

Conservation and sustainable management of wetlands with focus on high-nature value areas in the Prut River basin

Part I: Project Information

GEF ID
10650

Project Type
MSP

Type of Trust Fund
GET

CBIT/NGI
 CBIT
 NGI

Project Title
Conservation and sustainable management of wetlands with focus on high-nature value areas in the Prut River basin

Countries
Moldova

Agency(ies)
UNDP

Other Executing Partner(s)
Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment of the Republic of
Moldova

Executing Partner Type
Government

GEF Focal Area

Multi Focal Area

Taxonomy

Focal Areas, Biodiversity, Mainstreaming, Extractive Industries, Biomes, Rivers, Wetlands, Lakes, Protected Areas and Landscapes, Productive Landscapes, Terrestrial Protected Areas, Species, Threatened Species, Land Degradation, Sustainable Land Management, Restoration and Rehabilitation of Degraded Lands, Influencing models, Demonstrate innovative approach, Transform policy and regulatory environments, Stakeholders, Local Communities, Communications, Awareness Raising, Private Sector, Individuals/Entrepreneurs, Beneficiaries, Civil Society, Academia, Non-Governmental Organization, Type of Engagement, Information Dissemination, Consultation, Participation, Partnership, Gender Equality, Gender Mainstreaming, Sex-disaggregated indicators, Gender-sensitive indicators, Capacity, Knowledge and Research, Knowledge Generation, Knowledge Exchange, Learning, Theory of change, Indicators to measure change, Adaptive management, Gender results areas, Knowledge Generation and Exchange, Access to benefits and services, Capacity Development, Innovation

Rio Markers**Climate Change Mitigation**

Climate Change Mitigation 1

Climate Change Adaptation

Climate Change Adaptation 1

Duration

60 In Months

Agency Fee(\$)

82,008.00

Submission Date

8/18/2020

A. Indicative Focal/Non-Focal Area Elements

Programming Directions	Trust Fund	GEF Amount(\$)	Co-Fin Amount(\$)
BD-2-7	GET	624,270.00	15,772,000.00
BD-1-1	GET	152,648.00	3,000,000.00
LD-1-4	GET	86,324.00	2,000,000.00
	Total Project Cost (\$)	863,242.00	20,772,000.00

B. Indicative Project description summary

Project Objective

To achieve ecological integrity of key floodplain wetlands ensuring positive status of biodiversity, land and water resources, as well as ecosystem services

Project Component	Financing Type	Project Outcomes	Project Outputs	Trust Fund	GEF Amount(\$)	Co-Fin Amount(\$)
Component 1 Enhanced regulatory and financing environment	Technical Assistance	<p>Outcome 1.1 Better fiduciary and financial environment for long-term resilience of wetland ecosystems.</p> <p>Indicators (<i>target to be set at PPG</i>):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • #of new/amended regulations/policies directly related to improving status and management regimes of wetlands • % of the pollution charges collected by the National Ecological Fund directed towards improving wetlands condition 	<p>Output 1.1.1 Regulations and by-laws developed, consulted and adopted by relevant institutions that promote identification, monitoring and wise use of wetlands under international treaties</p> <p>Output 1.1.2 National Ecological Fund capacitated to identify, collect, manage and disburse pollution charges for wetland conservation (link to baseline and further details are in the main text).</p> <p>Output 1.1.3 Biodiversity-compatible local development strategies in two target districts designed and under implementation</p>	GET	60,000.00	1,100,000.00

#of adopted methodologies for incorporation of biodiversity conservation requirements into planning and management of land use in productive zones

Component 2 Improved protection and management of Key Biodiversity Areas on wetlands	Investment	<p>Outcome 2.1 Positive status of wetland habitats and species at targeted Key Biodiversity Areas</p> <p>-Improved management of 30,178 ha of wetland protected areas – METT score up by app.20%</p> <p>-Improved status of globally threatened / indicator wetland species (<i>see details in the text</i>)</p>	<p>Output 2.1.1 Revised PA category, upgraded international designation, improved zoning, mapping, management and business plans for Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve (including assistance for its integration into the tri-lateral Biosphere Reserve with Ukraine and Romania) and Royal Forest Nature Reserve.</p> <p>Output 2.1.2 Management units and communities at targeted PAs capacitated to comply with/enforce management/buffer zone regimes, ensure proper monitoring of biodiversity and key wetland ecosystems, undertake species-focused conservation activities and PA patrolling.</p> <p>Output 2.2.1 Riparian forest strips restored (through assisted regeneration or reforestation as feasible) acting as a barrier to agricultural and waste runoff in Lower Prut, at Manta-Beleu Lakes network. High value forested floodplain ecosystems in Padurea Domneasca (Royal Forest) restored through optimization of flooding regime in Camenca River Basin and regulation of the ground water table.</p>	GET	494,766.00	5,072,000.00
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Outcome 2.2

Viabile wetland
and forest
ecosystem
restoration
options
demonstrated.

- 6,050 ha of lakes
and riparian
forests and
floodplains
restored and/or
under improved
flooding and
groundwater
regime (details in
the text)
-
-

<p>Component 3 Demonstrating sustainable use/livelihoods at wetlands</p>	<p>Investment</p>	<p>Outcome 3.1 New sustainable income streams created for communities and small size entrepreneurs from sustainable use of resources at wetlands</p>	<p>Output 3.1.1 Strengthened capacities of Local Action Group “Lower Prut” and local entrepreneurs’ to implement local development initiatives such as: waste management, organic agriculture and biomass pelleting, biodiversity monitoring.</p>	<p>GET</p>	<p>100,000.00</p>	<p>13,000,000.00</p>
		<p>Indicator: % increase in monetary income to targeted communities/entrepreneurs derived from sustainable wetland management demonstrated and facilitated tourism</p>	<p>Output 3.1.2 Eco-tourism packages for wine/gastronomy routes adjusted to incorporate biodiversity observation in 2 communities.</p>			

Component 4 Knowledge management, monitoring, and evaluation	Technical Assistance	Outcome 4.1	Output 4.1.1 Online awareness raising campaign targeting central and local authorities/decision makers and local and regional education seminars (details in the text)	GET	130,000.00	1,000,000.00
		Knowledge management platform and gender sensitive KM products in place	Output 4.1.2 Monitored and evaluated project results and innovative gender sensitive knowledge products and services from the project synthesized, packaged and disseminated			
		Indicators: increased awareness on wetlands, values, functions and management, adoption of environmental standards (as measured through public surveys)				
Sub Total (\$)					784,766.00	20,172,000.00
Project Management Cost (PMC)						
				GET	78,476.00	600,000.00
				Sub Total(\$)	78,476.00	600,000.00
				Total Project Cost(\$)	863,242.00	20,772,000.00

C. Indicative 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 Agriculture, regional Development and Environment	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	100,000.00
Recipient Country Government	Ministry of Agriculture, regional Development and Environment	Public Investment	Investment mobilized	1,000,000.00
Recipient Country Government	“Moldovan Waters” Agency (Ministry of Agriculture, regional Development and Environment)	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	100,000.00
Private Sector	Oil drilling private sector representatives (to be defined at PPG stage)	Equity	Investment mobilized	500,000.00
Recipient Country Government	Cahul Rayon (District)	Public Investment	Recurrent expenditures	150,000.00
Recipient Country Government	Glodeni Rayon (District)	Public Investment	Recurrent expenditures	150,000.00
Recipient Country Government	Botanical Garden Institute/Academy of Science of the Republic of Moldova	Public Investment	Investment mobilized	150,000.00
Recipient Country Government	Institute of Zoology/Academy of Science of the Republic of Moldova	Public Investment	Investment mobilized	150,000.00
Recipient Country Government	“Moldsilva” Agency (Ministry of Agriculture, regional Development and Environment)	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	200,000.00
Recipient Country Government	“Moldsilva” Agency (Ministry of Agriculture, regional Development and Environment)	Public Investment	Recurrent expenditures	2,000,000.00
Recipient Country Government	“Moldsilva” Agency (Ministry of Agriculture, regional Development and Environment)	Public Investment	Investment mobilized	2,000,000.00

Recipient Country Government	National Institute for Research and Development in Forestry (ICAS)	Public Investment	Investment mobilized	300,000.00
Others	Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Administration (Government of Romania)	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	100,000.00
Civil Society Organization	Rewilding Europe	Grant	Investment mobilized	222,000.00
Civil Society Organization	"Verde e Moldova"	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	100,000.00
Donor Agency	Austrian Development Agency (ADA)	Grant	Investment mobilized	500,000.00
GEF Agency	UNDP	Grant	Investment mobilized	13,000,000.00
GEF Agency	UNDP	Grant	Investment mobilized	50,000.00
Total Project Cost(\$)				20,772,000.00

Describe how any "Investment Mobilized" was identified

Clarification on the investment mobilized: - The Government component of investment mobilized represents anticipated contribution by the Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment, including its agencies "Moldsilva" and "Moldovan Waters", the Botanical Garden and Zoology Institutes towards (i) conservation and sustainable management of natural resources (ii) sustainable agriculture measures (iii) biodiversity conservation (iii) management of freshwater resources and hydrotechnical works (iv) environmental monitoring (v) afforestation and sustainable forests management;(vi) flora and fauna inventories - The NGO component of the investment mobilized represents anticipated contributions from their respective projects, towards the implementation of freshwater resources management measures and climate vulnerability assessments in the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve; - The private sector component of the investment mobilized represents contribution from the oil drilling company (concession/exploitation permit holder under the Valeni petroleum agreement) towards investments in voluntary environment certification (ISO14001 and EU Eco-management and Audit Scheme EMAS) for improved management of company's operations and prevention of petrochemical pollution of Prut River waters from Valeni oil exploration point, situated near Lake Beleu in the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve. - The UNDP component of investment mobilized represents (i) \$ 50,000 anticipated cash contributions/TRAC financing, or other similar sources to support key elements of the project implementation, including Project Management costs; (ii) incremental investments in strengthening local livelihoods in Cahul rayon, through EU4Moldova: Focal Regions project, covering all the villages located in the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve;

D. Indicative 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(\$)
UNDP	GET	Moldova	Biodiversity	BD STAR Allocation	776,918	73,807	850,725.00
UNDP	GET	Moldova	Land Degradation	LD STAR Allocation	86,324	8,201	94,525.00
Total GEF Resources(\$)					863,242.00	82,008.00	945,250.00

E. Project Preparation Grant (PPG)

PPG Required



PPG Amount (\$)

50,000

PPG Agency Fee (\$)

4,750

Agency	Trust Fund	Country	Focal Area	Programming of Funds	Amount(\$)	Fee(\$)	Total(\$)
UNDP	GET	Moldova	Biodiversity	BD STAR Allocation	45,000	4,275	49,275.00
UNDP	GET	Moldova	Land Degradation	LD STAR Allocation	5,000	475	5,475.00
Total Project Costs(\$)					50,000.00	4,750.00	54,750.00

