversity and climate value. Moreover, a series of concrete commitments and actions shall be undertaken to restore degraded ecosystems across the EU by 2030, and manage them sustainably, addressing the key drivers of biodiversity loss. The AANP is thought to house 28 habitats of EU community conservation interest, four of which are priority habitats and listed in the annex of the Habitat Directive and as such require specific conservation measures. The Albanian Alps area has also been included in the List of Areas of Special Conservation Interest under the EMERALD network and is part of the European Green Belt. Further, housing one of the Country's most important watersheds, which provides water to thousands of Albanians as well as its bordering countries, makes the protection of this watershed crucial to support the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, an important contribution considering the country's advancement toward EU accession.

The Protection of Nature and Biodiversity is one of the five pillars of the Western Balkans Green Agenda, as well as central to the European Green Deal. The main priorities for the Western Balkan

region are to halt biodiversity loss, to integrate the EU Biodiversity Strategy targets and ensure enforcement of Birds and Habitats Directives. It highlights the protection and coordinated sustainable management of the transboundary clusters of protected areas. As a large landscape level protected area bordering Prokletije National Park in Montenegro and Bjeshkët e Namuna National Park in Kosovo (under UNSCR 1244/99), the sustainable, inclusive and effective management of the AANP is even more important for the region.

Additional benefits of the project include:

- ? Enhancing capacity of the country to implement MEAs (multilateral environmental agreements);
- ? Providing ways and means for reducing and mitigating the effects of anthropogenic transformation, habitat fragmentation and degradation;
- ? Providing global support for maintaining UNESCO World Heritage status for beech forests of the area as part of the Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe;
- ? Increasing the competence of the next generation concerning the central importance of sustainable use of local natural resources.

Lastly, the Project will contribute to the following GEF-7 Core Indicators (see Annex F) specifically: Core Indicator 1. Terrestrial protected areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use (hectares) ? 82,568 ha

Sub-Indicator 1.2. Terrestrial protected areas under improved management effectiveness

This indicator refers to the number of hectares of protected area whose management has been improved. The main data source for this indicator is the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) score, which is calculated using the GEF-7 BD tracking tool . The METT was originally developed by the World Wildlife Fund and the World Bank Forests Alliance for Forest Conservation and Sustainable Use. It has been applied as the main qualitative measure of management effectiveness at protected areas since 2001 . Any increase in METT score from the baseline, will satisfy the threshold for this indicator. Additional analysis of increases in METT scores could further characterize these changes.

Core Indicator 11. Number of direct beneficiaries disaggregated by gender as co-benefit of GEF investment: Direct benefits to at least 82,000 people (approx. 41,000 men and 41,000 women).

This indicator captures the total number of individual people who will receive targeted support from the project and/or who use the specific resources that the project maintains or enhances. Reporting disaggregated by sex (male, female) is mandatory. Targeted support is the intentional and direct assistance of a project to individuals or groups of individuals who are aware that they are receiving that support and/or who use the specific resources. Direct beneficiaries are all individuals receiving targeted support from the project, including for example all relevant staff within the PA agency benefiting from project activities on strengthening institutional capacity of the PA system, or local communities benefiting from protection of traditional livelihoods and customary rights; and environmental and other benefits from avoided and degradation of natural resources.

1.7 Innovativeness, sustainability and potential for scaling up

Innovativeness: This process will recognize and highlight that the adequate representation and active involvement of local communities and the private sector are key to ensure sustainable outcomes.

Although individually such actions are not necessarily ?innovative? per se, the focused and explicit

recognition of the need to address them in an integrated manner in order to achieve an effectively functioning NP is a relatively new concept in Albania.

The project will address, in a systematic and integrated manner the establishment of a truly effective, functional and sustainable management system for the newly established Albanian Alps National Park. Critical to achieving this, is the focus on pragmatically reviewing the draft management plan and realistically identifying and fulfilling, the systemic, institutional, and individual level gaps for actually applying the proposed management interventions. The project however, goes even further and, in recognition of past lessons learned, will focus efforts in facilitating the smooth transition from plan to practical, a crucial step often missed when trying to enhance management effectiveness.

The project will support the practical application, testing and local adaption of a wide range of innovative natural resources management approaches new to Albania, most crucially integrated conservation approaches that seek to coordinate and synergize socio-economic, land use management, biodiversity conservation and ecosystem service maintenance issues, which were previously approached in a sectorial manner. In order to create the 'tools' for achieving this, the project will introduce, test and locally adopt innovative approaches to the valuation of functional landscapes and management of specific natural resources (forestry, pasture, arable land, etc.) that respond to the practical political, socio-economic, demographic and climate change conditions that now exist in the country. At the site level, the project will introduce and demonstrate a range of innovative good practices and approaches based on the regional and international experience and lessons learned. Furthermore, the value of integrated landscape-scale approaches to biodiversity conservation at a national scale and of sustainable rural livelihoods will be demonstrated, economic justifications proven, and the capacity and experience to monitor and replicate them put in place.

Finally, the project intends to support and hopes to become a model, for demonstrating effective approaches and 'good practices' for addressing one of the most significant environmental threats currently faced in Albania mountains and the wider Balkans region, namely inappropriate and economically questionable HPP development.

Sustainability: The main risks to the sustainable effective management of the AANP is the limited systemic, institutional, and individual capacity and experience of all stakeholders (from national authorities, financial institutions down to the NP direct management institution, local non-government organizations and rural communities themselves) to work constructively together to apply the new approaches necessary to achieve the NP objectives. Additional to this is the limited historical capacity to generate sufficient financial resources to support the necessary management actions. The project seeks to address these sustainability risks in a very focused and concerted manner and thereby greatly increasing the likelihood of sustainability.

The project will focus on building targeted and priority capacity in response thorough gap assessments and will provide training manuals and guidelines that can be referred to and used beyond the project lifespan thus benefiting the entire institution and not just individuals, critical given the often-high staff turn-over in government agencies. The project will also build on previous in country initiatives and experiences to help ensure that in addition to capacities, institutions have sufficient and sustainable finances to implement conservation actions. These however in themselves, while critical, will not necessarily ensure sustainability on their own.

Central to the project approach is the adaption of current management systems and approaches to meet the existing socio-economic and political context. Stakeholder support and buy-in will be critical for any chance of sustainable project outcomes. A key aspect the project will work on, will be

strengthening the relevance of the system to the livelihoods of the rural mountainous populations and ensuring the conditions and incentives for them to pursue sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Albanian Alps. The project will ensure that key lessons learned from implementing all these actions will be captured and transitioned to the wider PA system. In this way, project efforts to impact at a national scale will be based on practical experience and an existing core level of awareness and capacity, which should enhance the sustainability of the project's impact.

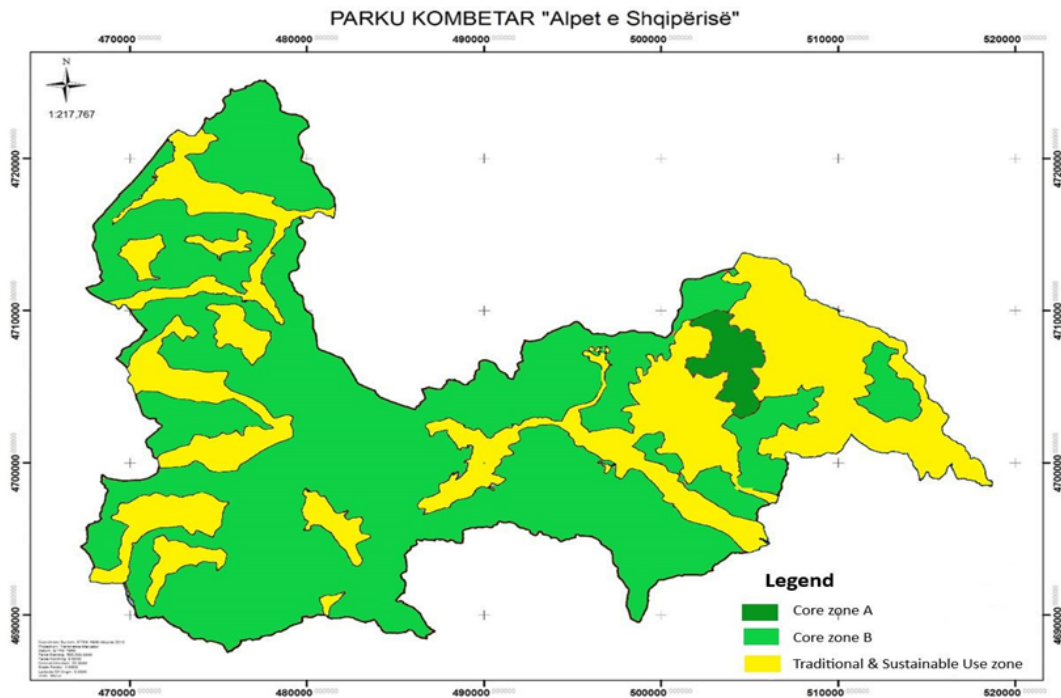
Replication: The project intends to act as a pilot for several initiatives. For example, it will select three demonstrations for implementing potential financing mechanisms. The lessons learned and emerging good practices originating from these pilots and other initiatives, will be shared with local, national and regional partners and offer the opportunity to replicate approaches that have proven to be effective and offer benefits to communities. Replication will rely heavily on the recognition by governmental institutions and their adoption of such initiatives at a wider level. Recommendations for replication and scaling up along with proposed roles and responsibilities will be developed and provided to project partners. Improved legislation, best practice guidelines, and sharing lessons learned, all key activities of the project, will facilitate the replication of several interventions (such as financial mechanisms, monitoring protocols, stakeholder collaboration etc.) across other PAs.

Scaling up: The current situation in the mountainous region of the Albanian Alps is very typical of such landscapes in the country, and hence lessons and experiences from the pilot site will have direct applicability and potential for upscaling in approx. 40-50% of the country. The project addresses the need to ensure better recognition of the wider values of functional ecosystems and the adoption of integrated and landscape scale approaches into economic and long-term development decision making and efficient planning. Through the practical on ground testing and development of approaches for addressing many of the typical threats faced in mountain areas of Albania (and the Balkans generally) such as inappropriate HHP and road infrastructure, collapse of rural livelihood options, unsustainable tourism development, etc. the project will provide scalable experiences both nationally and regionally inclusive of the private sector. The project will support testing new innovative collaborative approaches to biodiversity conservation, ecosystem service valorization, resilience and protection, effective management of PAs, forest and pasture management, sustainable tourist and nature-based approaches as possible income generating activities for the PAs at a pilot scale in the context of the AANP. Based on regional and international best practices and experience, the principles and methodologies from this experience can be applied widely. Furthermore, the project is devoting considerable resources and effort to ensuring the experience and lessons learned from the project site are meaningfully captured and transitioned into national-level awareness, capacity, policy, and planning. This provides a sound basis for real adoption and upscaling and national scale impact.

1b. Project Map and Coordinates

Please provide geo-referenced information and map where the project interventions will take place.

SHTOJCA 1



Map 5: A draft zonation map of the AANP Source: Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 59 of January 26, 2022.

A shape file of the AANP boundary is provided in Annex E.

1c. Child Project?

If this is a child project under a program, describe how the components contribute to the overall program impact.

2. Stakeholders

Select the stakeholders that have participated in consultations during the project identification phase:

Civil Society Organizations Yes

Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities

Private Sector Entities Yes

If none of the above, please explain why:

Please provide the Stakeholder Engagement Plan or equivalent assessment.

The identification of stakeholders was carried out initially during the PIF stage and has been revised following an inception meeting held in February 2022. Considering the structure of the legal framework for the process of drafting, approval and decision-making in support of socio-economic development and protection of nature and natural resources, as well as other information gathered, a list of key collaborators and stakeholders, their roles in the project and their relationship among one another was compiled.

Table 10 presents the lists of stakeholders identified along with their mandated role and if any, their expected role in the project.