Core Indicators

Indicator 1 Terrestrial protected areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
30,178.00	0.00	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	WDPA 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)
30,178.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Name of the Protected Area	WDPA 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)
Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve			14,771.00						
Royal Forest Nature Reserve/ Ramsar site			15,407.00						

Indicator 3 Area of land restored

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

6050.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
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Indicator 3.1 Area of degraded agricultural land restored

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

Indicator 3.2 Area of Forest and Forest Land restored

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

Indicator 3.3 Area of natural grass and shrublands restored

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

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Indicator 3.4 Area of wetlands (incl. estuaries, mangroves) restored

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
6,050.00			

Indicator 6 Greenhouse Gas Emissions Mitigated

Total Target Benefit	(At PIF)	(At CEO Endorsement)	(Achieved at MTR)	(Achieved at TE)
Expected metric tons of CO ₂ e (direct)	527869	0	0	0
Expected metric tons of CO ₂ e (indirect)	0	0	0	0

Indicator 6.1 Carbon Sequestered or Emissions Avoided in the AFOLU (Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use) sector

Total Target Benefit	(At PIF)	(At CEO Endorsement)	(Achieved at MTR)	(Achieved at TE)
Expected metric tons of CO ₂ e (direct)	527,869			

Expected metric tons of CO ₂ e (indirect)	0
Anticipated start year of accounting	2021
Duration of accounting	20

Indicator 6.2 Emissions Avoided Outside AFOLU (Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use) Sector

Total Target Benefit (At PIF) (At CEO Endorsement) (Achieved at MTR) (Achieved at TE)

Expected metric tons of CO ₂ e (direct)				
Expected metric tons of CO ₂ e (indirect)				
Anticipated start year of accounting				
Duration of accounting				

Indicator 6.3 Energy Saved (Use this sub-indicator in addition to the sub-indicator 6.2 if applicable)

Total Target Benefit Energy (MJ) (At PIF) Energy (MJ) (At CEO Endorsement) Energy (MJ) (Achieved at MTR) Energy (MJ) (Achieved at TE)

Target Energy Saved
(MJ)

Indicator 6.4 Increase in Installed Renewable Energy Capacity per Technology (Use this sub-indicator in addition to the sub-indicator 6.2 if applicable)

Technology	Capacity (MW) (Expected at PIF)	Capacity (MW) (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Capacity (MW) (Achieved at MTR)	Capacity (MW) (Achieved at TE)
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Indicator 11 Number of direct beneficiaries disaggregated by gender as co-benefit of GEF investment

	Number (Expected at PIF)	Number (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Number (Achieved at MTR)	Number (Achieved at TE)
Female	21,000			
Male	19,000			
Total	40000	0	0	0

Part II. Project Justification

1a. Project Description

1.a.1. The global environmental and/or adaptation problems, root causes and barriers that need to be addressed

Moldova's 2013 Wetland Strategy (ultimately not approved as a stand-alone document, however its main priorities and inputs included in the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan and several other pieces of national environmental legislation) estimated the total area of wetlands, lakes and riparian zones in Moldova at approximately 200,000 ha (6% of the country's territory), highlighting that the root causes for wetland degradation are past river engineering which affected ground water table and discharge, land use change and extensive water drainage to make way to agricultural lands. The remaining wetlands are hosting some of the oldest European forest floodplains and meadows, reedbeds, lakes and swamps, providing critical wintering and feeding habitats for hundreds of thousands of water birds migrating along various Eurasian-African flyways. There are two wetland areas which best demonstrate the values and the problems of wetland conservation and management in Moldova. These are: 1) Padurea Domneasca (Royal Forest) Nature Reserve IBA/KBA (Annex A) located in the middle section of River Prut, hosting Moldova's oldest floodplain forests, stretching over 6,032 ha and 2) the MAB/UNESCO Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve covering 14,771 ha, hosting the country's largest natural lakes, also designated Ramsar sites. Detailed description of values of the target areas is provided in Annexes.

According to Moldova's fifth National Communication to the CBD, wetland areas in Moldova are "degraded and are disappearing, and key habitats for important waterfowl are decreasing" further highlighting that the main threats to biodiversity are coming from "the irrational exploitation of natural resources, fragmentation of natural habitats, environmental pollution, poor institutional framework for protected areas management and increasing climate change impacts". The National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan NBSAP (2015-2020) is prioritizing wetland sustainable management with the aim of including more wetland areas under a legal protection regime. The total surface of the wetland protected areas is approximately 94,706 ha which include Moldova's only three Ramsar sites: The Lower Prut Lakes; Lower Nistru and Unguri-Holosnita.

There are several threats to wetlands of Moldova (that the project will address) and each of them has a number of underlying factors that are discussed below.

Disturbed hydrological regime

According to the draft Wetland Strategy, past river regulation has altered water regimes and the water drainage of the past 20-30 years has destroyed approximately 33,000 ha of wetlands. Up to now only 40% of the irrigation system remained operational. The engineering works in the Prut River basin in particular, were done mainly to prevent major flooding and, in this regard, 1976 saw the construction of a large hydropower dam at Stanca Costesti, with a total capacity of 1,285 million m³. The dam (and reservoir) is situated in the upstream stretch of the Prut River, between Romania and Moldova, just 16 km away from the Royal Forest Reserve. According to Moldova's Prut Basin Management Plan, the rationale for its construction was the protection against regular floods of 34 settlements located downstream. The Prut tributaries (notably Camenca) are also regulated by over 300 reservoirs that are affecting the river

flow. The main dam at Stanca Costesti and the smaller reservoirs on tributaries have irremediably changed the water regime and river flow. For example, the natural riparian forest galleries in the Royal Forest Reserve, formed by species such as ash, willows and elms, hosting key habitats for waterbirds are drying out.

Similarly, in the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve, the alteration of flooding regime and climate change but also the construction of artificial ponds and smaller reservoirs on tributaries led to a drastic decrease of water levels in both Manta and Belevu lakes and run-off from nearby agricultural fields and land erosion have increased siltation. During the 2015 drought, Lake Belevu has almost completely dried out. The past years have been increasingly warmer and the Prut river flow, especially during summer months, has decreased. For example, in 2019 the official hydrometeorological data indicated “hydrological drought” during July-September, with the Prut river discharge decreasing by 0.4-0.7 m (near Costesti) and by 0.8-1.3 m (further downstream, near Giurgiulesti). In 2019, the discharge of Prut river and tributaries had decreased by approximately 35-65 % compared to the multi-annual average.

Pollution from agriculture and poor waste management

Agriculture is the main source of income for 798,000 people (approximately 22.4% of the total population) living in Prut River basin, of which 74% are living in rural areas. There are 447 villages and 15 towns in the Prut river basin. Diffuse agricultural water pollution, illegal waste deposits on riverbanks and sub-standard wastewater treatment are the usual pollution sources. Agriculture is a traditional economic sector in Moldova, accounting for over 1/3 of the total GDP and 13% of the total exports, involving approximately 32% of the active population. The Prut River Basin is a typical agrarian region and agricultural land (irrigated and non-irrigated) covers over 76.8% of the area.

The Management Plan of the Prut River Basin based on 2013 water quality assessments, shows that the status of Prut surface water quality oscillates between moderate and poor ecological status. One of the measures to address water pollution listed in the management plan envisages progressive reduction of nitrate pollution and the restoration of riparian forests. Another source of pollution is generated by the occasional oil leaks which have been observed in Belevu Lake, in the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve. Moldova’s oil reserves have been discovered recently and they’re estimated at 2-3 million tones.

Unsustainable agricultural practices

The local development strategies of the districts situated in the surrounding geographies of the protected areas including key wetland ecosystems, lakes and riparian zones (namely Cahul district which hosts the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve; Glodeni and Falesti districts that are located near the Royal Forest Nature Reserve) don’t include concrete sustainable management measures of the natural resources. Much of the riparian grassland ecosystems and pastures located near the riverbanks are degraded due to overgrazing. Wetlands situated in Prut basin and other wet meadows harbour immense biodiversity. However, these have been drained for agriculture and are now severely degraded, having been mowed and grazed intensively for decades, while others continue to make way for farmland. The excessive use of pesticides and fertilizers in the agriculture sector, coupled with the increased sediments in water due to soil erosion, have detrimental effects on aquatic ecosystems and biodiversity. As pastures are degrading, local people are increasingly letting their animals enter forests for grazing. Grazing is a big issue for the country, especially in seasons when rain/water is missing. It has an impact on both the land per se and biodiversity. When the quality of pasturelands worsens because of climatic or other conditions, grazing happens in riparian protective forest strips, floodplain forests and/or protected areas, then it becomes illegal and unsustainable. Enforcement of legislation is still a problem as no alternative measures are proposed by authorities, so communities are mostly left on their own.

While the existing Royal Forest Reserve benefits from some legal form of protection it doesn’t really have a management plan. The annual management activities are implemented by the State Enterprise “Padurea Domneasca/Royal Forest” (founded by the National Forest Authority “Moldsilva”) largely consisting of wood harvesting according to the legal agreed forestry norms and antipoaching measures. The surrounding area (the proposed 9,671 ha buffer zone under Ramsar designation, that surrounds

the current limits of the Royal Forest Reserve) is under a constant threat from unsustainable agricultural practices and inefficient legislation enforcement.

In the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve, unsustainable grazing led to degradation of the riparian strips of grassland and forest, and soil erosion increased the siltation of lakes Beleu and Manta. Prut riverbanks are fragmented by a network of highly eroded ravines, and run-off water (with stones, debris and agricultural organic matter) enter the lakes, therefore increasing the siltation process which is also clogging the channels connecting these lakes with the Prut River. The Biosphere Reserve's draft management plan is pending official approval. So far, concrete restoration measures are not systematically planned and implemented.

Reed burning represents another challenge to biodiversity in the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve. Here, reedbeds used to cover more than 30,000 ha but they've declined drastically over the past couple of decades, due to the desiccation of wetlands and land use change, nowadays they're found mainly around Manta, Vadul lui Isac, Valeni localities, near the largest lakes. They are important habitats in their own right and a number of threatened species rely directly on them. Reed burning practices for land clearing or reed regeneration, are occasionally getting out of control, affecting biodiversity. Although a controlled reed burning management method can have some benefits in terms of reed regeneration, several research conclusions are pointing out that fire destroys invertebrates and therefore bird biodiversity is declining, probably due to food limitation, since butterflies, beetles and some spiders are important prey groups for passerines. Early migratory species nesting areas are also getting destroyed by uncontrolled reed fires.

The following barriers need to be removed on the path from the current threat-dominated scenario to optimal status of wetlands.

Legal framework inadequacies. Moldova has ratified major UN environmental treaties. Although the domestic legislation that translates Moldova's international commitments is comprehensive, there are key inadequacies with significant impact on protected areas management and permitting system over natural resource use. For example the Law on Protected Areas (art.26) does stipulate that economic activities that may affect the natural ecosystem are forbidden in the scientific reserves but provides an exception for the exploitation of natural and mineral resources that are of national interest (such as oil and gas) with the only caveat to respect environmental norms, Although a series of economic operators have introduced ISO 9000 certification, there is no account of ISO 14001 and EU ECO Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) implemented in the country. Voluntary environmental reporting, except for Lafarge cement plant, does not exist in the country. In case of Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve (which is a former scientific reserve) this provision proved to be disastrous, as oil exploitation is happening in a core protected area, in Beleu Lake next to key birding and nesting areas, and oil leaks are likely to occur especially during flooding period, due to sub-standard safety standards of the operations. Furthermore, the Prut river flows have decreased during the past decades due to regulations on Prut and its tributaries, and even more so during past years, due to climate change. Stanca-Costesti Dam operates based on an old Regulation, which needs to change to account for the climate change induced decrease of the river flows. Moldova's technical capacity to engage in transboundary hydrological management and negotiations over revised ecological flows in Prut basin needs to be strengthened.

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National Ecological Fund inadequate in its current operational mode for financing of restoration and conservation of wetlands. Revenues from pollution charges are regulated by the Moldovan Pollution Charge Law (no 1540/1998) and by a number of additional environment related taxes. According to the provisions of this law, five main categories of payments for environmental pollution are applied, including for: 1) emissions of pollutants from stationary sources; 2) emissions from mobile sources; 3) discharges of pollutants; 4) disposal of production wastes; 5) import of goods that causes the environment pollution. The law does not indicate important objectives such as application of the 'polluter pays' and internalizing the external costs of pollution, compensation of damages caused to the environment and human body. In practical terms, only the objective regarding the formation of environmental funds has been achieved. At the same time, the financial resources accumulated by the environmental funds (National Environmental Fund (NEF) and Local

Environmental Funds (LEFs) as a result of receipt of payments for pollution are used mainly for the development of public works, especially for water supply and sewerage works, sanitation and greening of localities. The National Ecological Fund, under the Ministry of Regional Development, Agriculture and Environment, is not fully capacitated to redirect the funds towards protected areas/wetlands management.

The final evaluation of the UNDP/GEF project “*Environmental Fiscal Reform*” implemented during 2011-2015, pointed out that the project has delivered extensive legal assessments and proposals which were not fully implemented due to the political volatility and frequent changes of the government in recent years. One of the main recommendations of the final evaluation was for future GEF project to build on the proposals and assessments delivered by the Environmental Fiscal Reform project and explore opportunities to further support the reform of the National Environmental Fund. Furthermore, a 2013 Study on the extension of Protected Areas (developed under the GEF Project “*Improving coverage and effectiveness of the protected area system in Moldova*”) highlighted that the budget dedicated for financing the protected areas represent only 53% of the basic management costs and the financing gap of the protected area is estimated at approximately 1.9 million USD annually for the basic management measures and 2.8 million USD for the optimum management. The Study underlined the importance of the National Ecological Fund in increasing the available resources destined to the management of protected areas, proposing to increase the financing of protected areas from the National Ecological Fund, and direct up to 15% of the total taxes and funds collected by the National Ecological Fund towards the projects that are focused on the management of protected areas, including wetlands.

Missing know-how and inadequate capacities for protection and restoration of wetlands. Currently, the PAs system in Moldova covers 189,385.9 hectares (or 5.61% of the country's territory). A third of it is managed by the National Forests Authority Moldsilva (government agency, under the Ministry of Regional Development, Agriculture and Environment) and the rest is mostly located on community or private lands. Protected areas (PAs) outside Moldsilva's management have almost no effective protection (covered by law, but no management undertaken). The PAs system is neither representative of species nor of habitat diversity across the terrestrial biomes. The capacities of Moldsilva protected areas management units are better equipped for forestry management and they lack technical capacities and trained conservation biologists.

The Royal Forest Nature Reserve is currently managed by the Royal Forest Enterprise, a state company founded by Moldsilva agency, with 38 staff. The total annual budget dedicated for the management of Royal Forest Reserve is approximately 200,000 USD. According to the 2013 Study on the extension of Protected Areas (developed under the GEF Project “*Improving coverage and effectiveness of the protected area system in Moldova*”) the financing gap of protected areas, in general, is around 50%. Funding for Royal Forest management is sourced from wood harvesting and tourism revenues.

A serious threat to key wetland ecosystems in this area is the lack of regular floods due to regulation of the Prut river and its tributary, Camenca. Climate change is also contributing to the decrease of the river flow. The Moldsilva agency is currently implementing some restoration work that limits the expansion of the Box elder, *Acer negundo*, the spreading of which tends to gradually replace the native riparian forest galleries, but without being able to address the underlying causes of wetland destruction which is the lack of regular floods. The main problem and key barrier is that the Royal Forest Nature Reserve does not have a management plan and as a result, key wetland restoration measures on the Prut tributary (Camenca river) that could improve flooding regime in the area and increase the chances of wetland survival, cannot be contextualized in the landscape, properly planned and budgeted for. The main activities in the area consist of forestry management measures, protection against poaching and illegal logging. There haven't been comprehensive species inventories conducted in the area and there are no key species monitoring protocols implemented; the institutional capacity is weak in terms of technical expertise on biodiversity conservation (for example there are no biologists' positions in the organization's structure).

The Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve is managed by the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve's administration, under the authority of Moldsilva agency. The management plan of the protected area was developed and submitted to the Ministry of Regional Development, Agriculture and Environment more than a year ago, and pending approval. According to the official representatives, the reason for delays stem from the recent institutional reform, still ongoing in Moldova, in particular the need of changing Moldsilva state agency's status and transition to full public agency legal status. A government ordinance in this sense is soon expected to be formally approved. The current management team of the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve consist of 19 permanent staff and a Consultative Council. The staff are implementing some management and monitoring measures mostly in the core areas, and the management unit does not have the resources and capacities to cover the entire biosphere reserve's territory. Moreover, considering that the Lower Prut region and Danube Delta are part of the Lower Danube Euroregion, there are no coordinated management and monitoring measures with the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve and no best practices and lesson learnt transferred to Moldova.

- Absence of planning and enforcement framework to mainstream biodiversity in the wider local development policies, planning and budgets. The capacity of natural resources management at district level is very weak. Currently for example, important key biodiversity consideration is not used in the process of allocation of land to various uses. In order to conserve biodiversity outside PAs, there is a need for local strategies and local-level land use plans to not only fully take into consideration biodiversity conservation considerations but to also effectively budget appropriate resources for addressing environmental threats and effectively implement environmental legal compliance. The existing legal framework for biodiversity monitoring is not fully in place and its enforcement is still a problem, mostly because of weak protected areas management capacities and lack of coordination among stakeholders (governmental, science/academia, NGOs, community, private) and lack of interest in and understanding for species/habitat conservation at site level in and outside protected areas. Effective biodiversity management outside PAs is very important to maintain the ecological integrity of Moldova's ecosystems and ensuring that their biodiversity is rationally conserved. Under the Ministry of Regional Development, Agriculture and Environment, the State Ecological Inspectorate (SEI) operates at the district level to enforce environmental legislation while the Local Public Authorities (LPAs) and Municipalities are responsible for enforcement of biodiversity related legislation at a local level, as well as for enforcement of land use plans (where they exist). Moldsilva is responsible for the enforcement of forestry regulations on forest land under their jurisdiction. There is however limited technical capacity to deal with biodiversity mainstreaming in local development policies. Moreover, there are weak capacities for permitting, monitoring, and enforcing biodiversity-friendly development at the district level with respect to managing threats at wetlands.

- Local communities lack opportunities for alternative sources of income. Cahul is located in the south-west border of Moldova and it is hosting the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve. The socio-economic development is mainly based on commerce, agriculture and potential for tourism. According to 2017 data, in Cahul there are 785 businesses with 10,008 employees, of which 10 large companies and 605 micro-enterprises. The monthly average salary is approx. 25% lower than the country average. In the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve, the 9 local villages have formed a Local Action Groups (LAGs) with own strategy and priorities for environment and local development objectives, but this work requires support and development of concrete models of alternative livelihood opportunities on wetlands.

Insufficient awareness about the decline of wetlands. Moldova's priorities are revolving around key issues under the EU Association Agreement. The 2019 EU Report on Moldova's progress under the Association Agreement highlighted several priorities related to environment: organic farming, management of waste from electric and electronic equipment and chemicals, climate change. Similarly, among potential national opportunities under the Green New Deal, the political discourse in Moldova is touching upon air quality and air monitoring, energy efficiency, waste management and low carbon transport, land use and spatial planning, afforestation of riparian and degraded land, eco-tourism, reducing air/water/soil pollution. A sharpened focus and increased awareness and political backup are needed to address the causes of wetlands decline since healthy wetland ecosystems services are the basis of many political priorities under Moldova's EU accession agenda.

II.1a.2) the key baseline projects

Implementing Organization	Brief description, time period, budget, and relevance to project
<p>Ministry of Regional Development, Agriculture and Environment</p>	<p>EU4Moldova Focal Regions/ EU4Cahul</p> <p>Overall objectives of the EU4Moldova project is to support development of smart, inclusive and sustainable regional growth poles in Cahul and Ungheni districts of Moldova, to bring a better quality of life and new opportunities to citizens. The EU Focal Regions supports both Cahul and Ungheni districts to improve the necessary public services and infrastructure, involving private sector and stimulating investments, improving employment and equal opportunities for men and women</p> <p><u>Synergies:</u> The proposed project will work with 9 municipalities in Cahul districts, which are located within the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve perimeter, on local demonstration agri-business projects and will support local communities/small enterprises' participation under the local calls for proposals to be organized by the EU4Cahul initiative.</p> <p><i>Period: 2016-2024</i> <i>Total budget: 23m EUR (European Union)</i></p>
<p>Eco Contact</p>	<p>Enhancing climate resilience in Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve</p> <p>The main objective of this project is to support sustainable management and resilience of the wetland ecosystems in the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve considering climate change impacts and increasing local livelihoods and their adaptation capacities.</p> <p><u>Synergies:</u> The proposed project includes a strong focus and attention to climate resilient wetland ecosystems and will complement awareness raising efforts on the importance of the wetland ecosystems services for adaptation to climate change.</p> <p><i>Total budget: 1m EUR (Austrian Development Agency)</i> <i>Period: 2020-2023</i></p>
<p>Verde e Moldova</p>	<p>Restoring Danube Delta wetlands and steppe</p> <p>The project is implemented by “Rewilding Europe” in three countries: Romania, Moldova and Ukraine, with the aim of restoring 40,000 ha of wetlands in Danube basin and Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve. The focus in Moldova is on Lake Beleu, where the project is implementing topo-bathymetric studies that will serve as a basis for future desilting works.</p>

Synergies: The proposed project includes a focus on wetlands in Prut River Basin with complementary activities in Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve.