Stakeholder and level	Relevance and Expected Role in Project[1] ¹
<i>National level</i>	
National Council of Territory Planning	<p><i>Key and provide guidance</i></p> <p>Responsible institution for making decisions in sector planning documents that have an effect on the environment. It gives national importance to the territories given to a project or to an object that can be built, approves the detailed development plans based on the national importance of the proposed project area and also gives importance to the areas considered in the General Development Plan of the Territory.</p> <p>-The NCT will be an important stakeholder during the approval and finalization for the management plan for the Albanian Alps NP, and ensure integration to other strategic documents for the Albanian Alps</p>
Council of Ministers (CM)	<p><i>Key and provide guidance</i></p> <p>It is the highest and most powerful executive and decision-making institution on environmental issues. It proposes and approves environmental legislation in general and in particular on various environmental issues (such as nature protection, natural protected areas, flora, fauna, biodiversity, forests, fisheries, water management, mining, energy, management plans, etc.). The Council of Ministers may declare, remove or change the status of protected areas in Albania. The CM has approved the National Sectoral Plan for Tourism in the Albanian Alps Region ? and provides funds for projects implemented in this context.</p>
Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MTE)	<p><i>Direct beneficiary and Lead Executing Agency</i></p> <p>The Ministry of Tourism and Environment is the main national institution responsible for drafting policies and programs for environmental governance, biodiversity conservation, protected areas, forest and pasture management and climate change. The Focal Point for UNCBD and GEF lies within the Ministry. -MTE is a key to project execution as main body responsible for the implementation/execution of project activities. Specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Substantive review and backstopping, with a focus on coordination of efforts and effective project delivery -Hosting the Project Steering Committee and coordinating the participation of other Ministries, state agencies and other stakeholders; -Responsible/owner of the integrated BD monitoring and reporting system

Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy (MIE)	<p><i>Collaborating Partner</i></p> <p>Responsible for the design and implementation of general State policies for urban planning and the development sector, the infrastructure and transport sector, telecommunications and postal services, the energy sector, energy resource utilization, and the mining industry sector. MIE is responsible in awarding licences/ concessions on HPPs and other major infrastructure. MIE as the lead institution responsible for the implementation of the National Energy and Climate Plan of the Republic of Albania chairs the Inter-Ministerial Energy and Climate Committee (IECC).</p> <p>MIE will also be an important stakeholder to engage when revising the zonation of the PA.</p>
Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD)	<p><i>Collaborating Partner</i></p> <p>Responsible for regulating and the sustainable management of the agricultural sector including: irrigation systems, drainage, and flood protection; fisheries, ensuring the protection of species and internal waters, through the promotion of sustainable development of the activity; and rural development. This Ministry will be engaged significantly regarding pilot livelihood initiatives of the project. The Ministry is responsible for drafting and approving the IPARD and national scheme assistance to farmers and foresters.</p>
Ministry of Interior	<p><i>Collaborating Partner</i></p> <p>The Ministry of Interior exercises its activity, in accordance with the relevant legislation, mainly, but not only, in the areas of state responsibility of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>a) the activity of the prefect of the region;</i> <i>b) coordination with local government units and associations of local elected officials;</i> <i>c) policy making, coordination and supervision of the fire protection service;</i> <i>d) prevention, protection, supervision and control / inspection of the implementation of the legislation in force for the protection of land / territory, air, water and forests from pollution, damage or illegal interference of any kind.</i> <p>The Ministry of Interior has under its dependency the entire local government structure, such as Municipalities and Municipal Councils and County Councils.</p>
Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MHSP)	<p><i>Providing guidance</i></p> <p>The Ministry of Health and Social Protection will be an important partner and collaborator with respect to the gender perspectives of this project.</p>

Ministry of Finance and Economy (MFE)	<p><i>Collaborating partner</i></p> <p>Responsible for economic stability through efficient, effective and transparent management of public finances. The Ministry of Finance exercises its activity through these areas of state responsibility: Macroeconomic and fiscal policy; Income administration; State Budget Administration; Public debt management; Financial administration; Financial management and control; European Union financial assistance management and EU fund management; Public financial inspection; General Internal Audit Coordination.</p> <p>-An important stakeholder for the project to be included in the development of the different financial mechanisms to support the sustainable development of the Albanian Alps.</p>
Ministry of Culture (MC)	<p><i>Collaborating partner</i></p> <p>This Ministry defines, prepares, implements programs, and develops national policies related to culture. It is responsible for the country's cultural heritage, material and spiritual growth of religious tolerance and cultural dialogue, and cultural integration into the family of European and world, in line with the government of the Republic of Albania. -An important stakeholder for the project to be included in the development of the different financial mechanisms to support the sustainable development of the Albanian Alps (cultural tourism, protection and development of heritage values of the Albanian Alps, integration with cultural activities happening regionally or internationally).</p>
Ministry of Education Sports and Youth (MESY)	<p><i>Collaborating Partner</i></p> <p>This stakeholder is to be consulted and engaged especially during the implementation of activities under <u>Output 1.1.6</u>: Support to the development of educational and awareness building, and scientific research sub-programs, and a long-term NP monitoring system (MP program 4)</p>
Ministry of Defence	<p><i>Collaborating partner</i></p> <p>Ministry of Defence is a stakeholder to be consulted and engaged especially during the cooperation with civil emergency structures in regional and local level to support the touristic activities in Alps? area to ensure their security and developing the humanitarian operations/missions. The role of this ministry for the project will be utilized in order to strengthen communications and coordination and build synergies with local institutions especially in response to civil emergencies, fires, flooding and natural disasters in the protected area of the Albanian Alps.</p>

National Agency of Protected Areas (NAPA)	<p><i>Direct Beneficiary and executing agency</i></p> <p>Responsible for the management of the network of protected areas of national and international interest, collection and dissemination of information, environmental education, public awareness for protected areas and support of sustainable economic activities within these areas. NAPA operates in the whole territory of the Republic of Albania. It directs the work for the development and implementation of strategies, policies and programs for protected areas, in collaboration with field experts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Its main role will be coordination with national stakeholders and local stakeholders, -providing necessary information on existing PAs, and their management regime, -provide guidance with regards to future plans and other ongoing or future projects - coordination with local entities such as RAPAs, information centers and other local stakeholders. -NAPA is the main beneficiary of the project
National Environment Agency (NEA)	<p><i>Executing Partner</i></p> <p>Responsible for protecting the environment, and exercising the functions entrusted by the laws "On Environmental Protection", "On environmental permits", "On environmental impact assessment" and the respective bylaws.</p> <p>-As an entity under the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, the NEA is part of the main executing entity of the proposed project. Its main role will be coordination with national stakeholders and local stakeholders.</p>
National Forest Agency (NFA)	<p><i>Collaborating Partner</i></p> <p>Responsible for the good governance of the forestry sector, since the Albanian Alps is one of the most important forested areas in the country, this stakeholder will be highly engaged in the management planning of the NP, as well as in activities for stakeholder engagement and capacity raising.</p>
National Agency for Tourism (NAT)	<p><i>Executing Partner</i></p> <p>This is an agency that is dependent on and reports to the Ministry of Tourism and Environment. It is responsible for the marketing of the country as a tourist destination abroad. Its role in the project will be to consult and actively participate in all tourism related activities as well as the awareness raising events, distribute promotional material, while advising on the best approach to, and promoting tourism in the AANP.</p>
National Agency of Water Resource Management (NAWRM)	<p><i>Collaborating Partner</i></p> <p>It is the executive body of the National Water Council and is tasked with implementing integrated water resource management policies, approved by the NWC; coordinating and supervising the work of local water resource management units and pursuing fundraising procedures, permit applications and authorizations for the use of water resources. An important stakeholder to be consulted and engaged for gathering and sharing information on the water resources and their use in the Albanian Alps, as well as mainstreaming specific measures and build synergies into the water management plan of the Drin ? Buna river basin crossing the Albanian Alps.</p>

State Agency of Cadastre	<p><i>Collaborating Partner</i></p> <p>The State Cadastre Agency regulates the public real estate registration service as the institution responsible for the service and the way of cadastre administration, as a public real estate register. The role of this institution will be required for the process of transferring the land registration of the newly declared protected areas of the Albanian Alps National Park from the three municipalities of Shkoder, Malesi e Madhe, Tropoje to the National Agency of Protected Area, a process which will be facilitated by the project.</p>
The National Agency for Territorial Planning (NATP)	<p><i>Key and provide guidance</i></p> <p>This agency is responsible for coordinating the processes of the development of territorial planning projects undertaken by central and / or local planning authorities. It ensures that the development and implementation of territorial plans are in accordance with the legislation by providing technical assistance to the authorities responsible for territorial planning and development. They further propose through the relevant Minister territorial development issues through the functions of the National Secretariat of the National Territorial Council. This agency will help mainstream the AANP management plan into the previously drafted vision and strategies and regulations of the Local Development Plans for the three municipalities of Shkoder, Malesi e Madhe and Tropoje.</p>
Territory Development Agency (TDA)	<p><i>Key and provide guidance</i></p> <p>The Agency performs the functions of the technical secretariat of the National Council of the Territory (NCT). The Agency ensures that the development control documents, at central and local level, are in accordance with the provisions of this law and with the approved planning documents at each level. All PA's are considered territories of national importance for the NCT, thus any development in this area will require an approval from the NCT, and a technical review from the TDA. The role of this agency for the project will be to improve and facilitate coordination between the Municipalities of Shkoder, Malesie e Madhe and Tropoje and the NAPA and RAPA with regards to any and all building permits in and around the AANP.</p>
National Agency of Natural Resources (NANR)	<p><i>Collaborating Partner</i></p> <p>Responsible for regulating and overseeing the development and use of natural resources in the country.</p> <p>-The NANR is an important stakeholder for collecting and sharing information on the ongoing activities such as mining, resource extraction, HPPs etc. in the PAs as well as the valorization of the PAs of the Albanian Alps region.</p>

<p>National Agency for Water Supply and Sewerage and Waste Infrastructure (AKUM)</p>	<p><i>Collaborating Partner</i></p> <p>The National Agency for Water Supply and Sewerage and Waste Infrastructure is the only state body specialized in the field of drinking water supply, sewage and white water and their treatment (water infrastructure). It technically supports the policies of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy, in accordance with the legislation and policies of the Government set out in the sector strategies.</p> <p>The role of AKUM in the field of its activity is to realize through its legal and technical authority, the coordination and monitoring of the activity for the provision of water supply, sewerage of used water and their treatment for the entire population of the country, in cooperation with local governments and water infrastructure management entities. This agency will be consulted on project activities related to sharing information and coordinating ongoing projects for building and improving the water supply, sewerage and waste infrastructure in the area of the Albanian Alps.</p>
<p>Agency of Agricultural and Rural Development (AARD)</p>	<p><i>Collaborating Partner</i></p> <p>The Agency for Agricultural and Rural Development rigorously follows and implements the Law on Agriculture No. 9817, dated 22.10.2007 of the respective DCMs ?On determining the basic criteria of the sectors to be supported and the measures to benefit from the program fund for agriculture and rural development?, as well as ?On the management of the support fund for agriculture?, defined by relevant instructions. The Agency has carried out the approximation of its organizational structure and capacities, managerial and technical, with EU accreditation standards and has been accredited for 3 Measures by the IPARD II Program, Measure 1-Investment in physical assets on the farm, Measure 3-Investments in physical assets in the processing and marketing of agricultural and livestock products and Measure 7- Farm diversification and business development. The role of the agency in the project will be to share information and build synergies with regards to the implementation of IPARD funds in and around the Albanian Alps for the next four to five years.</p>
<p>Directorate of Fisheries and Aquaculture Service</p>	<p><i>Collaborating Partner</i></p> <p>The mission of this Directorate is to fulfil all the necessary state services related to the management of infrastructure and data of fisheries and aquaculture, as well as to guarantee the observance of legal requirements in the protection of fisheries and aquaculture in the Republic of Albania. This is an important stakeholder to share information and consult during the revision of the AANP management plan, specifically regarding livelihoods in the area.</p>
<p>General Directorate of the National Veterinary and Plant Protection Authority</p>	<p><i>Collaborating Partner</i></p> <p>The mission of this Authority is the orientation and ensuring a sustainable development of agricultural plants in order to optimally increase production to better meet the needs of the country, minimize imports and increase opportunities for exports and support and management of this development. Agriculture is an extremely important livelihood in the Albanian Alps, particularly for women, therefore, the Directorate will be an important stakeholder to share information and consult with during the revision of the AANP management plan, as well as during the implementation of measures proposed by the plan, or related pilot activities undertaken by the project.</p>

National Inspectorate of Territorial Defense (NITD)	<p><i>Collaborating Partner</i></p> <p>Responsible for the compliance of legal requirements in the field of protection of environment and forests. -This institution and its extension offices in the territory will be engaged considerably to effectively coordinate efforts at the local level for the detection of illegal activities in and around the protected area in collaboration with other local institutions. This will be an active stakeholder not only during the zoning of the AANP but all throughout the project implementation in order to foster better communication and coordination with the RAPA in the implementation of its functional duties for the protection of the AANP.</p>
Municipalities and Municipal Councils (Munic)	<p><i>Beneficiaries and Key Collaborating Partners</i></p> <p>The three identified municipalities in the PA (Shkoder, Tropoje, Malesie Madhe), are an important partner to include in most project activities, especially the activities conducted in the local areas, involving engagement consensus building as well as improved coordination and information sharing with local community members, private sector, entrepreneurs and other actors in the area.</p>
National Agency for Civil Protection (AKMC)	<p><i>Collaborating Partner</i></p> <p>Civil Protection aims to create conditions for a society capable of reducing the risks of disasters, to prevent, prepare, cope with disasters and to recover, through an integrated and efficient system of civil protection in the Republic of Albania.</p> <p>The National Agency for Civil Protection (AKMC) is a central public legal entity, under the Minister responsible for civil protection and responsible for reducing the risk of disasters and civil protection, throughout the territory of the Republic of Albania.</p> <p>AKMC exercises coordination, coordination, management, technical, supervisory and control authority in the field of disaster risk reduction and civil protection. This is an important stakeholder to be included during the revision of the management plan, as well as to be better engaged with the RAPAs in the execution of their duties to monitor activities in the AANP related to civil protection and natural disasters.</p>
<i>Regional</i>	
Prefecture office (Pref)	<p><i>Collaborating Partner</i></p> <p>Maintains, pursues, and takes measures to ensure that all institutions at the regional level meet the obligations that they have to guarantee sovereignty, constitutional order and public health. It supervises, controls and coordinates the activity of central institutions at local level as well as with the local government bodies in the municipalities.</p> <p>-The Prefect chairs the Protected Areas Management Committee, and thus is an important stakeholder to ensure coordination among regional and local institutions to the benefit of protected areas management.</p>