Period: 2019-2023

Total budget: 4 m USD (Budget for Moldova: 222,000 USD)

Under the baseline scenario, continued degradation of wetlands in Moldova will be expected as a result of water pollution from agriculture, poor waste management and exploitation of oil resources, and incoherent legislation that prioritize conservation and sustainable wetland management. Water pollution due to agriculture, illegal waste deposits and oil exploitation will continue to represent major problems, alongside inefficient enforcement of legal environmental norms, weak collection of pollution charges and weak collection of local taxes on natural resources exploitation. The National Ecological Fund will remain insufficiently capacitated to acknowledge the critical financing needs of wetlands and protected areas; therefore, it would not re-direct funds towards wetland management and reconstruction measures. Contextualization of the key wetland areas of the Prut River Basin into the local development broader landscape will not be enabled by the local development policies and land use plans under the baseline scenario. The PA management system in Moldova will remain inadequate. The Moldsilva protected areas management units will lack technical capacities, basic biodiversity management tools and trained conservation biologists. The Royal Forest Nature Reserve, managed by “Moldsilva” agency will not have an adequate management plan, no key species monitoring system will be in place and no adequate management capacity. The local communities will be unprepared to access the available sources of financing in order to implement sustainable local development measures. For further discussion of the difference between the baseline scenario and the alternative scenario please refer to *Section II.1a5 Incremental cost reasoning*.

II.1a.3) the proposed alternative scenario with a brief description of expected outcomes and components of the project

Long term solution: The long term solution for the sustainable development and conservation of the high value wetland ecosystems in Moldova includes promotion of effective wetlands management models, aligned with Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) principles, within the context of supporting and securing sustainable and resilient livelihoods for local resources users, whose daily existence depend greatly on the integrity and productivity of these high value wetland ecosystems.

The project’s **Theory of Change** is that multiple benefits of ecosystems resilience and healthy watersheds can be unlocked when key wetlands, lakes and riparian zones are managed effectively, and adequately contextualized in the surrounding landscape and aligned with IWRM principles . The project’s four components are closely aligned and linked to facilitate an enabling environment that provides for effective wetlands protection and management based on an integrated river basin management approach that ensures the continuity of wetland ecosystem services sustaining livelihoods. For an integrated landscape approach, an adequate policy, legal and financing framework must support multiple types of management measures. For example, water must be managed in a way that facilitates the necessary ecological flow to ensure the survival of wetland ecosystems located downstream. In addition, protected areas including key wetland ecosystems must be adequately planned and managed, appropriately contextualized within the river’s basin landscape. Both biodiversity and livelihoods depend on land and water that are not polluted and not degraded and on vegetation that is resilient and provides fodder and critical habitats. Both livelihoods and biodiversity depend on adequate flows of water and many livelihoods depend on different components of biodiversity. The

project aims to put all these different types of on-the-ground management practices in place: support the regulatory adjustments to increase the level of water flow, prevent pollution and improve management effectiveness of key wetland areas; contextualize wetland areas into broader landscape by introducing several best practices in the Prut River basin and elevating wetland conservation higher on the political agenda.

Component 1 of the project contributes to a better regulatory framework to ensure conservation and sustainable management of wetlands biodiversity.

Under Output 1.1.1 the project will focus mostly on regulatory adjustments. The project will support the revision of the existing legislation and will address legal inadequacies in order to strengthen wetland protection and better compliance with the EU Directives, MAB UNESCO and Ramsar guidelines. The project will further support the current efforts of the “Moldovan Waters” Agency (“Apele Moldovei”) to coordinate with the Romanian water management authorities through (i) technical expertise and analysis of different hydroclimatic scenarios, using INFO-FLOW software, in order to estimate the minimum ecological flow needed to maintain ecological integrity of wetlands and lakes in Prut river basin, taking into account consideration climate change impacts, through the analysis of different scenarios, runoffs and recharge estimates, to back-up ecological risk assessment and identification of priority river flow management and river restoration action (ii) technical assistance to the Biodiversity SubCommission under the Bilateral Hydrotechnical Commission (Romania-Moldova) for negotiations on the minimum ecological flow necessary to maintain the integrity of wetland ecosystems in the Prut River basin (*details will be validated at PPG stage*). Based on the discussion with representatives of the local communities, during the PIF writing, the project will also seek to address legislative inadequacies regulating the permitting system (to combat over-exploitation of natural resources) in the biosphere reserve’s territory. (iii) support to organisation of multi-stakeholder consultations on the ecological and socio-economic benefits derived from ensuring adequate water releases and observance of minimum ecological flow to wetlands, lakes and riparian zones within the Prut River basin situated downstream Stanca Costesti Dam, considering the climate change and water deficits observed during recent years.

- Under Output 1.1.2 the project will build on the previous GEF funded project “*Environmental Fiscal Reform*” and will support potential legal adjustments and modifications to the Regulation that governs the National Environmental Fund, on order to strengthen the National Environmental Fund’s capacity to collect water pollution charges and taxes and redirect a larger part of the funds collected towards wetland restoration.

Under Output 1.1.3 the project will work with the local districts’ authorities in Cahul (hosting the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve), Glodeni and Falesti districts (hosting the Royal Forest Reserve). Although some maps of biodiversity priority areas exist, they are not reflected in district level development strategies and land use plans (where they exist). The proposed project will support mapping of key wetlands habitats in the targeted protected areas and will work with the district authorities to integrate the main biodiversity consideration and provisions for natural resource management and biodiversity monitoring their new local development strategies. “ The project will use GEF resources to develop methodological guidelines to support integrated land-use planning to ensure that land and resource use are not undermining biodiversity and that agriculture and extractive industry practices are more biodiversity-positive”

Component 2 focuses on improved protection of KBAs/IBAs and species populations through increasing the management effectiveness of existing wetland protected areas. This will enable stable population dynamics of key species (Outcome 2.1) and planning and budgeting for strategic restoration activities to improve wetland habitats and ecosystem services (Outcome 2.2). The project’s work under this component will create the prerequisites for improvements in wetland protection in targeted protected areas, will facilitate international designation and will provide for the necessary basic management tools such as a management plan (and revision of the existing one), key habitats mapping and zoning, species inventory, identification of indicator species, monitoring protocols and species conservation activities, strengthening enforcement and patrolling capacities, planning and budgeting for key restoration activities.

Output 2.1.1 will focus on supporting Royal Forest Nature Reserve's Ramsar international recognition, a priority objective under Moldova NBSAP. The project will build on previous *ad-hoc* inventories carried out in the area. Royal Forest Nature Reserve's proposed Ramsar area is stretching over 15,407 ha, situated at approximately 16 km downstream of Stanca Costesti dam, within the administrative boundaries of Glodeni and Falesti districts. The core area of 5,763 ha corresponds to the current Royal Forest Nature Reserve. The proposed Ramsar area includes a mosaic of habitats: some of the oldest wooded floodplains of Europe, rivers, meadows, marshes, relict lakes and active river channels; hayfields and pastures and 10 villages. The area supports globally threatened species included in the IUCN Red List and the Moldovan Red Book and it shelters the largest colony of herons in Europe.

Further downstream, the project will support the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve's participation into a trilateral transboundary MAB UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. The project will support the compilation of the MAB UNESCO dossier, for the designation of a 641,174-ha^[1] trilateral biosphere reserve that will unite Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve in Moldova with the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve in Romania and the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve in Ukraine. The intention of creating a trilateral cross-border protected area has originated from early meetings of the Joint Trilateral Ministerial Committee of the Euroregion Lower Danube (established in 1998) and it is aimed at harmonisation of biodiversity management and conservation measures of the wetlands in the lower Prut-Danube region. The foundation has been laid down by the EU funded project "*Consolidation of the nature protected areas network for biodiversity protection and sustainable development in the Danube Delta and Lower Prut Region-PAN Nature*" funded from the Joint Operation Programme Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova 2007-2013, which has supported the creation of the Lower Prut MAB UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in Moldova, as a prerequisite to the final trilateral unification into a cross border MAB UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Danube Delta and Lower Prut.

This GEF project will build on EU funded efforts and will strengthen the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve's management capacity. The participation of the Lower Prut River Biosphere Reserve in the creation of a transboundary trilateral protected area is dependent on a positive review of its first progress report to MAB/UNESCO, to be submitted in 2022. In addition, a study of the hydro-ecological conditions for adequate wetlands, lakes and riparian zones management, encompassing targeted wetlands within Prut River Basin, will be developed

Output 2.1.2 will focus on building the technical and institutional capacities needed to address key management weaknesses and abate critical wetland threats. The right actors will be engaged in the process: protected areas guards and field level staff, ministerial staff, and policy makers, local communities' representatives. Joint agreements with local police will be facilitated and management units' capacities for patrolling the protected areas, fighting against poaching and illegal logging will be strengthened.

The project will support the development of the Royal Forest Nature Reserve management plan, to cover the total area to be included under Ramsar designation, 15,407 ha (*to be validated at PPG stage*). The project will develop the management plan based on habitat mapping and species inventories. Identification of key indicator species and setting up of a monitoring protocol will be carried out in cooperation with the Moldovan Academy of Science institutes and Moldsilva agency.

The Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve has a draft management plan, submitted for approval to the Ministry of Regional Development, Agriculture and Environment. The approval is still pending (expected by end 2020) due to an institutional reform that is still on-going and it also affects changes in Moldsilva agency. The Management Plan needs revisions of the zoning and delineation of key habitats. The project will support the revision of the current draft management plan, based on habitat mapping and a more accurate zoning. Further support will be provided for the identification of indicator species, setting up integrated monitoring protocols that will be harmonised with the monitoring database developed by the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve (in Romania) and strengthening the management unit's capacity to implement conservation and monitoring activities. The monitoring database will encompass biotic and abiotic environmental parameters such as: hydrology, hydrobiology, water quality, soil quality, biodiversity, natural resources, economic activities, local population. Based on the discussions with the Local Action Group Lower Prut LAGLP (that comprises

representatives from all the 9 localities situated in the biosphere reserve) the monitoring of biodiversity and natural resources is one of their priorities, included in the LAGLP strategy. Therefore, the project will seek to promote local communities' involvement in biodiversity and key species monitoring, by linking the monitoring protocols of the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve administration with local monitoring programmes in each locality, to be included in local development plans.

Concrete species conservation activities will aim at maintaining a stable population of key indicator species such as: e.g. water lily *Nymphaea alba*; floating fern *Salvinia natans*; European water chestnut *Trapa natans*; red-breasted goose *Branta rufficollis*; little egret *Egretta garzetta*; great egret *Egretta alba*; glossy ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*; black-crowned night heron *Nycticorax*; Eurasian spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*; grey heron *Ardea cinerea*; mute swan *Cygnus olor*; etc., including the forested floodplain species in Padurea Domneasca (Royal Forest) Nature Reserve/Ramsar site with willow trees *Salix sp.* ash trees *Fraxinus sp.*, black alder *Alnus glutinosa*; European wild cat *Felix sylvestris*; European pine marten *Martes*; Eurasian otter *Lutra*; European mink *Mustela lutreola* etc. (indicator species to be established at PPG).