Regional Administration of Protected Areas (RAPA)	<p><i>Beneficiary and execution of activities</i></p> <p>RAPA is the regional arm of NAPA and is responsible for protected areas occurring in its region.</p> <p>-The role of the RAPA (Kukës and Shkodra) in the project will be to provide information on existing work undertaken in the Albanian Alps protected areas</p> <p>-participate in all the activities of the project, especially those conducted on site, designed to, revalorize, build capacity and raise awareness, improve management effectiveness of the park.</p>
River Basin Council ? Drin&Buna Rivers	<p><i>Collaborating Partner</i></p> <p>The Water Basin Council is the body responsible for the integrated management of water resources in the respective basin, at the local level. The Water Basin Council has these tasks</p> <p>a) ensures the most rational conservation and development of water resources within the boundaries of the respective water basin;</p> <p>b) ensures the fair distribution of water resources within the boundary of the respective water basin, according to the purposes of use and the direction and effective administration of them;</p> <p>c) ensures the protection of water resources from pollution, misuse and damage that affects their quality and quantity;</p> <p>?) identifies the relevant water bodies that need protection.</p> <p>The council is an important actor to be included during the revision of the AANP management plan, as well as to be consulted and share date with regards to water use and HPPs, while its presence will also be crucial in strengthening the role of the AANP management committee.</p>
Albanian Development Fund	<p><i>Collaborating Partner</i></p> <p>The Albanian Development Fund is a development organization with a long-standing experience in the development of infrastructure, urbanization, tourism and cross border interaction. The ADF is responsible for executing government infrastructure development projects and programs in Albania. Their activity in the Albanian Alps has started since 2017 and is ongoing. Building a relationship with the ADF and ensuring good collaboration will be essential to ensure that any negative effects on the environment as a result of planned infrastructure development are considered and minimized</p>
National NGOs	<p><i>Collaborating Partner</i></p> <p>The non-governmental organization INCA (Institute for Nature Conservation in Albania), who was involved in the elaboration of the draft Management Plan for the Albanian Alps, will provide any documentations and clarifications on the existing management plan, as well as provide support during the updating and revising of the management plan, and its corresponding programs.</p> <p>The Urban Research Institute (URI) with more than 22 years of experience on environment, tourism, governance, and local development projects in Albania.</p>

Banks and Financial Institutions	<p><i>Direct beneficiary</i></p> <p>The Albanian Association of Banks is the main institution that provides financial education, capacity development and awareness raising for second tier banks and lending institutions in Albania. This will be an important partner in developing the training for increased social and environmental safeguards for HPPs, and other infrastructural developments. They are also an important stakeholder as they could be supporting the local activities through key investment portfolio or loans schemes for local community and businesses</p>
Private Sector	<p><i>Engagement</i></p> <p><i>Local HPP operators and other major infrastructure developers to be engaged and included in project activities in order to reduce environmental and social impacts.</i></p>
Academia	
Universities and Research Institutions (Research)	<p><i>Consulting partner</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - University of Tirana (Faculty of Natural Sciences, Research Centre for Flora and Fauna) - Agriculture University of Tirana (Faculty of Forest Sciences, Faculty of Agriculture and Environment) - University of Shkodra ?Luigi Gurakuqi? <p>Universities are the responsible bodies in Albania, engaged by the NEA in biodiversity monitoring. These stakeholders are to be consulted and engaged especially during the implementation of activities under Outcome 1.1 and Outcome 1.3, particularly in relation to the development of scientific research sub-programs, and a long-term NP monitoring system and valorization studies.</p>
Local Level	

Local Communities and community groups

Key resource users, beneficiaries and collaborating partners

Communities will be engaged to revise the management plan and will be part of several capacity building and livelihood initiatives of the project. There are several CBOs of relevance to the project in the area, who will be engaged:

-**Shkreli Farmer Association** was established in 2002 and focuses on medicinal plants. It brings together 120 farmers in and around Malesi e Madhe.

-**Echo of Kelmend** has been established in 2000 as an association focusing on cultural activities in Malesi e Madhe. It has 26 members, and it aims to promote the cultural heritage of the area.

- **AGRO-RE?I Association** was established in 2013, it has seven members, and focuses on the production, collection and post-production of chestnuts, cheese and medicinal plants.

-**The Albanian Alps Alliance** is a group of non-profit organizations operating in the Shkodra region in the field of environmental protection, biodiversity conservation, tourism development and community outreach.

-**Shepherds Association**, is a recently created association in Malesi e Madhe with offices in Kelmend. The objective of the association is to evaluate and aid the shepherds of the area of Kelmend and Peja, in their seasonal activities, with the condition of their facilities, identify tourism opportunities and the values of the natural resources they use.

Local NGOs	<p><i>Key Collaborating Partners</i></p> <p>They are interested in communication, awareness and education issues related to the protection of the natural environment, biodiversity and landscape. Currently, the following organizations are locally active:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -NGO TOKA focuses on the protection of the Albanian Alps and the development of mountain tourism. TOKA is the only organization in Tropoja that has conducted an awareness campaign against the construction of hydropower plants within the Valbona National Park. During the last years TOKA has had a strong cooperation with WWF Adria. -NGO Integrimi is focused on helping families in need through financial assistance and soft loans for the creation of small businesses such as guesthouses, greenhouses, etc.. They also provide professional courses and training to young people. Their key financial partners are organizations such as Dorcas and Kom Over En Help. -Mary Ward Loreto organization focuses on women's rights and the prevention of women's violence. -Writers and Artists Club focuses on the promotion and support of Tropoja artists and writers. -Alpine organization is mostly focused on environmental protection. -VIS Albania is active in the Shkodra and Malesi e Madhe area. -SALVIA NORD is a group of experts with 30 years of experience in the field of medicinal and aromatic plant in the North of Albania, Koplik, Malesi e Madhe, Shkoder. -Woman to Woman is an NGO established in 2002, active in the Shkodra District, focusing on women rights, equal participation and gender violence. -Code Partners is an NGO active in the Shkodra District since 2017, supporting youth action, social cohesion and engagement of youth in rural areas. -The Center for Women Counseling and Social Services in Kukes is an NGO active in the Kukes Region, with experience in women and social issues, executing local projects focusing on women rights and gender equality.
SME (Tourist operators/ Restaurants/bars/Hotels/guest-house, hunters, farmers, beekeepers, medicinal plants collectors, agro-tourism, shepherds)	<p><i>Beneficiaries</i></p> <p>Businesses are interested in using parts of the territory for construction and socio-economic activities and tourism. They use the coastal marine territory for vacation, recreation, water and land sports activities, etc. There are some small enterprises especially hotels and restaurants that develop their activities in the area. In this list are included also some small self-employment activities like beekeepers, medicinal plants collectors and shepherds that are users of the nature resources and should be part of the interesting group as they live and exploit the area. These will be a key group to consult and collaborate with on the project for sustainable financing and livelihood development activities of the project. They will be represented in forums and committees established and in relevant training activities of the project.</p>
<i>Multilateral and bilateral donors and international organizations</i>	

<p>International organizations (Int. Org.)Bilateral development agencies</p>	<p>Collaborating Partners</p> <p>These organizations will play the role of supporting the national and local public authorities and community through funds and tools in order to facilitate the effective management of the Alps National Park.</p> <p>The most relevant ones are the United Nations (UN) Country Offices. In July 2021 the UN Country Office in Albania finalized the process of drafting and approving the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework with the Albanian Government. The document will lead UN activities for the period 2022 ? 2026. This project is included and contributes to Strategic Priority B: Sustainable, resilient and green economic growth and resource management of the Cooperation Framework. The UNCT will be attended regularly and activities will be shared with the UN team in Albania. The UN communication channels (such as the social media) will be used for information campaigns. Work and project results will be outlined, consulted and shared with other UN agencies such as UNDP, FAO, UN Women through the regular monthly UNCT meetings, as well as through other joint activities, while joint regular (by annual and annual) reporting will continue through the Joint Workplan.</p> <p>GIZ, is implementing the program Sustainable Rural Development, which was recently extended till 2025. This program aims to improve the performance of the relevant rural development stakeholders. In addition to sharing information of their ongoing activities, GIZ will also collaborate and contribute to the project with supporting action in agrotourism training, camping and medicinal and aromatic plants. (see Annex R: Stakeholder Involvement for details).</p> <p>UNDP has a long standing experience in executing projects on PAs, climate change DRR and nature protection. In addition to sharing of information and knowledge built through their Sustainable Financing project on the PAs of Dajti and Llogara, their main contribution to the project will be in evaluating financing mechanisms that will best support the AANP. (see Annex R: Stakeholder Involvement for details).</p> <p>ADA is developing several projects in the field of management of water resources, climate change and forestry. Their contribution to the project will be mainly through their information sharing with regards to climate change scenarios foreseen and developed for Albania. (see Annex R: Stakeholder Involvement for details).</p> <p>AICS, has been implementing the NaturAlbania project, to strengthen the role of national and regional institutions and local communities in managing protected areas, The areas of intervention include the municipalities of Shkodra and Mal?si e Madhe wich are part of the Albanian Alps. This project will be further replicated in Peja, Decan and Junik in the Bjeshket e Namuna National Park area for the period between 2022 ? 2024, with an approved amount of 1,800,000 Euros.</p> <p>PONT is a conservation trust fund, and is providing long-term sustainable financing to the region?s national parks and local environmental actors. PONT provides grants to the national parks and civil society organizations working to conserve the Prespa Ohrid ecoregion and the Albanian Alps National Park, (further, to be enlarged with ecological corridors (map not yet approved). Their contribution to the project is the support and funds offered for RAPAs and local NGOS for the next 10 years in the AANP.</p>
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[1] See Section 5 Stakeholder Participation for more details on participation of specific stakeholders.

Table 11, also presents an analysis carried out on the *Power* i.e the level of *influence* stakeholders have over the activities, policies and outcomes of the project, and to what level can they potential block or help achieve them, and *Interest* i.e. the level of interests the stakeholder has in, or is likely to be *affected* by the activities, policies and outcomes of the project either positively or negatively.

The stakeholder analysis deemed each stakeholder *High*, *Medium* or *Low* for both *Power* and *Influence*. Based on these allocations, each stakeholder was identified as one of the following categories.

? **Promoters** (*High Power/High Interest*): Generally, stakeholders with high power and interest in the project should be considered the priority target group of the project. Stakeholders falling into this category should be involved in the decision-making process and should be significantly engaged and managed closely for the project's duration.

? **Latents** (*High-Medium Power/Medium-Low Interest*): These are stakeholders where meeting their needs is essential to the project, these are influential, can easily become supporters or opponents. They need to be monitored and kept informed with a view to encouraging this group to increase their interest in the project.

? **Defenders** (*Medium-Low Power/High-Medium Interest*): This group of stakeholders can be advocates for project activities. Their high interest in the project should be maximized and they should be kept informed and consulted on areas of their interest.

? **Apathetics** (*Low Power/Low Interest*): Although low power and low interest, this group should be kept informed via general communication channels, with an aim to encourage a greater interest in the project's activities and outcomes.

Table 11: Stakeholder Power and Interest analysis

Stakeholder and level of responsibility	Power	Interest	Category of engagement
National Council of Territory Planning	<i>high</i>	<i>medium</i>	Latent
National Council of Water	<i>high</i>	<i>medium</i>	Latent
Council of Ministers	<i>high</i>	<i>medium</i>	Latent
Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MoTE)	<i>high</i>	<i>high</i>	Promoters
Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy (MoIE)	<i>high</i>	<i>medium</i>	Latent

Stakeholder and level of responsibility	Power	Interest	Category of engagement
Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD)	<i>high</i>	<i>medium</i>	Promoters
Ministry of Interior	<i>medium</i>	<i>medium</i>	Latent
Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MHSP)	<i>medium</i>	<i>low</i>	Latent
Ministry of Finance and Economy (MoFE)	<i>high</i>	<i>medium</i>	Latent
Ministry of Culture (MC)	<i>medium</i>	<i>medium</i>	Latent
Ministry of Education Sports and Youth (MESY)	<i>medium</i>	<i>medium</i>	Latent
Ministry of Defence	<i>medium</i>	<i>medium</i>	Latent
National Agency of Protected Areas (NAPA)	<i>high</i>	<i>high</i>	Promoters
National Environment Agency (NEA)	<i>high</i>	<i>high</i>	Promoters
National Forest Agency (NFA)	<i>high</i>	<i>high</i>	Promoters
National Agency for Tourism (NAT)	<i>high</i>	<i>high</i>	Promoters
National Agency of Water Resource Management (NAWRM)	<i>medium</i>	<i>medium</i>	Latent
State Agency of Cadastre	<i>medium</i>	<i>medium</i>	Latent
The National Agency for Territorial Planning (NATP)	<i>high</i>	<i>high</i>	Promoters
Territory Development Agency (TDA)	<i>high</i>	<i>high</i>	Promoters
National Agency of Natural Resources (NANR)	<i>high</i>	<i>high</i>	Promoters
National Agency for Water Supply and Sewerage and Waste Infrastructure (AKUM)	<i>medium</i>	<i>low</i>	Latent
Agency of Agricultural and Rural Development (AARD)	<i>high</i>	<i>high</i>	Promoters
National Food Authority	<i>medium</i>	<i>low</i>	Latent
Directorate of Fisheries and Aquaculture Service	<i>medium</i>	<i>low</i>	Latent
General Directorate of the National Veterinary and Plant Protection Authority	<i>medium</i>	<i>low</i>	Latent
National Inspectorate of Territorial Defence (NITD)	<i>medium</i>	<i>medium</i>	Latent
Municipalities and Municipal Councils (Munic)	<i>medium</i>	<i>high</i>	Promoters
National Agency for Civil Protection (AKMC)	<i>medium</i>	<i>high</i>	Promoters
Prefecture office (Pref)	<i>medium</i>	<i>high</i>	Promoters
Regional Administration of Protected Areas (RAPA)	<i>high</i>	<i>high</i>	Promoters
River Basin Council ? Drin&Buna Rivers	<i>medium</i>	<i>high</i>	Promoters
Universities and Research Institutions (Research)	<i>medium</i>	<i>high</i>	Promoters
Albanian Development Fund	<i>high</i>	<i>high</i>	Promoters
National NGOs	<i>low</i>	<i>high</i>	Defenders
Banks and Financial Institutions	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Medium</i>	Latent

Stakeholder and level of responsibility	Power	Interest	Category of engagement
HPP and other major infrastructure development operators	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Medium</i>	Latent
Local Communities and community groups	<i>low</i>	<i>high</i>	Defenders
Local NGOs	<i>low</i>	<i>high</i>	Defenders
SME (Tourist operators/ Restaurants/bars/Hotels/guest-house, hunters, farmers, beekeepers, medicinal plants collectors, agro-tourism)	<i>medium</i>	<i>high</i>	Promoters
International organizations (Int. Org.)	<i>medium</i>	<i>high</i>	Promoters
UNDP	<i>medium</i>	<i>high</i>	Promoters
Other International organizations and projects	<i>medium</i>	<i>high</i>	Promoters

Many of the above-mentioned project stakeholders were appropriately involved in the project development throughout the PPG phase of this project through different meetings and consultations. The Project Management and Implementation Unit and the Project Steering Committee will act as major stakeholder coordinators and will coordinate all necessary information, meetings and make sure that each stakeholder has a definite role in the project. The most effective and important coordination of stakeholders and information will be through continuous national and/or local stakeholder meetings that will take place throughout implementation of all three components of the project and will involve all identified stakeholders.

Stakeholder consultation and engagement methods

There are a variety of engagement techniques used to build relationships with, gather information from, consult with, and disseminate project information to stakeholders. When selecting appropriate engagement methods culturally appropriate consultation methods, and the purpose for engaging with a stakeholder group will be considered.

Guiding principles during consultations and other forms of engagement are commitment, integrity, respect, transparency, inclusiveness and trust. Through these principles the project will be able to engage the stakeholders, understand their needs and values, respond to specific concerns and questions, ensure that a broad participation is encouraged with inclusion of vulnerable groups and ultimately building mutual trust in the process of formulation and implementation of the project. With upholding these principles the project is aiming to be participatory in its engagement with its stakeholders through their continuous inclusion in the formulation process and in the implementation cycle from planning to execution including monitoring, evaluation and review. The project will recognize and respect the importance of traditional knowledge, innovations and practices. It will actively work on documentation, consolidation, and dissemination of traditional best practices of sustainable management. The role of women and youth will be emphasized, in recognition of their vital role of maintaining and transferring traditional knowledge and practices, therewith supporting the empowerment, participation and leadership of women and youth[2].

Stakeholder engagement is embedded in every outcome of the project through the foreseen activities inclusive of meetings, analysis, site expeditions, zoning, consultation, training, or awareness raising activities. The project will develop a knowledge management and communication strategy to ensure information dissemination and sharing of knowledge with (local, national and global) project stakeholders, making use of dissemination mechanism to share good practices, lessons learned and knowledge products for global stakeholder groups as outlined under Component 3 specific knowledge and outreach products will be made available. A detailed stakeholder engagement plan is provided in Annex R. The Stakeholder Engagement Plan includes information on how stakeholders will be involved and consulted in the project execution, including any disadvantaged or vulnerable groups/individuals, as well as how stakeholder engagement will be continuously fostered during project implementation. More detailed planning with local communities will be conducted as part of the project implementation. The goal of this Stakeholder Engagement Plan is to involve all stakeholders of the project, as early as possible in the implementation process and throughout project duration to ensure that, their views and concerns are made known and taken into consideration throughout the project implementation. Annex R provides a table of stakeholders met and meeting discussion points and outcomes during the PPG phase. The Executing Agency will continue to hold consultations throughout project implementation as deemed necessary. The Stakeholder Engagement Plan will be implemented in conjunction with the Gender Action Plan (Table 12; Annex S).

The PMU, will be responsible for implementing the stakeholder engagement plan (Annex R). It will also be responsible for monitoring and reporting on stakeholder engagement through the annual project implementation reports (PIRs). Relevant tasks have been incorporated into the Terms of Reference of the project staff (see Annex N). Budget for stakeholder engagement has been allocated through the meeting, training and travel budget lines.

In the annual PIRs, the PMU will report on the following indicators:

- i) Number of government agencies, civil society organizations, private sector, vulnerable groups and other stakeholder groups that have been involved in the project implementation phase.
- ii) Number of engagements (such as meetings, workshops, official communications) with stakeholders during the project implementation phase.
- iii) Number of grievances received and responded to/resolved (see Grievance Redress Mechanism described in the section below).

COVID-19 and stakeholder engagement

The present COVID-19 pandemic and its restrictions may influence and limit the possible engagement methods of the project. Although direct person-to-person contact is often the most desirable, the project in its preparation phase has made and, in its implementation, will make use of digital video call applications as Zoom to enable frequent consultations and dialogues with project stakeholders. Local organizations and expertise will be utilized as much as possible, and the project will adapt to the meeting and gathering restrictions as outlined and approved by the Albanian Government. During the drafting of this PPG most of the restrictions were eased off, however the project team will continue to monitor the situation. Continuous information is released and distributed by the UN Country Offices to

all UN Agencies in real time through email, and any changes to the situation will be notified and addressed immediately.

Grievance redress mechanism

The project will facilitate all stakeholders to bring forward any complaints, to be responded and addressed by the project accordingly[3]. The details of the mechanism will be further developed during the project inception phase and the project will ensure that all relevant stakeholders are informed adequately on the mechanism. The essence of the mechanism is that the project it will have a system in place through which stakeholders are able to bring forward any complaint they have regarding project interventions that have, or assessed to have, a negative impact (be it social or environmental). This could for example relate to cases where access to natural resources would be limited. The mechanism will describe the procedure of where and how complaints can be brought forward, with descriptions of a clear focal point, where grievance can be submitted. The mechanism will describe how complaints will be addressed (first through dialogue and forms of mediation to seek a resolution) and what will be done if this does not lead to consensus: unresolved complaints will be brought forward to UNEP and ultimately to GEF.

Gender Equality is strongly implemented in the project, GEF supports the empowerment, participation and leadership of local women and men in GEF-financed projects through the implementation of the provisions under the GEF Policies on *Agency Minimum Standards on Environmental and Social Safeguards* and *Gender Mainstreaming*. The project guidelines should reflect a human rights framework and be consistent with internationally recognized norms and standards affirmed by international human rights treaties and instruments such as UNDRIP.

[1] See Annex R

[2] GEF (2012), Articles 39 and 41

[3] GEF (2012) Articles 42-44

In addition, provide a summary on how stakeholders will be consulted in project execution, the means and timing of engagement, how information will be disseminated, and an explanation of any resource requirements throughout the project/program cycle to ensure proper and meaningful stakeholder engagement

Select what role civil society will play in the project:

Consulted only; Yes

Member of Advisory Body; Contractor;

Co-financier; Yes

Member of project steering committee or equivalent decision-making body;

Executor or co-executor;

Other (Please explain)

3. Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Provide the gender analysis or equivalent socio-economic assesment.

Gender inequality and social exclusion increase the negative effects of environmental degradation on women and girls. The Gender Equality Index for Albania is seven points less than the combined score for EU countries. Although the country has made strides to put women and girls at the forefront of national priorities, the country still needs to strengthen the implementation of laws and policies, accountability, and monitoring mechanisms to ensure the achievement of all gender related targets in the Sustainable Development Goals. Wide gender gaps in economic opportunities continue with fewer women participating in the workforce than men (Female: 61.6%; Male 77.6%) and there remains strong occupational stereotypes, limiting women's and girls' choices. Agriculture remains the primary employer for women (41.6% compared to 32.3% men). The concentration of women and girls in the informal economy and in few sectors also stunts the overall economic growth of the country, when there is growing consensus that Albania needs to increase productivity and diversify employment and education opportunities (e.g. towards science, ITC, and entrepreneurship). Women's participation in business increased during the last decade, with 25.4% of women owning or managing a business. However, the majority of women's enterprises are under-capitalized micro/small businesses in mostly informal and lower value-added sectors (e.g. in manufacturing and agriculture). Women's active participation in private sector development remains low, especially for women in rural areas, and the impact of discriminatory gender norms and behaviors is found at all levels. While women formally enjoyed equal rights to inheritance and ownership of land and property, over 80% of land titles remain in the name of the 'head of household' (mainly husbands, fathers-in-law, brothers, fathers, grandfathers), thus limiting women's entitlements to productive resources^[1]. A similar pattern is observed in the Albanian Alpine region. In Tropoja Municipality, although not fully verified, it is thought that 34.5% of women are employed of which 2% hold executive positions and 35% of businesses are registered in women's names, most of which however are family owned.

The development and implementation of environmental and social safeguards are essential to incorporate at any project development, and gender-responsiveness is a critical and cross-cutting element that should be incorporated into project interventions. In order to fully develop gender-related safeguards a thorough understanding of women's role, in the local context and the impacts of climate change on their well-being is required.

This project will mainstream gender equality and women's empowerment into project activities by ensuring that women have an equal voice in project implementation, as well as AANP governance, and will play an active role during the entire project. Women will participate equally with men in any dialogue or decision-making initiated by the project, and will influence decisions that will determine the success of the project and ultimately the future of their families. In the Kukes region, the last election showed a relatively equal participation by men and women (49.19%F: 50.81%M). The project will adopt UNEP's commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment and taking into account the differences, needs, roles and priorities of men and women. The project is consistent with the GEF Policy on Gender Equality (GEF/C.53/04, October 2017) and is also in line with the UNCCD Decisions 21/COP.9, 11/COP.8, 15/COP.5, 15/COP.4, 15/COP.3 and 13/COP.2.

To promote gender equality and the empowerment of women, the project conducted stakeholder consultations to understand, among others, the context on gender and identify specific dimensions and entry points for gender mainstreaming. Based on these consultations, a gender-responsive approach has been identified for the project outcomes, outputs, and activities, and specific gender-sensitive indicators have been developed for the proposed project and integrated into the project results framework for implementation. Gender aspects are cross-cutting and multi-dimensional and therefore it is imperative to recognize and deal with differentiated situation and needs of women, men and various social groups at all phases of the project and secure their equal participation as an essential ground for successful project implementation. This will further facilitate engaging local women, men and different social groups in more appropriate utilization of natural resources as well as improving their capacities towards climate change resilience building processes and sustainable PA management.

How the project intends to integrate gender in its planning, implementation and monitoring

Consultations were held during the project development phase, through close collaboration with local people, organizations and key and relevant members of the communities located in the project areas ? particularly with women and women representatives.

This project intends to use a pragmatic approach to integrate gender across all levels and processes of the project life cycle. This approach is guided by several principles put in place from the project development to be further integrated into the project implementation. The principles include:

- i. Integrate gender from the inception of the project and develop a gender pro-active approach at the earliest stages of the project implementation. An early recognition and sensitization of

the project staff and key stakeholders is a prerequisite to come to an effective approach to addressing gender issues that affect men and women's participation in project activities.

ii. Hire staff with expertise in gender issues at the start of the project to ensure and oversee the integration of gender across the project. At least two women organizations have been identified in the project area to help facilitate the project to be more proactive in its gender considerations and actions.

iii. Adopt a proactive gender and development approach that engages men and women to promote gender equality and transform gender relations in project locations. Using a win-win approach in which men and women perceive gains in shifting gender norms is also important to support sustainable change.

iv. Include gender considerations into the Results Framework with specific targets.

v. Integrate gender evenly and consistently across all project objectives to achieve the intended impact of promoting gender equality.

The project-related gender indicators will include but not limited to: (i) number of female staff and women trained by the project (presented as numbers, percentages over time); (ii) number of female staff and women that participate and play a role in project activities (data on rates and percentages).

Annex S provides a Gender Action Plan with Table 12 below presenting an overview with indication of the activities and related responsibilities in the execution of the various project outputs.