Output 2.2.1 The first part of the work under this output will focus on the restoration of the severely degraded riparian grassland meadows and forest strips, in the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve. The reforestation activities will be co-financed by "Moldsilva" agency and will be implemented on approximately 50 ha around the Manta and Beleu lakes ecosystem, in strategic locations, with the aim of not only restoring degraded land and reducing soil erosion but also acting as a barrier against domestic waste and agriculture run-offs entering 3000 ha of lakes ecosystems in Manta-Beleu lakes network and increasing siltation (*the location of the restoration areas will be selected at PPG stage*). Addressing land degradation is a priority for Moldova. Intensive use of land resources and poor adaptability of applied agricultural practices along with ineffective risk governance have increased a wide-ranging impact of environmental degradation related to severe soil fertility decline and reduction in ecosystem resiliency. Through this component, the project will support the voluntary LDN target of Moldova which aims "to achieve by 2030 no net loss of productive land/soils and increase drought resiliency, adaptation capacity and biodiversity services of agricultural ecosystems".

The second part of the restoration work under this output, will focus on increasing regular flooding and increased groundwater level at key wetland habitats of approximately 3,000 ha of elms, willows, ash, poplar galleries and swamps and the rich biodiversity of the Royal Forest Nature Reserve, on the verge of being lost, as wetlands are drying out due to the absence of flooding. These species are being gradually replaced by the box elder *Acer negundo*^[2]. The Royal Forest Reserve is situated between the Prut river, and its main tributary, Camenca. In the past, the Camenca river was affected by engineering works and regulation designed for flood prevention in the neighboring villages. Some of these works have modified Camenca's lower reaches such that the water flows back into the Prut river. This has led to the surrounding wetlands no longer receiving water from the Camenca or the Prut rivers, as the water level in the Prut river has dropped due to factors such as climate change, and the Stanca Costesti dam. Preliminary discussions and assessments at the PIF stage indicated that a possible solution would be to build a small size lock on Camenca to prevent waters flowing back into the Prut river (between the villages of Balatina and Pruteni), and to redirect the river back to its old course - which used to flood the riparian meadows and forests. The overall costs of such an intervention will be assessed at PPG stage. The project will support the development of a technical feasibility study for the hydrological restoration works which will restore Camenca's primary course and will increase the flooding of riparian floodplain forests. Further financing for the implementation of the works will be sought from the National Ecological Fund (*to be validated at PPG stage*). The proposed intervention is aligned with the Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) principles and it is reflected in the Management Plan of the Camenca River Basin 2019-2024. The project will work together with the Association of Women for Environment and Sustainable Development^[3] and the regional branches of the Ministry of Regional Development, Agriculture and Environment Protection to deploy participatory approaches and multi-stakeholder consultation throughout the implementation of the restoration work.

Component 3 Will support local communities in the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve to develop and implement local initiatives, improving their livelihoods.

Output 3.1.1 Under this output, the project will work with local communities in the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve to support local development initiatives. All the 9 villages located in the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve territory are part of the *Local Action Group Lower Prut* (LAGLP) set up under EU LEADER programme. The project will work with the LAGLP and will identify local development and environment priorities. The project will further support local entrepreneurs and will facilitate their participation into different calls for proposals to be organized by the EU4Moldova programme, implemented in Cahul district. Possible local initiatives that could be supported include (i) fruits and vegetables processing (fermented vegetables and fruit products, fruit juices, jams; dried fruits etc) (ii) milk and wool processing- with co-financing from the EU4Moldova project and local municipalities the project will seek to support cooperatives of producers, by the providing milk processing equipment for cheese/yogurt production and butter, and sour cream (iii) organic agriculture- could be supported by offsetting some of the local upfront costs related to certification (iv) reed pelleting- will be based on Moldova's successful EU funded Biomass Project's experience and on other examples from Romania or Ukraine^[4] *(to be validated at PPG stage)*.

Output 3.1.2 The project will support local ecotourism initiatives including bird watching tours. Integrated packages or "biodiversity passports" will be developed including attractive itineraries in the Lower Prut and Danube Delta Biosphere Reserves and wine/gastronomy routes in the lower Prut region and in the Royal Forest Nature Reserve/Ramsar site. The project will develop a SMART "biodiversity passport", a downloadable *Smart Phone App* that will be promoted as the preferred means to download a single ID/code which would give access to protected sites and tourism facilities in the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve and the Royal Forest Nature Reserve with the option to visit the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve in Romania. The funds will be collected into a distinct account managed by the project; 50% of the funds collected will be directed to local communities for strengthening tourism infrastructure and 50% will be managed by the project for cross-border biodiversity conservation (in Lower Prut-Danube Delta wetlands and in the Royal Forest Nature Reserve/Ramsar site). *(co-financing of activities and proposed SMART solution will be validated at PPG stage)*. Given the COVID-19 implications, the project will work with the **Local Action Group Lower Prut and local communities' representatives as well as with Moldova's Association of Inbound Tourism (ANTRIM)** and with line ministries (the ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment and the Ministry of Health) to develop Safe Tourism standards, destined to gain tourists confidence and promote the tourism potential of Moldova's protected areas, making sure that tourists can enjoy holidays in Moldova in a safe environment, and feel comfortable for the duration of their visits. The safe tourism standards are expected to be applied by the project initially in the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve *(to be explored during the PPG)*.

Component 4 will focus on raising awareness on wetlands and their main problems, using digital channels, and local partnerships, targeting decision makers, NGOs, the public and local resource users.

Output 4.1.1 The project will organise an online awareness raising campaign, designed to grab attention and elevate the issues related to wetlands threats on the political agenda. The campaign will also seek to raise the public's awareness on the importance of wetlands ecosystem services and the threats to their fragile balance. Social media, blogs, a dedicated website, networking and direct targeted messages will be used as the main digital channels. The main messages to the decision makers will be related to the issues addressed by the project in the targeted protected areas, which are mainly: water pollution, water scarcity and need for financing. The messages sent through these digital channels will also emphasize the necessary regulatory measures that need to be in place to abate these threats. The Moldovan Academy of Science, Moldsilva, the Research Institutes, and other partners to conduct species' inventories, are expected to support the on-line awareness campaign by writing easy-to-read papers on the biodiversity richness hosted by Prut basin's wetlands and threats. The project will hold local awareness raising and education seminars that will reach out to local resource users. These seminars will be organized jointly with other existing projects and donor initiatives in both protected areas. Under this output, the project will use GEF resources and will work together with the Ministry of Regional Development, Agriculture and Environmental Protection's and will organise several workshops with representatives of economic operators involved in mining and extractive industries located in the Prut River basin with negative impact on wetlands, to raise awareness and encourage

adoption of ISO 14001 and EU ECO Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) environmental management systems. The project's results and lessons learnt will be disseminated through online channels and the local seminars, as well as through the support of the Bilateral Committees and Trilateral Committees that are active in the Prut-Danube basin.

Output 4.1.2 The Project Management Unit (PMU) will be responsible for implementing the project's Knowledge Management (KM) and M&E Plan, including the project's inception workshop, annual planning workshops, monitoring of activities, outputs and outcomes as well as indicators, monitoring of the risk matrix, and identifying potential risks and mitigation measures to reduce risks and conduct midterm and final project evaluations while integrating the evaluative knowledge further in the project's adaptive management and sharing the lessons learned with key partners and collaborators, other GEF and non-GEF projects. For example, a number of awareness seminars will be organized together with the GEF WWF project " Danube River Basin Hydro-morphology and River restoration DYNA" to raise awareness on the negative impacts of the unsustainable agricultural practices that amplifies soil erosion around lakes and riparian areas leading to lakes siltation. Synergies with the EU funded EU4Cahul programme will be explored and best practices shared, at least 1-2 awareness seminars are envisaged to be organized jointly. engaging local communities and local entrepreneurs and raising awareness on biodiversity friendly business models and practices. The project will work together with Eco-contact and will capitalize on joint focus on and attention to climate resilient wetland ecosystems and the importance of healthy ecosystems and ecosystems services to resilient livelihoods. A clear Knowledge Management (KM) approach will be used, in line with the GEF requirements to foster learning and sharing from relevant projects and initiatives and evaluations and contribute to the project's overall impact and sustainability. The proposed project's Knowledge Management (KM) approach will be aligned with the GEF requirements to foster learning and sharing from relevant projects and initiatives and evaluations and contribute to the project's overall impact and sustainability.

II.1a.4) alignment with GEF focal area and/or Impact Program strategies

The project contributes to the Biodiversity focal area, as it supports more effective management of Key Biodiversity Areas at 30,178 ha and integrates biodiversity conservation principles into spatial planning at local level in two districts.

The project contributes to the Land Degradation focal area as it designs a model to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality on wetlands and promotes restoration of wetlands and riparian forests at 6,050 ha.

II.1a.5) incremental/additional cost reasoning and expected contributions from the baseline, the GEFTF, LDCF, SCCF, and co-financing; and II.1a.6) global environmental benefits (GEFTF) and/or adaptation benefits (LDCF/SCCF);

<i>Baseline scenario</i>	<i>Summary of GEF incremental intervention</i>	<i>Benefits</i>
Component 1: Enhanced regulatory and policy environment for conservation and sustainable management of wetlands		
Continued degradation of wetlands in Moldova as a result of (i) water pollution from agriculture, poor waste management and exploitation of oil resources (ii) unsustainable agriculture	Moldova's technical capacity to engage in the transboundary cooperation in the Prut River Basin will be strengthened. The project will support Moldova's capacity to support the amendments to	KBAs/IBAs and Ramsar sites located in Prut River basin will maintain their balance and ecosystem services with adequate level

practices (iii) incoherent legislation that prioritize conservation and sustainable wetland management (iv) water scarcity and climate change

Stanca-Costesti Dam on Prut river is regulated by the Romania-Moldova Bilateral Hydrotechnical Commission founded in 2010. The Commission has agreed on the Regulation of the Stanca-Costesti as the main regulatory framework document. Romania and Moldova water management agencies are currently working on amendments to the Regulation, prompted by the 2019 drought and by the alarming decrease of Prut river flow.

Water pollution due to agriculture, illegal waste deposits and oil exploitation are stringent, multifaceted problems, that include legislative inadequacies, inefficient enforcement of legal environmental norms, weak collection of pollution charges and weak collection of local taxes on natural resources exploitation.

The National Ecological Fund is not sufficiently capacitated to acknowledge the critical financing needs of wetlands and protected areas; therefore, it doesn't (re)direct funds towards wetland management and reconstruction measures.