Table 12: Gender Action Plan

<i>Output</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Gender dimension</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>
1.1.1: Assessment of likely climate change scenarios in the Albanian Alps landscape, implications for biodiversity, land use and livelihoods, and opportunities for mitigation/resilience building.	Use models to assess the impact of climate change scenarios on biodiversity, land use patterns and livelihoods of local communities. Identify any opportunities for mitigation and resilience building measures.	Impacts on livelihoods and local community as well as resilience building measures opportunities identified to provide disaggregated data for women and men.	<i>PMU and Climate expert.</i>

<i>Output</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Gender dimension</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>
1.1.3: Support to the field demarcation process of the Albanian Alps NP boundaries and zones following an in-depth review and adjustment of draft NP boundary and zonation plans (based any changes in circumstances since initially developed, stakeholder consultation, and identified climate change factors).	<p>Carry out a review in participation with stakeholders, of the existing zonation plan(s) while considering any new data on the values and threats to those values, including climate change.</p> <p>Carry out a public awareness campaign of the boundaries and the zonation of the Albanian Alps National Park.</p>	Ensure high participation of women in consultation and public awareness events.	<i>PMU</i>
1.1.4: Validate, update, and rationalize existing (draft) management plan (including sub-programs) for the Albanian Alps NP based on any changes in circumstances since their initial development, consultation with all stakeholders, identified CC responses.	<p>Carry out a socio-economic assessment of the local community livelihoods and development opportunities within the AANP.</p> <p>Review and update the management plan in participation with stakeholders</p> <p>Develop and implement a solid stakeholder consultation plan.</p>	<p>Develop disaggregated data for women and men for the socio-economic assessment, with diverse and specific livelihoods opportunities.</p> <p>Target specific stakeholder consultation plan in order to ensure high participation of women.</p>	<i>PMU, Socio-economic expert, and communication expert.</i>

<i>Output</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Gender dimension</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>
<p>1.2.3: Support to the practical setting up and implementation of at least 3 demonstrations for generating sustainable income for the NP (depending on those identified as viable under Outcome 1.2 and incorporated into NP financing Plan)</p>	<p>Identify and support all steps required to functionally establish at least three demonstrations of most viable financing mechanisms</p> <p>Provide on-going support and guidance to implementing parties (RAPA, private businesses, local user groups) on both the management and longer-term development of these financing opportunities.</p> <p>Organize stakeholder consultations on the identification and implementation of the financial mechanisms.</p>	<p>Engage women organizations in order to identify and support financing mechanisms that are equally beneficial to both men and women.</p> <p>Engage high participation of women in stakeholder consultations.</p>	<p><i>PMU, experts, RAPA.</i></p>

<i>Output</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Gender dimension</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>
<p>1.3.2: Reforms and adjustments of the NP management and governance institutions and legal/operational frameworks carried out, and key equipment provided, to enable effective implementation of management plan.</p>	<p>Identify any gaps in legislation and provide recommendations to improve/clarify the legal framework for the effective management of the AANP</p> <p>Establish appropriate community-based structures, with agreed roles and involvement of non-government and private sector entities</p> <p>Train communities to participate in the management and sustainable use of natural resources.</p>	<p>Asses if any gender disparities are present in the legislation. Establish community-based structures with high participation of women.</p> <p>Ensure high participation of women in trainings.</p> <p>Provide training material that show gender desegregated data.</p>	<p><i>PMU, experts.</i></p>
<p>1.3.3: A comprehensive capacity development program for the NP management staff and other relevant stakeholders (based on an assessment of the gaps in skills/experience for effective implementation of the agreed MP), provision of key equipment</p>	<p>Conduct a capacity and training needs assessment for protected area management and governance (including inspection and law enforcement).</p> <p>Develop a tailor-made comprehensive training program (short and long term) and support the delivery of capacity building activities on selected priority topics</p> <p>Develop a series of manuals, guidelines and tool kits in support of the training activities and for use beyond the project's lifespan</p>	<p>Ensure high participation of women in trainings. Provide training material that show gender desegregated data.</p>	<p><i>PMU, experts.</i></p>

<i>Output</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Gender dimension</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>
<p>2.1.3: Strengthening of regulation and management of HPPs and other infrastructure, through capacity building on EIA and SEA and training law enforcement officers, private sector and community representatives on sustainable natural resource management in order to reduce pressures on BD, and of CC (MP Program 3).</p>	<p>Strengthen the efficacy of Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIA) by training and educating national and local law enforcement officers, the private sector, and community representatives, on how to better use ESIA guidelines in their planning and implementation.</p> <p>Support the organization of public consultation meetings on the issues related to infrastructure development in the area.</p>	<p>Ensure high participation of women in community engagement, organize women only meetings when necessary, work with local women NGOs.</p>	<p><i>PMU</i></p>
<p>2.1.4: Support to the development of educational and awareness building, and scientific research sub-programs, and support a long-term NP monitoring system including a gender-specific and sensitive approach (MP program 4)</p>	<p>Carry out awareness raising activities for local stakeholders and residents, visitors to the area, and national audiences, on the values and importance of the biodiversity and landscape of the AANP.</p> <p>Support the development and dissemination of outreach materials</p> <p>Develop and deliver environmental education programs in cooperation with local schools.</p> <p>Support the ?Junior Rangers? program for the AANP area.</p>	<p>Screen knowledge and outreach materials for specific gender message/content and for possible specific gender outreach products, support participation of women trainers, and junior rangers.</p>	<p><i>PMU, experts</i></p>

<i>Output</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Gender dimension</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>
<p>3.1: Lessons learned, and experiences gained in the establishment and management of the Albanian Alps NP captured and applied to the wider national PA system</p> <p>3.1.2: Positive experiences and lessons learned from Albanian Alps documented and disseminated to key national stakeholders in order to facilitate national scale application (particularly CC resilience and financing).</p>	<p>Develop a gender-sensitive/responsive knowledge management and communications and outreach strategy at the start of the project to support implementation and replication of project activities.</p> <p>Deliver knowledge management activities</p> <p>Support implementation of the Communications and Outreach strategy</p> <p>Develop promotional materials and create pathways to share project results to inform local and national stakeholder groups.</p> <p>Organize and deliver national workshops on traditional knowledge and use natural resources, biodiversity conservation and protected areas management, and on sustainable livelihoods.</p> <p>Develop a number of short promotional movies to showcase the project achievements.</p>	<p>Develop and implement a gender sensitive knowledge management communication and outreach strategy.</p> <p>Develop promotional material with disaggregated data for men and women.</p> <p>Ensure high participation of women in workshops.</p> <p>Develop promotional movies that highlight disaggregated data/stories between men and women.</p>	<p><i>PMU, experts</i></p>

[1] ?Advancing Gender Equality and the Empowerment of all Women and Girls in Albania A position paper by the United Nations in Albania?, UN Albania, 11 May 2021

Does the project expect to include any gender-responsive measures to address gender gaps or promote gender equality and women empowerment?

Yes

Closing gender gaps in access to and control over natural resources; Yes

Improving women's participation and decision making Yes

Generating socio-economic benefits or services or women Yes

Does the project's results framework or logical framework include gender-sensitive indicators?

Yes

4. Private sector engagement

Elaborate on the private sector's engagement in the project, if any.

In the project territory, the inadequately planned and regulated activity of the private sector is one of the sources of many of the greatest threats (for example, inappropriate HHP development, unplanned tourism development that actually undermines the resources that attract tourists, etc.). However, the private sector also has the potential to be the driver of positive and sustainable development if engaged effectively and supported to do so (i.e. appropriate infrastructural development, sustainable tourism, sustainable land use marketing and service provision, etc.). The effective and constructive engagement of the project, and project key stakeholders such as the NP management authorities, with these private sector actors is a critical component of addressing threats and generating sustainable solutions.

Apart from the HHP and other infrastructure developers, there already exists a substantial private sector presence in the project area. As in most areas of Albania the private sector, particularly Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) SMEs are the most vibrant component of the economy currently SMEs represent a driving force in economic development (i.e., about 98% of total companies with a significant contribution of about 70% to the national GDP)[1]. The cities of Tropoja, and Koplík/Malesi e Madhe, are strategically located east and west of the AANP, and are equipped with typical economic entities such as tourist and accommodation service providers of different varieties (very small to large with differing conditions and facilities), entertainment and cultural service providers, and markets of local products and handicrafts. According to the development plans of the two cities, Tropoja is characterized of activities such as agriculture, tourism, extraction (mining and aggregates), and renewable energy (wood and hydropower)[2]², Malesi e Madhe is characterized by economic activities inclusive of agriculture (especially cultivation and trade of medicinal plants) and tourism. A special characteristic of this city is the railroad in Bajze that is seen as an important node for

transport and future economic development of the city[3]³. The most significant private sector actors include relevant tourism and accommodation entities including tent park owners, as well as mountainous huts, agricultural product providers, handicraft service providers as well as the cultural and entertainment service providers such as guides. During a scoping exercise conducted in 2019 with tourist organization in Tropoja Municipality, meetings were organized with several operators offering services such as:

- Accommodations in Valbona Valley, and mountainous huts (Albanian stans) discussing their needs for better marketing of the eco-tourism features of their businesses, as well as better business models/plans for more sustainable year-round activities.
- Local guide operators as well as kayaking, and hiking tour guide in the Valbona and Thethi areas expressing needs for better path markings and comprehensive maps of the entire area, as well as detailed maps showcasing the biodiversity and cultural values of the PAs.
- Horseback riding and farm owner outlining the need for better business plan, and better connectivity in the PAs.
- Blueberry collector, honey producer, dairy produce producer and artisanal worker outlining the great potential of the area for producing quality and unique products, expressing needs for better post agriculture management and better marketing tools.

In terms of engaging with HHP and other significant private sector actors, the project can provide a valuable mechanism for bringing together potentially conflicting parties in a transparent and constructive context, in order to reach pragmatic compromises and solutions in all parties' interests. In the context of tourism, AANP authorities, with support of the project, need to closely engage with tourism actors (tour operators, local service providers, local communities, etc) in order to agree on a strategic approach that will guide ongoing tourism development, focusing on the limits and parameters for tourism access and development in the region, and the facilitatory role that the AANP can play in promoting, training and regulating future tourism. The project needs to support the development and mobilization of the private sector in providing the appropriate marketing of local products, and work together to help identify the real opportunities in this regard lie. National financing institutions will also be identified and capacitated to include environmental and social safeguards for more sustainable financing practices in major infrastructure developments in Albania such as HPPs.

Private sector engagement will aim to strengthen communication efforts among the different types of entities with connected, but also conflicting interests towards biodiversity conservation, and to better connect them with NGOs and the local leaders of the community as important actors and advocates of the good governance and effective management of the AANP. The private sector will be involved in project implementation through their direct participation in meetings, awareness raising activities, trainings, and as such take an important role in the sustainability of the project activities and their further replication. More specifically the implementation of activities relating to the sustainable income generation mechanisms and approaches, for contributing to AANP financing, will require the

engagement of the private entrepreneurs in the area, and thus their identification and involvement will begin in the earliest stages of project implementation. Several community members and entrepreneurs have been involved in the design of the project and have already been visited and interviewed onsite (see Annex R).

[1] Polis University, "Measuring the Performance of SMEs for Evidence - Informed Economic Development Policies in Albania?", 2019

[2] Tropoja Development Plan, approved in 2017

[3] Malesi e Madhe Development Plan, approved in 2017

5. Risks to Achieving Project Objectives

Elaborate on indicated risks, including climate change, potential social and environmental risks that might prevent the project objectives from being achieved, and, if possible, the proposed measures that address these risks at the time of project implementation.(table format acceptable):

Risks	Level of Impact	Mitigation Measures
Lack of political will and commitment by the national governmental institutions, due to other priorities	Medium	The current political situation in the country is stable. State and local government are fully supporting the initiative of proclamation and sustainable management of the future national park. The project team will provide continuous monitoring of the security and political situation in the country and update the Steering Committee on a regular basis, so there is enough lead time for adequate response actions and adjustment in project strategy.
Unclear roles in the execution of the project may result in a lack of commitment/buy-in from local communities and therefore may result in failure of collaborative activities	Medium	A stakeholder engagement plan will be developed, and community stakeholders have been engaged during the PPG phase, to ensure their buy-in into the project. The project is devoting significant attention (Outcome 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3) to awareness and community mobilization/capacity development and lessons learned. During the initial implementation, the project will actively engage communities (provide equal possibilities to both men and women) in order to clarify the implications of the project and build awareness of their expected role and benefits
Limited cooperation among governmental agencies with competencies in BD limits the delivery of results	Low/Medium	The project will actively involve governmental agencies beginning in the design phase to ensure their support and participation in the project. Representatives of the relevant institutions will be invited to join the Project Steering Committee to facilitate cooperation, decision making and project follow up.