The former GEF funded project in Moldova PIMS 4183 "Environmental Fiscal Reform" (2011-2015) has developed legal assessments to support the reform of the National Ecological Fund. The former GEF funded project PIMS 5355 "Mainstreaming biodiversity in local development plans (2015-2019) has produced legal assessments and recommendations to mainstream biodiversity in the land use and spatial pl

the Regulation of the Stanca Costesti Dam, through hydroclimatic modeling and analysis of different scenarios that will account for climate change negative impacts, support to stakeholder consultation and needed coordination work, aligned with the IWRM principles

Building on past legal assessments undertaken under by prior GEF funded project, the project will develop amendments that are expected to adjust legal inadequacies related to the: (i) exploitation of mineral resources in the protected areas, (ii) pollution charges and (iii) local taxes on the use of natural resources.

Attention will be dedicated to oil extraction in a core area of the MAB UNESCO biosphere reserve, and the project will advocate for the implementation of all the environmental safety measures and removal of residual contamination.

In addition, amendments to the National Ecological Fund's Regulation will be developed in order to increase its capacity to collect pollution charges and increase the percentage of funds to be channeled for wetland management and ecological reconstruction measures.

The project will further support mapping of key wetland habitats in the targeted protected areas and will work with the local and district authorities to integrate the main biodiversity considerations and provisions for natural resource management, land use planning and biodiversity management in their new local development strategies (their current local development strategies timeline is 2020).

In the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve, the project will work with the local authorities aiming at intr

l of water flows. The amended minimum ecological flow embedded in the newly amended Regulation, is taking into consideration ecosystems' needs under the variability induced by the climate change, and it is ensuring the integrity of the wetlands located downstream of Stanca-Costesti Dam.

Legal framework will enable wetland protection and sustainable wetland management and the National Ecological Fund will be able to collect water pollution charges and redirect a larger part of the collected funds for wetlands management.

Increasing financing of wetlands will provide for the needed ecological reconstruction measures such as hydrological work in order to increase regular flooding of the riparian forests and meadows (e.g. in the Royal Forest Nature Reserve) and for the regeneration of the degraded riparian meadows and forests and removal of siltation in the affected lakes (Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve).

Biodiversity considerations mainstreamed in production areas in three districts. Policy development will include gender and biodiversity conservation and hab

<p>can connectivity in the land use and spatial planning.</p> <p>Contextualization of the key wetland areas of the Prut River Basin in the local development broader landscape is not enabled by the local development policies and land use plans (if they exist).</p>	<p>will work with the local authorities aiming at introducing key species monitoring and biodiversity considerations into local planning.</p>	<p>biodiversity conservation and habitat management provisions in the 2020-2024 district development strategies in three districts of Moldova.</p>
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Component 2: Improved protection of Key Biodiversity Areas on wetlands

<p>The PAs management system in Moldova is inadequate, a third of it is managed by the National Forests Authority Moldsilva (government agency, under the Ministry of Regional Development, Agriculture and Environment) and the rest is mostly located on community or private lands.</p> <p>The capacities of Moldsilva protected areas management units lack technical capacities, basic biodiversity management tools and trained conservation biologists. Internationally designated sites are better managed than local reserves.</p> <p>The Royal Forest Nature Reserve, managed by “Moldsilva” agency doesn’t have a management plan, no key species monitoring system and no adequate management capacity. Wetlands are drying out, heavily affected by past river engineering. No planning for hydrological restoration measures is done currently; the trend of species’ population is not monitored systematically; key species are not identified.</p> <p>The Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve has a draft Management Plan submitted for approval; however, it needs revision in order to adjust zoning and mapping of key habitats. There is an existing monitoring database. The management</p>	<p>The project will support Ramsar designation of 15,407 ha of wetlands in middle section of the Prut River basin, including the current Royal Forest Nature Reserve (6,032 ha).</p> <p>The development of a full-fledged management plan in the Royal Forest Nature Reserve/Ramsar site will be facilitated, based on species inventories and habitat mapping and monitoring protocols/database set-up.</p> <p>In the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve, the project will support key habitat mapping and improved zoning and revision of the current management plan. With the project’s support, a study of hydro-ecological conditions for adequate wetlands, lakes and riparian zones management will be developed (encompassing targeted wetlands) monitoring database will be set-up, harmonized with the monitoring protocols and the integrated monitoring database of the Danube Delta Biosphere reserve (Romania).</p> <p>The project will further facilitate the designation of the Trilateral Biosphere Reserve Lower Prut and Danube Delta (641,174 ha comprising the Lower Prut MAB UNESCO Biosphere in Moldova (14,771 ha) and Danube Delta MAB UNESCO Biosphere Reserves in Romania and Ukraine (626,403 ha)</p>	<p>15,407 ha of wetlands in middle section of the Prut River basin, including the current Royal Forest Nature Reserve (6,032 ha) enhanced international recognition and improved zoning, management and monitoring capacity.</p> <p>14,771 ha of wetland in Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve with increased management effectiveness (20% METT score) improved zoning, key habitat mapping, monitoring of key species.</p> <p>3,000 ha of old wooded floodplain restored through increased regular flooding</p> <p>Regenerated 50 ha of heavily degraded riparian meadows and forest ecosystems, acting as a barrier to waste and agricultural runoffs in 3000 ha of lake ecosystems in Belev and Manta lakes/ Ramsar sites</p>
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<p>cient monitoring database. The management unit is insufficiently equipped for the management of the entire biosphere reserve's area. No best practices are currently transferred from Danube Delta Biosphere in Romania. No harmonized monitoring and management measures in lower Prut-Danube basin is currently implemented. The core area (lake Beleu) is polluted due to oil leaks from the oil extraction platform situated 200 m away from key bird species nesting habitats. Lakes Beleu and Manta (Ramsar sites) are affected by waste and agricultural run-offs and increased siltation.</p>	<p>anile (020,403 ha)</p> <p>Key strategic restoration activities will be triggered, co-financing will be further sought from the partners, Moldsilva Agency and National Ecological Fund. The project will support the feasibility studies for key restoration measures (i) in the Royal Forest Nature Reserve/Ramsar site the project will support the planning and implementation of the necessary restoration measure on Camenca River to increase groundwater level and regular flooding of the wooded floodplains and maintain the integrity of wetlands and key species. (ii) in the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve, the project will support (in partnership with Moldsilva Agency) the regeneration and reforestation of severely degraded riparian meadows and improve condition of lake ecosystems at Manta Beleu lakes.</p>	
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Component 3: Demonstrating sustainable use/livelihoods at wetlands

<p>The local communities in the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve have formed the <i>Local Action Group Lower Prut</i> with priority objectives related to biodiversity conservation and monitoring, sustainable use of natural resources. The local communities are not prepared to access the available sources of financing in order to implement sustainable local development measures.</p> <p>In Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve, there are opportunities for small agri-businesses: small organic farming, milk processing, reed pelleting and waste management but the local communities have not been exposed to best practices and lack technical know-how and capacity to access financing. Ecotourism is developing, there are a few itineraries in the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve, but infrastructure is very poor.</p>	<p>The project will support the local communities and the Local Action Group Lower Prut with technical assistance on legal issues regarding permitting issuance for local natural resource use and with technical assistance and guidance for mainstreaming local monitoring plans into their Environmental Strategies. The project will further support local entrepreneurs to access micro-grants under EU4Moldova micro-grant scheme.</p> <p>Ecotourism initiatives will be supported through development of integrated safe tourism packages including cross-border (Moldova-Romania) itineraries including Lower Prut -Danube Delta Biosphere Reserves.</p> <p>The project will develop a Smart Phone App, to function as an all-inclusive ticket ("biodiversity passport") to facilitate public access to the integrat</p>	<p>Out of 40,000 people (52.5% women) and 9325 households in Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve will benefit from enhanced livelihoods.</p> <p>Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve becomes better known as a tourist destination and effectively managed protected area that generates best practices of local sustainable natural resources use and community involvement in biodiversity conservation and monitoring.</p>
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<p>The EU4Moldova project is supporting a more effective growth agenda in Cahul and Ungheni districts and building business environment. The programme uses the LEADER approach, to support locally driven rural development intervention by providing grants to support the creation, and effectiveness of Local Action Groups (LAGs) in the targeted communities and implementation of their priority objectives.</p>	<p>ed cross-border safe tourism packages. The package will include birdwatching tours, wine/gastronomy routes, visits to cultural heritage sites and getting familiar with the multi-ethnic cultural setting in the lower Prut-Danube region.</p>	
<p>Component 4: Knowledge management, monitoring, and evaluation</p>		
<p>Although key policy documents (e.g. fifth UN CBD National Communication and NBSAP) acknowledge wetlands' dire situation, the general public and decision makers are not aware of just how threatened the wetlands are in Moldova, therefore planning and financing for sustainable wetlands management is not among priorities.</p> <p>Political discourse (understandably) revolves around EU Accession priorities, which emphasize environmental governance. However, wetlands do not feature as a specific and distinct feature that is, high on the political agenda.</p>	<p>The project will conduct an online awareness campaign targeting the general public but also decision makers in order to raise awareness on wetland management.</p> <p>Locally, the project will join efforts with existing projects and development partners on the ground and will organize awareness seminars targeted at local natural resource users.</p> <p>Prut River is the second largest Danube tributary, and the project results will be disseminated through existing platforms, and meetings of the bilateral and trilateral commission in the Lower Prut and Danube Delta regions and through the International Commission for the Protection of Danube River (ICPDR).</p>	<p>Increased availability of, and accessibility to information on wetlands' threats in Moldova</p> <p>Sensitized public and local communities about the importance of wetlands' ecosystems services to the environment and to their livelihoods</p> <p>Increased support towards Ramsar and UNESCO MAB Conventions</p> <p>Increased advocacy at community level and regional level about the wetland's protection and conservation.</p>

1.a.7. Innovation, sustainability, replication and potential for scaling up

Innovation:

The project will foster innovation in wetland management and will apply several innovative techniques based on international best practices. Under the Output 1.1.1. the project will strengthen Moldova's capacity to engage in bilateral coordination in Prut river basin and will support innovative ecohydrological modelling, accounting for climate change impact, that will generate different scenarios, runoffs and recharge estimates, to back-up ecological risk assessment and identification of priority flow management and river restoration actions. Under Output 2.2.1, in the Royal Forest Nature Reserve/Ramsar site,

the project will facilitate innovative hydrological works, that will restore the old course of the Prut river tributary (Camenca) that used to flood the riparian meadows and forests, and by so doing, it will increase the regularity of flooding and preventing the loss of key riparian forests and the rich biodiversity it hosts. Under Component 3, the project will develop Smart “biodiversity passports” for itineraries in Lower Prut and Danube Delta Biosphere Reserves and wine/gastronomy routes in the lower Prut region and Royal Forest Nature Reserve/Ramsar site. The project will develop downloadable *Smart Phone App* that would be promoted as the preferred mean to download a single ID/code which would give access to protected sites in the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve and in the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve (in Romania) and in the Royal Forest Nature Reserve.

Sustainability:

The project design and implementation will pay close attention to sustainability and its four components: financial, institutional, socio-economic, and environmental. Sustainability of the project’s results will ultimately depend on how invested the stakeholders are and will depend on their long-term commitment (regulatory, policy, funding and resources) to scale-up and replicate best practices in sustainable land and natural resources management for sustainable livelihoods. During implementation, the project team will play close attention to the likelihood of the sustainability of the project results, including developing the project exit strategy to ensure project partners’ commitment to long terms endurance of the project results.