Risks	Level of Impact	Mitigation Measures
The outbreak of diseases (Covid-19)	Medium	<p>To achieve the proposed objectives, the project team will continue applying corresponding measures to adjust to COVID19 restrictions accordingly. Following the past year experience, in order to protect human health and also for cost-saving reasons, most of the stakeholders' meetings will be conducted virtually using different online tools. In case of inevitable face-to-face/in-person meetings, the project will adhere to the standardized measures of protection to reduce infections risks (social distancing, masks, disinfectants). Analytic work, capacity development and production of knowledge management materials will be conducted (as much as possible) as desk-work, in virtually connected teams or in small groups of people/participants to reduce COVID-19 infection risks. COVID-19 risks and mitigation measures will be continuously reviewed during project implementation. Activities will be carefully planned in order to allow enough time for site work to be conducted in small groups and spread out in the territory in order to minimize traveling and meeting in big teams, while bringing in international expertise and using the best online tools available. The project design also incorporates a recognition that resilience is linked to diversity of land uses and livelihoods and that over dependence on any one option brings risks (as demonstrated currently in terms of tourism during the pandemic). Thus, the design of practical implementations will not be based only on sustainable tourism options but also activities such as production of quality food and sustenance options. The Covid19 pandemic brings opportunities as well as risks that the project needs grasp. In July 2020, the UNCT in Albania also developed and approved the COVID-19 Socio-Economic Recovery and Response Plan, identifying 113 priority actions to promote socioeconomic development in Albania by minimizing and mitigating the negative impact of COVID-19, and by building forward better. The actions outlined support the Government of Albania in its recovery across five pillars, namely, (i) health response and systems strengthening, (ii) pro-poor social systems, (iii) resilient economic recovery, (iv) macro-economic and fiscal management, and (v) social cohesion and local resilience. The objective is to ensure a concrete, collaborative and all-inclusive effort to address the multidimensional impacts of the COVID-19, and to protect the needs and rights of people living under the duress of the pandemic. This project is in line with the objectives and actions outlined in this document and will support the local community in the Albanian Alps, in their recovery actions while also mitigate the risks of any future outbreak, by mainstreaming information, preparedness and mitigation actions in the management plan, capacity building and awareness raising events.</p>
Climate change impacts (e.g. increased flooding; more severe droughts; forest fires) may affect some project activities	Medium	<p>The project activities have been designed to address (directly or indirectly) vulnerabilities to climate hazards. The project will provide diversified livelihood alternatives to enhance adaptation and resilience. Project support to the sustainable use of natural resources will further improve the management and conservation of these resources, create income opportunities that enhance adaptation and resilience, and strengthen food security.</p>

Risks	Level of Impact	Mitigation Measures
Poor monitoring of environmental, social and economic impacts after the project implementation	Low	The Project will strengthen capacities of major stakeholders for environmentally sound practices in sectors competing for natural resources.
Project implementation in a gender-responsive way may be challenging	Medium	Although on the national level, and in national institutions, women participation is increasing, this is still not the case with the pilot region. The project will seek out proactive ways in which activities can be gender responsible and can increase the meaningful participation of women in the project. Measures to do so will be identified in a Gender Action Plan which will be developed at the beginning of the project.
Opposition from major infrastructure developers.	Low	The Government of Albania has now approved the new borders of the Albanian Alps National Park. Therefore any risks from this type of opposition would be a legal matter rather than a major risk for the project. However, the project will closely cooperate with regional and national authorities and engage developers as necessary, in order to monitor the proper implementation of the Management Plan and its zones Furthermore consultations with stakeholders will include private sector participation

6. Institutional Arrangement and Coordination

Describe the institutional arrangement for project implementation. Elaborate on the planned coordination with other relevant GEF-financed projects and other initiatives.

The **Ministry of Tourism and Environment of the Republic of Albania** is the governmental institution that will provide political and institutional supervision and act as the **National Executing Entity/Responsible Partner**. The overall responsibility for the project execution and implementation by MoTE implies the timely and verifiable attainment of project objectives and outcomes. The MoTE will provide support to, and inputs for, the implementation of all project activities. Execution generally includes the management and administration of project activities, in addition to managing the delivery of project outputs. This is in accordance with specific project requirements outlined in the approved Project Document and the agreement with UNEP.

UNEP Ecosystems Division represents the **Implementing Entity/Partner (IE) of the Global Environment Facility (GEF)**, with the following roles:

- Providing consistent and regular project oversight to ensure that GEF policies and criteria are adhered to and that the project meets its objectives and achieves expected outcomes,
- Performing the liaison function between the project and the GEF Secretariat,
- Applying UNEP policy and criteria to strengthen execution arrangements,
- Ensuring that both GEF and UNEP guidelines and standards are applied and met (technical, fiduciary, M&E),

- Ensuring timely disbursement/sub-allotment to executing agencies, based on agreed legal documents,
- Approving budget revision, certifying fund availability and transferring funds,
- Providing technical support and assessment of the execution of the Project,
- Providing guidance if requested to main TORs/MOUs and subcontracts issued by the project,
- Following-up with EA for progress, equipment, financial and other reports,
- Certifying project operational completion

Full support (at the request of the Ministry) with regards to the execution is placed in the **UNEP Regional Office for Europe** as the **Supporting Entity/Partner** of the project (See the Execution Support Request Letter). UNEP ROE is responsible for project cycle management services, while working closely with MoTE on:

- Recruitment of the Project Management Unit (PMU),
- Contracting executing partners and purchase of goods and services based on the decisions made in close consultation with MoTE and the Project Steering Committee (PSC), and in line with the annual budgets and work plans,
- Financial management and reporting.

The day-to-day management of the project will be carried out by a **Project Management Unit (PMU)**. The PMU will be established in Tirana and will consist of a Project Manager/Coordinator, Administrative Assistant and locally recruited staff in the country. The PMU will use premises in the country as provided by the Ministry of Tourism and Environment. The PMU roles will be to implement project outputs, monitoring and reporting, liaison with project partners, ensure project execution and all technical aspects of project implementation. Throughout the project, PMU will closely collaborate with MoTE and the UNEP offices. PMU will ensure collaboration with all country stakeholders, ministries and different municipalities and local communities, which is imperative for the successful implementation of the project.

A **Project Steering Committee (PSC)** will be established at the inception of the project to monitor project progress, to guide the project implementation and to support the project in achieving its listed outputs and outcomes. The PSC will be multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral in fields related to nature and biodiversity protection, forestry and agriculture and land use planning. The PSC will include representatives of relevant Governmental institutions of Albania, including, but not limited to the current line ministries responsible for environmental, nature and land protection issues ? the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, and the National Agency of Protected Areas. Membership will also include UNEP representatives, as well as GEF and UNCBD Focal Points in Albania and representatives of the targeted areas (RAPAs of Kukes and Shkoder). Other participants can be invited into the PSC meetings, at the decision of the PSC. The PSC will meet at least twice per year to ensure (in person or online, depending on the circumstances) to ensure: i) Oversight and assurance of technical quality of outputs; ii) Close linkages between the project and other ongoing projects and programs relevant to the project; iii) Timely availability and effectiveness of co-financing support; iv) Sustainability of key project outcomes, including up-scaling and replication; v) Effective coordination of government partner work under this project; vi) Making by consensus, management decisions when guidance is required by the Project Manager. The Terms of Reference of the PSC is provided in Annex N.

Project collaborators will be involved in the project to provide expertise in biodiversity, forestry, pastures, tourism, agriculture, cultural heritage, climate change, energy, land use planning knowledge and information management. They will also provide regular updates on environmental management in the country, staff time and experience in guiding and advancing the activities' implementation, support the project with robust field data on environmental issues at stake, link with stakeholders, including at local level for project implementation, and for receiving stakeholders' input and feedback. Organizations, NGOs and research institutions working in the area of BD, CC, SLM/SFM and LD, will be involved in the project by providing outputs related to data management and networking, as well as contributing to fundraising. Exact partner organizations will be identified for each project component at the initial stages of the project implementation. National and international consultancy services will be called in as required for specific tasks, such as needs assessments, development of indicator framework, capacity building and training for key stakeholders, design of delivery models and financing mechanisms. Consulting services will be procured in accordance with applicable UNEP /GEF rules and regulations.

The project will also build on the soon to be completed (2022) GEF project *Enhancing Financial Sustainability of the Protected Areas System in Albania?*, financed by MTE, GEF and UNDP and implemented by UNDP in partnership with MoTE and NAPA. The project aims to reduce existing funding gaps for the system of protected areas in Albania by building the financial management capacities of NAPA, the agency responsible for protected areas, and by demonstrating the efficacy of different financing strategies in a sub-set of individual protected areas. The UNDP project thus far has achieved a number of outputs on which this project will build, such as the national financing strategy for PAs, business plans for several PA, reporting, training, and assessment of management tools such as METT (management effectiveness training tools), and a FSS (financial sustainability scorecard). The project will work closely with UNDP for their remaining project's lifespan and will build on UNDPs outputs across several interventions such as the revision of the AANP financial plan and piloting revenue generation mechanisms for AANP (Outcome 1.2) as well as supporting the effective management of the Albanian Alps NP through revalorizing the ecosystem services, and updating the management plan for this PA in order to achieve compounded benefits (Outcome 1.1).

At the outset of project operations, a project inception report will be prepared in co-operation with the key stakeholders, local and international expert(s) engaged in leading or supporting the implementation of the project. The inception report will include detailed work plans for each subcomponent (output) of the project at the specific activity level and elaboration of the required resources and stakeholders to be involved for reaching the stated targets. These output specific work plans will provide the main basis for day-to-day management, implementation and monitoring of the progress of the project, complemented by the annual monitoring to be done at the Outcome level by the PIRs.

To successfully reach the objective and outcomes of the project, it is essential that the progress of each project component will be closely monitored both by the key local stakeholders and authorities as well as by project's international experts, starting with the finalization of the detailed, component-specific work plans and implementation arrangements and continuing through the project's implementation phase. The purpose of this is to facilitate early identification of possible risks to successful completion of the project together with adaptive management and early corrective action, when needed.

To accord proper acknowledgement to the GEF for providing funding, a GEF logo should appear on all relevant GEF project publications, including any hardware purchased with GEF funds. Any citation on publications regarding projects funded by GEF should also accord proper acknowledgement to GEF in accordance with the respective GEF guidelines.

The Decision-making flowchart and organizational chart is presented in Annex I.

7. Consistency with National Priorities

Describe the consistency of the project with national strategies and plans or reports and assessments under relevant conventions from below:

NAPAs, NAPs, ASGM NAPs, MIAs, NBSAPs, NCs, TNAs, NCSAs, NIPs, PRSPs, NPFE, BURs, INDCs, etc.

Albania's **National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP)** updated in 2020, is the key document determining the national objectives, on biodiversity. This NBSAP clearly identifies main areas of work of which this project is directly aligned. These are i) increasing Protected Areas coverage; ii) completing the legal framework in line with the EU acquires for nature and environment in accordance with the Birds and Habitats Directive; and iii) strengthening law enforcement by the means of improving legislation and building institutional capacities.

The **Document of Strategic Policies for the Protection of Biodiversity** was developed in 2015 as the main instrument for the implementation of the CBD Convention and its Strategic Plan. This document emphasizes the importance for Albania to substantially enhance investments in biodiversity conservation. It highlights a variety of expected financing sources including the State Budget, EU financial instruments, donor and other sources, including the private sector. This project is in line with objectives outlined in this document including several of its measures. More specifically the project contributes to the following measures:

- ? Measure 1 ? Expansion of protected areas in Albania,
- ? Measure 3 ? Conduct in-situ studies and research on ecology, ecosystems and habitats,
- ? Measure 4 ? Education and awareness raising,
- ? Measure 5 ? Increase implementation of the law.

The **National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI II)**, is Albania's most important strategic document outlining the national vision for the country's social and economic development. The NSDI II vision of "Creating wealth and well-being for European Albania" under the second pillar (Through Sustained Economic Growth - the Vehicle for Albania's Development), considers that economic growth should not be at the expense of the economic and social well-being of future Albanian generations due to unsustainable depletion of natural resources or loss of biodiversity. The achievement of the NSDI-II vision aims to support Albania's EU accession. The project is aligned with the NSDI particularly in the area of gender mainstreaming and other gender related issues, specifically the project will contribute to the

following national objectives: (i) enhancing women's role in decision making at all levels of government and politics; (ii) women's economic empowerment; (iii) strengthening gender mainstreaming in policies, gender analysis, gender indicators, and coherent monitoring and reporting.

As mentioned, tourism is a fast-growing industry in the Alpine region, and recreational values related to biological and landscape diversity represent an asset that can be leveraged for sustainable development. These assets therefore need to be protected to encourage visitors to the area so that benefits to communities in the region can be realized. It is essential therefore, that all development in the region, especially tourism, is done some in a sustainable manner, that benefits people but at the same time does not harm the valuable natural assets in the region. The **National Tourism Development Strategy 2013 ? 2024 (NTDS)**, and the **Albanian Alps Tourism Sectoral Strategy (AATSS)** are two strategies that will help guide tourism development in the region. The basic principles in the NTDS of sustainable tourism development strongly considers that economic objectives must be balanced with the protection of the environment, culture and community welfare, and that tourism development must be based on, and supportive of, environmental protection, including all of the components of biodiversity. This project will develop guidelines (aligned with these strategies) to promote and guide the development of sustainable tourism in the AANP as well as build capacities in stakeholders for their engagement in eco-tourism opportunities in the area.

This project will work on developing models (and collecting the required data) to determine climate change scenarios and to assess the impact of climate change scenarios on biodiversity, land use patterns and livelihoods of local communities. Once fully understood, the project will then opportunities for mitigation and resilience building measures to be applied. These interventions contribute to Albania's **National Strategy on Climate Change and Action Plan (NSCC&AP)**, 2019, a document designed to support the implementation of EU environmental and climate legislation, in order to respond to the need for approximation to EU requirements. This document provides guidance and punctual action for the adaptation process in Albania, together with the framework for adaptation to Climate Change (CCA).

The project is also fully aligned to the ?Government of Albania and the **United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2022-2026?**, more specifically Strategic Priority B ?sustainable, resilient and green economic growth and resource management?, under which by 2026 Albania will strive for innovative and integrated policy solutions accelerate sustainable, productive and inclusive economic development, enhancing climate change adaptation and mitigation and transition to a green and blue economy.

Lastly, the development of project interventions has through significant consultations, taken into account the vision and strategic objectives for environmental protection and sustainable development of the three **local development plans** for the municipalities of Tropoja, Malesi e Madhe and Shkodra. The project will continue to engage the municipalities and ensure interventions are fully aligned with these local development plans throughout the project implementation.

8. Knowledge Management

Elaborate the "Knowledge Management Approach" for the project, including a budget, key deliverables and a timeline, and explain how it will contribute to the project's overall impact.

The project has a strong knowledge management component. It will collect information through participatory approaches and make this information available through national channels of communication as well as global channels such as those provided by UNEP and the GEF. A wide range of communication material, publications, briefings, and guidelines, etc. will be prepared for a broad range of local, national and global stakeholders. Through dissemination and awareness raising activities, the project knowledge will be shared, capacity will be developed and sustainable biodiversity conservation and management strategies will be practiced and promoted in a sustainable and efficient manner.

The project will develop a knowledge base for climate change data and scenarios in the Albanian Alps, activities related to HPPs and other industry and infrastructure development, biodiversity data, inclusive of habitat and key species maps, cultural heritage data, training products, and awareness raising material pertaining to PA management. Knowledge will be developed with national and local stakeholders and further shared in-country by maximizing other dissemination channels including other representatives of UN agencies, local and national governments, civil society organizations and academic institutions.

The project will involve young scientists, PhD students and professionals in the fields of biodiversity conservation, climate change and cultural heritage to help generate, promote and share knowledge. In addition, there will be close cooperation with UN agencies such as UNDP, FAO as well as other agencies active in Albania in the field of protected areas, forestry and biodiversity such as, GIZ, SIDA, ADA. This project will use their project outcomes and key findings to inform and address issues at the international level. Under mapping activities, it is expected that the project will exchange data with established databases and remote sensing/mapping platforms. The project will consider traditional knowledge and build on it as far as possible throughout the project's life span. Traditional knowledge will also be accumulated and documented for its future use and application.

The project will maximize open access and information dissemination for decision support systems on biodiversity and protected area management including conservation, wise use of resources, and restoration. It will develop low-cost solutions for information storage, management, and exchange systems within the components addressing mapping, GIS and other databases development. Target audiences and the public will be informed through a variety of outreach and dissemination activities including national and local media as well as social media channels.

9. Monitoring and Evaluation

Describe the budgeted M and E plan

In line with the GEF Evaluation requirements and UNEP's Evaluation Policy, GEF Full-Sized Projects and any project with a duration of 4 years or more will be subject to an independent Mid-Term Evaluation or management-led Mid-Term Review at mid-point. All GEF funded projects are subject to a performance assessment when they reach operational completion. This performance assessment will be either an independent Terminal Evaluation or a management-led Terminal Review.

In case a Review is required, the UNEP Evaluation Office will provide tools, templates, and guidelines to support the Review consultant. For all Terminal Reviews, the UNEP Evaluation Office will perform a

quality assessment of the Terminal Review report and validate the Review's performance ratings. This quality assessment will be attached as an Annex to the Terminal Review report, validated performance ratings will be captured in the main report.

However, for an independent Terminal Evaluation (TE) of the project, the Evaluation Office will be responsible for the entire evaluation process and will liaise with the Task Manager and the project implementing partners at key points during the evaluation. The TE will provide an independent assessment of project performance (in terms of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency), and determine the likelihood of impact and sustainability. It will have two primary purposes: (i) to provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements, and (ii) to promote learning, feedback, and knowledge sharing through results and lessons learned among UNEP staff and implementing partners. The direct costs of the evaluation (or the management-led review) will be charged against the project evaluation budget. The TE will typically be initiated after the project's operational completion. If a follow-on phase of the project is envisaged, the timing of the evaluation will be discussed with the Evaluation Office in relation to the submission of the follow-on proposal.

The draft TE report will be sent by the Evaluation Office to project stakeholders for comment. Formal comments on the report will be shared by the Evaluation Office in an open and transparent manner. The project performance will be assessed against standard evaluation criteria using a six-point rating scheme. The final determination of project ratings will be made by the Evaluation Office when the report is finalized. The evaluation report will be publicly disclosed and will be followed by a recommendation compliance process. The evaluation recommendations will be entered into a Recommendations Implementation Plan template by the Evaluation Office. Formal submission of the completed Recommendations Implementation Plan by the Project Manager is required within one month of its delivery to the project team. The Evaluation Office will monitor compliance with this plan every six months for a total period of 12 months from the finalization of the Recommendations Implementation Plan. The compliance performance against the recommendations is then reported to senior management on a six-monthly basis and to member States in the Biennial Evaluation Synthesis Report.

The indicative Monitoring and Evaluation costed work plan is provided in table 14 below. The estimated cost of M&E activities is USD **48,000** (GEF), fully integrated into the project budget, as shown below:

Table 14: Costed M&E workplan

Type of M&E activity	Responsible Parties	Budget from GEF	Co-finance	Time Frame
Inception Meeting	Project Manager, Project Team, Steering Committee, UNEP		5,000	Within 2 months of project start-up
Inception Report	Project Manager		5,000	1 month after project inception meeting

Measurement of project indicators (outcome, progress and performance indicators, GEF Core Indicators) at national and global level	Project Manager & Project Team; Consultants		20,000	Outcome indicators: start, mid and end of project Progress/perform. Indicators: annually (Cost incorporated in project components and management budget)
Semi-annual Progress/ Operational Reports to UNEP	Project Manager		10,000	Within 1 month of the end of reporting period i.e. on or before 31 January and 31 July (Cost incorporated in project components and management budget)
Project Steering Committee	? Project Manager (secretariat) ? A representative of UNEP Implementing Agency ? A senior representative of The Ministry of Tourism and Environment ? A representative of ICR ? Other PSC members		10,000	At least once a year, and via electronic media per request and need Costs are mainly related for travel of PSC members
Reports of PSC meetings	Project Manager		10,000	Within 1 month after PSC meeting
Project Implementation Review (PIR)	Project Manager; UNEP		20,000	Annually, part of reporting routine (Cost incorporated in project components and management budget)
Mid Term Review/ Evaluation	? Project Manager ? PMU ? External consultant(s) ? UNEP	15,000	30,000	At mid-point of project implementation
Terminal Evaluation	UNEP EO	25,000	20,000	Within 6 months of end of project implementation
M&E travel		8,000	40,000	Annually
Audit	The Ministry of Tourism and Environment ICR		30,000	Annually

Project Final Report	Project Manager		12,000	Within 2 months of the project completion date (Cost incorporated in project components and management budget)
Co-financing report	Project Manager and Finance Manager		14,000	Within 1 month of the PIR reporting period, i.e. on or before 31 July (Cost incorporated in project components and management budget)
Publication of Lessons Learnt and other project documents	Project Manager; Consultants for lessons learnt evaluation		70,000	Annually, also part of Semi-annual reports & Project Final Report
Total M&E Plan Budget		48,000	296,000	

10. Benefits

Describe the socioeconomic benefits to be delivered by the project at the national and local levels, as appropriate. How do these benefits translate in supporting the achievement of global environment benefits (GEF Trust Fund) or adaptation benefits (LDCF/SCCF)?

The project will assist and benefit Albania by:

- ? Strengthening administrative capacities for mainstreaming biodiversity conservation into planning and accounting the climate impacts and adaptive capacities;
- ? Strengthening the conservation of biodiversity within the area of newly established PA Albanian Alps;
- ? Increasing sustainable financing of the Albanian Alps NP
- ? Strengthening capacities to assess ecosystem services and use it as a tool for decision making
- ? Supporting the scale up lessons learned national-wide

Project design assumed environmental and economic benefits arising through physical investment, development of new strategies, capacity building, awareness raising and training. The project will also support activities to assist communities in and around PAs in understanding and developing sustainable and alternative revenue generation. Through the strengthened management of AANP and stakeholder capacity enhancement activities, the project will generate significant mutual economic and environmental benefits to the livelihoods and communities by: (i) creating the opportunities for increased income generating jobs through better utilization of non-timber values of forests, particularly from tourism and

recreation, non-timber forest product collection, and sustainable commercial game management; (ii) securing conservation of biodiversity in internationally-important ecosystems; and (iii) conservation and improved management of globally-significant endemic biodiversity and landscape values of critical ecosystems.

11. Environmental and Social Safeguard (ESS) Risks

Provide information on the identified environmental and social risks and potential impacts associated with the project/program based on your organization's ESS systems and procedures

Overall Project/Program Risk Classification*

PIF	CEO Endorsement/Approval	MTR	TE
Medium/Moderate	Medium/Moderate		

Measures to address identified risks and impacts

Elaborate on the types and risk classifications/ratings of any identified environmental and social risks and impacts (considering the GEF ESS Minimum Standards) and any measures undertaken as well as planned management measures to address these risks during implementation.

See the stakeholder engagement plan on issues how to address social risks.

Supporting Documents

Upload available ESS supporting documents.

Title	Module	Submitted
UPDATED_Annex O Albania SRIF	CEO Endorsement ESS	
SRIF PIF Albanian Alps_22 July 2021	Project PIF ESS	

ANNEX A: PROJECT RESULTS FRAMEWORK (either copy and paste here the framework from the Agency document, or provide reference to the page in the project document where the framework could be found).

Outcome Level Indicators	Baseline	Targets and Monitoring Milestones	Means of Verification	Assumptions & Risks
Project Objective: To strengthen the management effectiveness and sustainability of the Albanian Alps protected areas system and increase resilience to climate change				
# of ha of Terrestrial protected areas created or under improved management (GEF CORE Indicator 1)	0ha of PA under improved management	<p><i>Mid term</i> 30ha PA under improved management</p> <p><i>Project end</i> Core indicator 1. Terrestrial protected areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use - 82568 ha</p>	<p>Ecological monitoring reports</p> <p>METT Assessment threat scores</p>	<p><i>Assumptions</i> RAPA adopt and effectively implement recommended management actions</p> <p><i>Risks</i> Government not supportive of recommendations for improved management</p>
The number of direct beneficiaries from project interventions). (GEF core indicator 11)	0 beneficiaries	<p>Mid term All groups of identified stakeholders consulted and informed on the project objectives, and participated in project activities.</p> <p>Project end 82,000 beneficiaries (41,000 M; 41,000F)</p>	<p>Meeting minutes, PIRS, ; socio-economic surveys; village population data</p>	<p><i>Assumptions:</i> <i>Several already identified stakeholder groups are aware of the project</i></p> <p><i>Risks</i> <i>Low participation of women.</i></p>
Component 1: Establishing an enabling environment for effective management of the Albanian Alps National Park				
Outcome 1: Albanian Alps National Park (NP) territory valorized, and effective and adaptive management planning put in place				

Outcome Level Indicators	Baseline	Targets and Monitoring Milestones	Means of Verification	Assumptions & Risks
<p>Revised updated gender-responsive and participatory management plan that addresses key threats to biodiversity and sustainable livelihoods</p> <p>Km demarcated boundaries</p> <p>% community members aware of and accept park boundaries</p>	<p>Draft management plan prepared in 2015</p> <p>No information available to assess community's awareness</p>	<p><i>Midterm</i></p> <p>Revised and updated draft zonation and gender-responsive Management Plan developed in participation with stakeholders</p> <p>At least 50% of participants in management planning workshops are women</p> <p><i>Project End</i></p> <p>Revised, updated and agreed zonation and gender-sensitive Management Plan addressing key threats to biodiversity and sustainable livelihoods</p> <p>100 km of demarcated borders 80% of those surveyed (50% M; 50%F) are aware of and agree with park boundary</p>	<p>Management plan document</p> <p>Workshop reports</p> <p>Survey results</p>	<p><i>Assumptions</i></p> <p>Institutions (MTE, NAPA) are supportive to project activities. There is adequate support and participation from stakeholders</p> <p><i>Risks</i></p> <p>Lack of buy in from communities on zonation and management measures proposed</p>

Outcome Level Indicators	Baseline	Targets and Monitoring Milestones	Means of Verification	Assumptions & Risks
<p><i>Outputs</i></p> <p>1.1.1: Assessment of likely climate change scenarios in the Albanian Alps landscape, implications for biodiversity, land use and livelihoods, and opportunities for mitigation/resilience building</p> <p>1.1.2: Strengthening the role of the Management Committee for Protected Areas for the assessment of constructed and planned HPP status in the Albanian Alps PA</p> <p>1.1.3: Support to the field demarcation process of the Albanian Alps NP boundaries and zones following an in-depth review and adjustment of draft NP boundary and zonation plans (based any changes in circumstances since initially developed, stakeholder consultation, and identified climate change factors)</p> <p>1.1.4: Validate, update, and rationalize existing (draft) management plan (including sub-programs) for the Albanian Alps NP based on any changes in circumstances since their initial development, consultation with all stakeholders, identified CC responses.</p>				
<p>Outcome 1.2: Sustainable financing of the Albanian Alps NP in place, including sustainable financing mechanisms tested and functionally established</p>				