Institutional sustainability is ensured through a comprehensive legal and regulatory framework which provides for the management of protected areas. Under Component 1, the project’s support will be incremental in that it will strengthen the inter-sectorial coordination and local communities’ participation during the development and revision of the management plans in the two targeted area, which will enhance the likelihood of sustainability. In the Royal Forest Nature Reserve, the local communities and local authorities in the surrounding localities will be included in the development of a landscape scale wetland management plan and will increase the sense of ownership of the local communities, but also their awareness on the main threats to biodiversity coming from agriculture and illegal poaching. Furthermore, a biodiversity monitoring program will be developed, which will involve local communities. Representatives of other sectors such as agriculture, hunting associations, mining, tourism, fisheries etc will be involved in the development of the management plan. Similarly, in the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve, the revision of the management plan will be based on participatory approaches and dialogue with all the interested economic sectors. The project will work with the Local Action Group Lower Prut and local communities’ representatives in order to develop biodiversity measures and biodiversity monitoring activities with their involvement. The participatory approaches employed will result in empowered rural communities, conscientious and effective managers of natural resources, with increased capacities to manage their land, access financing and enhance their livelihoods. Financial sustainability will be ensured through the National Ecological Fund, capacitated to collect pollution charges and redirect funds for wetland conservation measures. The project will support regulatory amendments and will capacitate the National Ecological Fund to increase the percentage of funds redirected to wetland conservation measures, and it is expected that these regulatory amendments will provide institutional and financial sustainability of results. Socio-economic sustainability will be enhanced in the project by improving livelihoods of local communities, through promotion of local agri-businesses and ecotourism (Outputs 3.1.1 and 3.1.2). Environmental sustainability will be enhanced by improving the management of the protected areas and through facilitating local wetlands restoration measures implemented by the project (under Component 2).

The project concept aligns with the STAP guidance (GEF/STAP/C.56/Inf.04) on achieving sustainable outcomes, including the following approaches: (i) Designing multi-stakeholder processes to engage key stakeholders, build stakeholder trust and motivation, and incentivize core actors for sustainable wetlands, lakes and riparian zones management (ii) Outlining a theory of change that recognizes the need for policy and financing frameworks’ coherence and participatory approaches and emphasizes diversity and adaptive learning. The STAP guidance on this issue will be further reviewed during the PPG phase, with additional specific aspects of the project designed to ensure sustainability.

Catalytic Role: Potential for Replication and Scaling-up

The project is innovative and scalable in its design, and will employ mainstreaming, replication and linking of results in order to achieve greater impact. The project's objective is to achieve ecological integrity of key floodplain wetlands through improved financing and status of biodiversity, land and water resources, as well as ecosystem services. The project will build on the countries' efforts to shape the post 2020 biodiversity agenda and post-2020 national priorities, an opportunity to highlight the importance of conserving the wetland habitats not only for biodiversity but also as an important building block for water security. The project will implement measures to revise environmental flows, improve water quality, protect and restore critical wetland habitats and include wetlands priorities in the larger landscape's development. The project will also develop and revise the management plans of the targeted protected areas, which are valuable tools to plan and budget for measures that are proven successful, measures that work. Therefore, through the development of the management plans in the Royal Forest Nature Reserve and the revision of the existing one in the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve, the best practices and successful measures demonstrated by the proposed project and by other similar initiatives will be captured and budgeted for and will provide for replication and scaling up, as relevant. The project's best practices are expected to be upscaled through priority measures in key national policy document and actions, such as the National Biodiversity and Action Plan (NBSAP). Furthermore, the National Ecological Fund will be capacitated to redirect a larger percentage of funds collected, towards wetland conservation measures, expected to replicate and scale up the project's best practices. The project's results will be further disseminated through the bilateral and trilateral commissions (Romania-Moldova-Ukraine) and through the International Commission for the protection of River Danube ICPDR platform.

[1] **641,174 ha**, of transboundary wetland areas with MAB/UNESCO status comprising the Lower Prut MAB UNESCO Biosphere in Moldova (14,771 ha), Danube Delta MAB UNESCO Biosphere Reserves in Romania and Ukraine (626,403 ha)

[2] Boxelder, *Acer negundo*, is primarily invasive in Europe's wetland habitats:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/225656310_Secondary_invasion_of_Acer_negundo_The_role_of_phenotypic_responses_versus_local_adaptation

[3] The draft Camenca River Basin Management Plan was developed by the Women Association for Environment Protection and Sustainable Development, through a project funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and by the Austrian Development Agency

[4] https://ec.europa.eu/environment/biodiversity/business/assets/pdf/workstream2/fieldfare_en.pdf

1b. Project Map and Coordinates

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

Please refer to Annex A for maps.

Annex D - Description of target areas:

Padurea Domneasca (Princely Forest or Royal Forest) Nature Reserve (Annex A Fig 2) was officially designated as a scientific reserve in 1993 (Law 409/1993). It includes a strictly protected core area of 261 ha and a buffer zone of 5771 ha. The area is situated in the middle section of the Prut River Basin, between Prut River and its tributary Camenca River. Of the total area (6032 ha), approximately 4,830 ha are forests, among the oldest European floodplain woodlands, largely at risk of drying out due to past river engineering. A larger area, extending over 15,407 ha, is proposed (by scientists) to be covered by the international Ramsar designation (Fig.1). This includes a core area of 5,736 ha (which is represented largely by the existing scientific reserve IBA/KBA) and an additional buffer zone of 9,671 ha. Beyond that, in the surrounding transition zone, there are hayfields, pastures and 10 villages that belong to two districts (Glodeni and Falesti) with a total population of 19,000 people.

The proposed area for Ramsar designation (15,407 ha) shelters 46 species of mammals (of which 6 species in the Red Book) 159 species of birds (of which 19 species included in the Red Book) 7 species of reptiles (2 species included in the Red Book) and 8 species of amphibians (2 species included in the Red Book) and a number of 575 vascular plant of which 12 are included in the Red Book of Moldova.

The site includes a variety of habitats, which are typical for the continental biogeographical region such as eutrophic waterbodies with rooted floating pond mats made of *Potamogeton sp.* and *Hydrocharis morsus ranae*, water courses with the common water crowfoot *Ranunculus aquatilis*; grasslands and alluvial riparian meadows with *Cnidion dubii* vegetation; mixed forests with oak *Quercus robur*, elms *Ulmus laevis* and *Ulmus minor*, common ash tree *Fraxinus excelsior*, willow *Salix alba* and silver poplar *Populus alba* galleries. The area is listed in the IBA database with 100-120 breeding pairs of Grey-faced woodpecker (*Picus canus*) as trigger species (2014 data). Other IUCN Red List waterfowl species include Eurasian spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*), little egret (*Egretta garzetta*) and Black-crowned night heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) among others. Some preliminary surveys (2008) indicated that the site could be considered a site of international importance as it encompasses complex wetland habitats encompassing old forested floodplains, meadows, marshes, relict lakes and smaller river channels, hosting favorable conditions for nesting, breeding, feeding of large numbers of migratory birds some of them vulnerable. Out of 159 bird species identified in the area, approximately 95 species are migratory water birds. The main endangered habitat is represented by 4,957 ha, riparian mixed forest with hosting over 1,000 pairs of herons (this particular area is locally called "The Land of Herons/ Tara Bitlanilor") and presumably

some of the largest populations of storks, wild ducks, swans and cormorants in this continental bioregion^[1] and about a third of vascular plants in the country. The National Forest Authority “Moldsilva” manages the area through the state company “Royal Forest/Padurea Domneasca Enterprise”.

The **Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve** (Annex A Fig 3) with a total area of 14,771 ha, has received its international MAB UNESCO designation at the July 2018 Coordinating Council of MAB UNESCO. The Biosphere Reserve includes the former Lower Prut River Scientific Reserve which was founded in 1991 and had covered 1691 ha, basically just Belevu Lake and its immediate surroundings. The area is managed by the Administration of the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve, which is the former Lower Prut Scientific Reserve’s management unit. The biosphere reserve’s management plan has been drafted and submitted for formal approval to the Ministry of Regional Development, Agriculture and Environment. The newly designated Biosphere Reserve includes both Belevu and Manta lakes (which are IBAs/KBAs and Ramsar sites), and its zoning system is aligned to MAB UNESCO criteria and delineates a core area of 302 ha, a buffer area of 1310 ha and a transition area of 13,159 ha. The Biosphere Reserve includes 9 villages and communes that belong to Cahul district: Crihana Veche (4661 ha), Manta (2911 ha), Vadul lui Isac (928 ha) Colibasi (986 ha), Brinza (359 ha), Valeni (1199 ha), Slobozia Mare (2861 ha), Cislita Prut (314 ha), Giurgiulesti (546 ha). The MAB/UNESCO dossier of the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve is listing 34 mammal species (of which 9 species included in the red Book), 203 bird species (27 included in the Red Book), 15 reptiles and amphibia species (3 species in the Red Book) , 41 fish species (with 6 species in the Red Book), 580 plant species (25 species in the Red Book).

The Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve’s Lakes Manta and Belevu are the largest natural lakes of Moldova. Lake Belevu (1700 ha) is situated close to Slobozia and Valeni localities. Originally a Danubian lake, it remained connected to the River Prut. Lake Manta (2100 ha) is situated between the city of Cahul and Brinza village and has been formed after the merge of several smaller surrounding lakes. Both lakes are designated Ramsar sites, hosting several trigger species: Red breasted goose *Branta ruficollis* (60-120 individuals), Ferruginous duck *Aythya nyroca* (30-35 breeding pairs), Common kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* (30-40 pairs). Other IUCN Red List waterfowl species were also identified on the biosphere reserve’s area (included in Moldova’s Red Book) such as: the Purple heron *Ardea purpurea*, Squacco heron *Ardeola ralloides*, Dalmatian pelican *Pelecanus crispus*, Pigmy cormorant *Phalacrocorax pigmaeus*, Common little bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*, Western marsh-harrier *Circus aeruginosus*, Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* and the Mute swan *Cygnus olor*, to name but a few. Manta-Belevu lakes are surrounded by smaller water bodies, lakes and riparian zones, grasslands and floodplain forest strips, located along the minor tributaries of Prut river, many of which dry out during summer.

The National Forest Authority “Moldsilva” manages the area through the Prut River Biosphere Reserve Management Authority.

[1] Experts may have referred to the WWF Subcontinental ecoregion encompassing Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Ukraine

2. Stakeholders

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

Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities Yes

Civil Society Organizations Yes

Private Sector Entities Yes

If none of the above, please explain why:

Indicative information on the key stakeholders' roles and the bases for their engagement are presented below.