Outcome Level Indicators	Baseline	Targets and Monitoring Milestones	Means of Verification	Assumptions & Risks
<p># of ecosystem services valued</p> <p># of financial mechanisms implemented and generating revenue</p> <p>% increase in finances available-to AANP</p> <p># stakeholders (disaggregated by gender) with improved capacity for participating in sustainable financing mechanisms</p>	<p>0 ecosystem services valued</p> <p>0 financial mechanisms implemented</p> <p>No business plan available</p> <p>108,432 USD available for the management of the PA</p> <p>0 stakeholder representatives trained in sustainable financing mechanisms</p>	<p><i>Mid term</i></p> <p>list of ecosystems services</p> <p>3 financial mechanisms identified and piloting initiatives commenced</p> <p>5% increase in funds available to AANP management from baseline</p> <p><i>Project end</i></p> <p>1 ecosystem service valued and used as decision making tool by key stakeholders</p> <p>3 financial mechanisms implemented and generating income</p> <p>20% increase in funds available to AANP management from baseline</p> <p>50 stakeholders with enhanced capacity for participating in sustainable financing mechanisms post training r (M:25; F:25)</p>	<p>Project progress reports</p> <p>Monitoring and evaluation reports</p> <p>RAPA accounts</p> <p>Partnership agreements</p> <p>Stakeholder policies and plans</p> <p>Pre- post-training capacity assessments</p>	<p><i>Assumptions</i></p> <p>Government is willing to approve partnerships with private businesses</p> <p>There are enough capacities at NAPA/RAPA level to implement and review the financial mechanisms</p> <p><i>Risks</i></p> <p>Private businesses are not interested in opportunities.</p>

Outcome Level Indicators	Baseline	Targets and Monitoring Milestones	Means of Verification	Assumptions & Risks
<p><i>Outputs</i></p> <p>1.2.1: Comprehensive ecosystem services valuation of the Albanian Alps landscape and assessment of potential options and opportunities for sustainable financing of the Albanian Alps NP</p> <p>1.2.2: Updating and adjustment of the draft Albanian Alps NP Financing plan to incorporate the financing opportunities / mechanisms identified under Output 1.2.1 (i.e., a budget and sustainable finance plan for the NP)</p> <p>1.2.3: Support to the practical setting up and implementation of at least 3 demonstrations for generating sustainable income for the NP (depending on those identified as viable under Outcome 1.2 and incorporated into NP financing Plan)</p>				
<p>Outcome 1.3: The systemic, institutional, and individual level capacity needs and gaps for effectively implementing the agreed NP management plan addressed (MP program 1)</p>				
<p>Individual staff (ensuring gender-balanced representation) capacity scores</p> <p>% increase of management effectiveness score (METT)</p>	<p>No baseline training and capacity needs assessment for staff carried out</p> <p>No baseline METT carried out</p>	<p><i>Mid term</i></p> <p>A gender-balanced baseline capacity and training needs assessment carried out for key staff (50%F:50%M)</p> <p>Baseline METT carried out</p> <p><i>Project end</i></p> <p>Individual capacity scores increased in both male and female staff by 50% from baselines</p> <p>METT score increased by 30% from baseline</p>	<p>Institutional development plan</p> <p>Training reports</p> <p>Project progress reports</p> <p>METT report</p> <p>Staff training and capacity needs assessment</p>	<p><i>Assumptions</i></p> <p>There is serious participation from NAPA/RAPA staff at training activities</p> <p><i>Risks</i></p> <p>Government does not consider institutional changes/recommendations</p> <p>High staff turnover due to political influences</p>

Outcome Level Indicators	Baseline	Targets and Monitoring Milestones	Means of Verification	Assumptions & Risks
<p><i>Outputs</i></p> <p>1.3.1: A detailed 'fit for purpose' assessment carried out of NP management and governance institutions and their legal/operational framework (in the context of the agreed management plan)</p> <p>1.3.2: Reforms and adjustments of the NP management and governance institutions and legal/operational frameworks carried out, and key equipment provided, to enable effective implementation of management plan</p> <p>1.3.3: A comprehensive capacity development program for the NP management staff and other relevant stakeholders (based on an assessment of the gaps in skills/experience for effective implementation of the agreed MP), provision of key equipment.</p>				
<p>Component 2. Strengthening the practical experience and 'know-how' of the Albanian Alps NP stakeholders to address threats</p>				
<p>Outcome 2.1: Threats to biodiversity in the Albanian Alps addressed through the effective initiation of the updated NP management plan programs, and the development of practical experience of key stakeholders to continue implementation in the long term</p>				
<p>#ha of protected area under improved management</p> <p># of gender-responsive livelihood initiatives piloted</p>	<p>0 ha of PA under improved management</p> <p>0 livelihood initiatives piloted</p>	<p><i>Mid term</i></p> <p>30,000ha of protected area under improved management</p> <p>1 gender-responsive livelihood initiative piloted</p> <p><i>Project end</i></p> <p>Core indicator</p> <p>1. Terrestrial protected areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use - 82568 ha</p> <p>3 gender-responsive livelihood initiatives piloted</p>	<p>Project progress reports</p> <p>METT assessment</p> <p>Ecological monitoring reports</p>	<p><i>Assumptions</i></p> <p>There are enough capacities at RAPA level to carry out conservation measures and monitoring activities</p> <p><i>Risks</i></p> <p>Relevant external agencies are not supporting enforcement efforts</p>

Outcome Level Indicators	Baseline	Targets and Monitoring Milestones	Means of Verification	Assumptions & Risks
<p><i>Outputs</i></p> <p>2.1.1: Support to establishment of effective NP biodiversity conservation actions in the NP (law enforcement, sub-programs for targeted conservation of rare species/habitats, fire and invasive species control, human wildlife conflict reduction, fuelwood supply (MP Program 2)</p> <p>2.1.2: Support to sustainable economic development: strengthening of regulation and management of sustainable natural resource management, livelihoods, and cultural heritage within communities in the NP in order to reduce pressures on BD and incentivize sustainable use and livelihoods, and encourage maintenance of cultural heritage (MP Program 3)</p> <p>2.1.3 Strengthening of regulation and management of HPPs and other infrastructure, through capacity building on EIA and SEA and training law enforcement officers, private sector and community representatives on sustainable natural resource management in order to reduce pressures on BD, and of CC (MP Program 3).</p> <p>2.1.4: Support to the development of educational and awareness building, and scientific research sub-programs, and support a long-term NP monitoring system including a gender-specific and sensitive approach (MP program 4)</p>				
<p>Component 3. Support to national level adoption and up scaling of sustainable PAs management best practices</p>				
<p>Outcome 3.1: Lessons learned, and experiences gained in the establishment and management of the Albanian Alps NP captured and applied to the wider national PA system</p>				
<p>-</p> <p># of NP adopting improved management plans and practices.</p> <p># of key national stakeholders reached</p>	<p>0 NPs adoption best practices</p> <p>0 key national stakeholders reached</p>	<p><i>Mid term</i></p> <p>1 best practice guideline adopted by at least one other site</p> <p><i>Project End</i></p> <p>2 best practice guidelines adopted by at least 3 other sites</p> <p>50 key national stakeholders reached</p>	<p>Project progress report</p> <p>Dissemination materials</p> <p>Meeting reports</p>	<p><i>Assumptions</i></p> <p>There are some good practices and lessons learnt</p> <p><i>Risks</i></p> <p>There is low interest/reluctance from key national stakeholders to replicate good practices</p>
<p><i>Outputs</i></p> <p>3.1.1: In depth evaluation of the critical lessons learned during the establishment and initial management of the NP captured and documented</p> <p>3.1.2: Positive experiences and lessons learned from Albanian Alps document and disseminated to key national stakeholders in order to facilitate national scale application (particularly CC resilience and financing).</p>				

ANNEX B: RESPONSES TO PROJECT REVIEWS (from GEF Secretariat and GEF Agencies, and Responses to Comments from Council at work program inclusion and the Convention Secretariat and STAP at PIF).

**ANNEX C: Status of Utilization of Project Preparation Grant (PPG).
(Provide detailed funding amount of the PPG activities financing status in the table below:**

PPG Grant Approved at PIF (USD 50,000)					
Project Preparation Activity Implemented		Budgeted Amount	Amount Spent To date	Amount Committed	
1200	CONSULTANTS				
	1201	PPG Coordinator	10,000	10,000	0
	1202	International consultant	15,000	15,000	0
	<i>Sub-total</i>		25,000	25,000	0
1600	TRAVEL ON OFFICIAL BUSINESS				
	1601	Travel on official business	3,500	3,500	0
	<i>Sub-total</i>		3,500	3,500	0
2200	SUB CONTRACT COMPONENT				
	2201	Local partner (NGO) for data collection, analysis, consolidation, logistics for meetings (including inception and validation workshops)	20,250	20,250	0
	<i>Sub-total</i>		20,250	20,250	0
50	MISCELLANEOUS COMPONENT				
	5301	Sundry/communication	\$1,250	\$1,250	0
	<i>Sub-total</i>		\$1,250	\$1,250	0
GRAND TOTAL			50,000	50,000	0

ANNEX D: Project Map(s) and Coordinates

Please attach the geographical location of the project area, if possible.

ANNEX E: Project Budget Table

Please attach a project budget table.

Expenditure Category	Detailed Description	Component					Sub-total	M&E	PMC	Total USD	Responsible Entity
		Component 1			Component 2	Component 3					
		Outcome 1.1	Outcome 1.2	Outcome 1.3	Outcome 2.1	Outcome 3.1					
Goods											
	Equipment and furnishing	25,000			71,000	16,000	112,000		112,000	MTE in collaboration with UNEP	
Contractual Services - Company											
	Sub - contract to national consultants for updating AA MP	30,000					30,000		30,000	MTE in collaboration with UNEP	
	Sub-contract for national consultants conducting site expeditions		121,000				121,000		121,000	MTE in collaboration with UNEP	
	Sub-contracts to national consultants for developing and delivering trainings for an effective implementation of the AA NP			37,000			37,000		37,000	MTE in collaboration with UNEP	
	Sub-contract for national consultants under outcome 2.1 addressing threats to biodiversity (including a gender expert)				167,000		167,000		167,000	MTE in collaboration with UNEP	
	Sub-contract for national consultants under output 3.1.2 for practical guidelines, manuals, drafting of policy, legislative and institutional reform documents mainstreaming lessons learned on CC resilience and PA financing					56,000	56,000		56,000	MTE in collaboration with UNEP	
International consultants											
	Sub-contract for international consultant on ecosystem valorization, and sustainable financing components		80,000				80,000		80,000	MTE in collaboration with UNEP	
	Sub contract to international consultancy performing institutional and capacity needs gap assessment			44,000			44,000		44,000	MTE in collaboration with UNEP	
	Sub-contract for consultancy services (chief technical officer)	40,000			148,000	42,000	230,000		230,000	MTE in collaboration with UNEP	
	Midterm Review							15,000	15,000	UNEP	
	Terminal evaluation							25,000	25,000	UNEP	
Salary and benefits / Staff costs											
	Project manager							67,000	67,000	UNEP	
	Local staff	26,400	19,800	19,800	26,400	13,200	105,600		105,600	PMU	
	Admin and finance staff							38,000	38,000	UNEP	
Training, Workshops and Meetings											
	Workshops, trainings and venues	28,000		14,000	64,200		106,200		106,200	MTE in collaboration with UNEP	
	PSC meetings				5,000		5,000		5,000	MTE in collaboration with UNEP	
Travel											
	Travel for on-site valorisation	10,000					10,000		10,000	MTE in collaboration with UNEP	
	Travel for pilot site activity implementation		10,000				10,000		10,000	MTE in collaboration with UNEP	
	Travel for training and awareness raising activities				20,400		20,400		20,400	MTE in collaboration with UNEP	
	Travel for dissemination of lessons learned (local)					9,000	9,000		9,000	MTE in collaboration with UNEP	
	Travel for M&E							8,000	8,000	MTE in collaboration with UNEP	
	PM Travel							15,289	15,289	UNEP	
Office Supplies											
	Office supplies and equipment purchases	15,000				61,699	76,699		76,699		
Other Operating Costs											
	Communication costs (including online presence)					15,000	15,000	8,000	23,000	MTE in collaboration with UNEP	
Grand Total		174,400	230,800	114,800	502,000	212,899	1,234,899	48,000	128,289	1,411,188	

ANNEX F: (For NGI only) Termsheet

Instructions. Please submit an finalized termsheet in this section. The NGI Program Call for Proposals provided a template in Annex A of the Call for Proposals that can be used

by the Agency. Agencies can use their own termsheets but must add sections on Currency Risk, Co-financing Ratio and Financial Additionality as defined in the template provided in Annex A of the Call for proposals. Termsheets submitted at CEO endorsement stage should include final terms and conditions of the financing.

ANNEX G: (For NGI only) Reflows

Instructions. Please submit a reflows table as provided in Annex B of the NGI Program Call for Proposals and the Trustee excel sheet for reflows (as provided by the Secretariat or the Trustee) in the Document Section of the CEO endorsement. The Agency is required to quantify any expected financial return/gains/interests earned on non-grant instruments that will be transferred to the GEF Trust Fund as noted in the Guidelines on the Project and Program Cycle Policy. Partner Agencies will be required to comply with the reflows procedures established in their respective Financial Procedures Agreement with the GEF Trustee. Agencies are welcomed to provide assumptions that explain expected financial reflow schedules.

ANNEX H: (For NGI only) Agency Capacity to generate reflows

Instructions. The GEF Agency submitting the CEO endorsement request is required to respond to any questions raised as part of the PIF review process that required clarifications on the Agency Capacity to manage reflows. This Annex seeks to demonstrate Agencies' capacity and eligibility to administer NGI resources as established in the Guidelines on the Project and Program Cycle Policy, GEF/C.52/Inf.06/Rev.01, June 9, 2017 (Annex 5).