Stakeholders	Responsibility and role in the project
<p>Ministry of Regional Development, Agriculture and Environment (including the National Ecological Fund and other specialised agencies)</p>	<p>The Ministry is responsible for the development of legislation, action plans, norms and standards in environment, agriculture and regional development.</p> <p>In the field of environment, the Ministry is responsible for the development of legal and regulatory framework in the field of environmental protection, sustainable use of natural resources, including management of air, waste, water resources, water supply and sewerage system, ensuring compatibility of legal framework with Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEA).</p> <p>Some of the Ministry's functions and competences for water, air and waste are implemented by specialised bodies under its mandate, with which the project will coordinate : State Hydrometeorological Service (SHS), Agency "Apele Moldovei (Moldovan Waters) ", Agency for Geology and Mineral Resources (AGMR) and State Ecological Inspection (SEI).</p> <p>The National Ecological Fund operates under the Ministry, managed by an Administrative Council, chaired by the minister.</p> <p>The Ministry will review and draft policy and legislation relevant to protected areas, pollution charges and amendments to the National Ecological Fund's Regulation. The Ministry will provide leadership to the project management team (PMT), especially regarding liaison with government authorities from different sectors. Ministry will ensure coordination with other relevant projects and initiatives.</p>
<p>Agency "Moldsilva"</p>	<p>Moldsilva will be an important partner for the implementation of reforestation activities on degraded la</p>

	<p>Moldosilva will be an important partner for the implementation of reforestation activities on degraded lands, as well as for their related duties in the protected areas management. The agency will provide, through its state forestry units, technical assistance, co-financing and support in implementing project components. Also, Moldosilva will help build cooperation with local communities where it operates.</p>
<p>Agency “Moldovan Waters”</p>	<p>The Agency “Moldovan Waters” is responsible for water management and resource allocation (including abstraction permits but also certain quality aspects). The Agency is a unit of the Ministry of Regional Development, Agriculture and Environment and it is responsible for the implementation of the state policy in the field of water resources, flood protection and irrigation.</p> <p>“Moldovan Waters” Agency will be the main counterpart under Component 1 (Output 1.1.1), and will facilitate coordination with the Romanian counterparts, regarding the hydro-ecological models and revisions to the existing Regulation of the Stanca-Costesti Dam, in order to increase the ecological flows to wetlands downstream.</p>
<p>Local Public Authorities (LPAs) at the district and village/community levels</p>	<p>District and village/community public administrations have a significant role to play in components 2, 3 and 4 of the projects. Their responsibilities are to promote cooperation among all land users and owners, to implement biodiversity-friendly practices, to support agri-businesses, to participate in conflict resolution, and promote awareness activities. The district authorities will be responsible for local development policies and mainstreaming of biodiversity measures, with technical support provided by the project.</p>
<p>NGOs: Ecological Movement of Moldova (EMM); BIO TICA Ecological Society; NGO “ECO-Contact” Regional Environmental Center (REC) Moldova; BIOS; NGO “Verde e Moldova”; NGO Congress of Local Authorities (CALM)</p>	<p>All NGOs will participate in stakeholder consultation during the protected areas management plans development and revision in targeted areas, and in the awareness raising seminars as relevant.</p>

<p>Local Action Group “Lower Prut” and clusters of small tourism entrepreneurs</p>	<p><i>The Local Action Group Lower Prut (LAGLP) was set up under EU LEADER programme and it includes all the 9 villages located in the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve. The LAGLP will mobilise local communities’ participation in biodiversity monitoring measures and ecotourism initiatives and will support the organisation of the awareness seminars. The LAGLP will participate into different calls for proposals under the EU4Moldova programme.</i></p>
<p>Private sector: Farmers associations; fishermen; concessionary companies (fisheries); tourism companies; oil extraction/mining (Valiexchim SRL)</p>	<p>Rural population, farmers and fishermen, small vegetable farming entrepreneurs (SRL “Matinal” and SRL “Faguras”), concessionary holders (S.A Pepiniera Piscicola Cahul) small tourism entrepreneurs and oil extraction company “Valiexchim SRL” are the most important stakeholders under Component 2 and Component 3 and will be closely involved in restoration activities, consultation meetings during the development of management plans and biodiversity monitoring measures, as well as the development of different regulatory amendments with regard to permitting system in protected areas.</p>

In addition, provide indicative information on how stakeholders, including civil society and indigenous peoples, will be engaged in the project preparation, and their respective roles and means of engagement.

The PIF was developed based on consultations with national government stakeholders and NGOs, and local authorities, which will have key roles in the project design and implementation. The project is confirmed to be based on key national policies and strategies. The project will be developed in full consultation with a broad range of stakeholders in Moldova through visits and consultation events. During the PPG process detailed stakeholder consultations will be organized at national, rayon (district) and local levels. The PPG process will include local community meetings/visits, and extensive stocktaking and validation stakeholder consultations with relevant government counterparts, and representatives of the private sector and civil society.

3. Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Briefly include below any gender dimensions relevant to the project, and any plans to address gender in project design (e.g. gender analysis).

The project will promote an environment that will help overcome gender biases, promote women's empowerment and foster inclusion and equal opportunities. Gender considerations will be fully mainstreamed into project implementation and will inform regional and local development planning and community level project activities through creating a platform for participation in decision making at local level. Under Component 1 the project will support district and local authorities to include biodiversity conservation and monitoring into local development strategies and will support public advocacy for women's rights and gender sensitive biodiversity conservation and management measures. Under Component 2, the project will support participatory approaches at local levels, in both protected areas, during the consultations on the Management Plan of the Royal Forest Nature Reserve and during the local consultations on the revision of the Management Plan in the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve, and will include women representatives to enable their participation into decision making over natural resources management, as women's input, knowledge and guidance are invaluable to any productive, sustainable efforts to avoid, reduce and restore wetlands, lakes and riparian zones. Under Component 3, the project's efforts will be directed towards strengthening local women entrepreneurship, enabling women participation into calls for proposals and different other local projects and education/awareness activities. The project will ensure that there is gender balance in all project activities (e.g. seminars, community level events) including access to project financial assistance. The project will also gather gender-disaggregated data for evaluation purposes and use gender sensitive indicators to facilitate planning, implementation and monitoring.

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;

improving women's participation and decision-making; and/or Yes

generating socio-economic benefits or services for women. Yes

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

Yes

4. Private sector engagement

Will there be private sector engagement in the project?

Yes

Please briefly explain the rationale behind your answer.

In 2019, the unemployment rate in Moldova - estimated at 3% - was quite low but it is expected to worsen due to the COVID-19 pandemic. With a moderate climate and productive farmland, the agriculture sector has an important role in Moldova's economy: it employs approximately 32% of the workforce (World Bank, 2019). Of the agriculture work force, around 25% are directly employed by agri-enterprises, while the other three-quarters are classified as self-employed (FAO). Moldova's main products are vegetables, fruits, grapes, grain, sugar beets, sunflower seeds, tobacco, beef, milk and wine.

Under Component 3, the project will support local communities in the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve to access financing (micro-grants) for the development of local small agri-business and eco-tourism initiatives, working with local entrepreneurs. In the Royal Forest Nature Reserve, the project will work with local ecotourism companies for the development of tourism itineraries.

In the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve, the project will work with the local oil extraction company "Valiexchim" in order to implement environmental safeguards measures. Furthermore, private sector in targeted areas will be involved in the project activities, through participative dialogues during the development of rayon/district development strategies and local development of localities and during the development of the management plans (or revision of the existing ones) in the targeted protected areas. Particular attention will be given to potential conflicts over natural resource use and permitting systems that are causing frustrations due to establishment of quotas (for example fishing quotas). The private sector representatives will be engaged in awareness raising seminars and other educational activities that will be implemented jointly with other initiatives in the targeted areas.

5. Risks to Achieving Project Objectives

Indicate risks, including climate change, potential social and environmental risks that might prevent the Project objectives from being achieved, and, if possible, propose measures that address these risks to be further developed during the Project design (table format acceptable)

Identified Risks and Category	Impact	Likelihood	Mitigation Measures
Vulnerable groups (smallholders with less land and capacities), might not be involved in project design and therefore not engaged in, supportive of, or benefitting from project activities	Moderate	Not likely	The project will be working closely with all stakeholders to ensure that stakeholders are adequately consulted, and their considerations integrated in the project design and project implementation. Activities designed under Components 2 and 3 will be specifically tailored to address the problems faced by small holders, poor households, women entrepreneurs etc. Engagement of vulnerable groups and other key community stakeholders will be detailed in the Comprehensive Stakeholder Engagement Plan and Gender Plan in line with current UNDP guidance, which will be prepared at the PPG stage.
The expected project impacts of the restoration of degraded land, and sustainable management of wetlands could be sensitive to changing climatic conditions in the future.	Negligible	Moderately likely	The project will demonstrate and put in place a programme framework for degraded riparian/deforested land restoration and sustainable management that is grounded by scientific principles and participatory methods mechanisms that will enable stakeholders to adapt sustainable land management to any given context and threats. Moreover, under Component 1, the project will support amendments to the Regulation of the Stanca-Costesti dam, by providing technical support and multiple-scenarios analysis under hydroclimatic models in order to account for the climate change impacts on the hydrological regime in Prut basin.
National and local government institutions responsible for the district and local development strategies do not have a adequate capacity to support, maintain and enforce integrated biodiversity considerations into local strategies	Moderate	Moderately likely	The project will strengthen and expand the current capabilities of the key institutions responsible for the development planning at district and local levels in three districts (Cahul, Glodeni and Falesti). The project will support the development of the new local district strategies (2020-2024) and will provide technical assistance to the mainstreaming of biodiversity and key habitats' considerations into local development planning (under Output 1.1.3). Furthermore, the species inventories and habitat mapping in the targeted protected areas and surrounding geographies (Output 2.1.1 and 2.1.2) will be implemented with the consultation of the local communities and local authorities. Moreover, local awareness seminars and

			the online awareness raising activities (Output 4.1.1) will sensitize local communities and authorities alike on the importance of maintaining the integrity of wetlands' ecosystem services to the environment and to local livelihoods, in these districts.
Divergent economic interests and/or government priorities related to natural resource use in the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve leads to limited progress in the restoration of degraded wetlands.	Moderate	Moderately	The project will be closely working with a range of government stakeholders, partners, and resource users and managers and potential investors. From a legal perspective, the project will work to identify any critical conflicts in government policies and normative acts related to the sustainable use of natural resources in the protected areas that would potentially diminish the potential to achieve the project objective and will propose subsequent amendments (Component 1). The project will work with all stakeholders to ensure government policies and priorities are aligned in a strategic, coherent, and rational manner that supports long-term wetland ecosystem services, sustainable livelihoods, and the conservation of critical ecosystem services and biodiversity.
The National Ecological Fund may fail to channel funds for the restoration of wetlands in the Royal Forest, due to limited interest from the Ministry or lack of funds	Moderate	Moderately Likely	The project will work closely with the Ministry of Regional Development, Agriculture and Environment and will support amendments to the existing regulations in order to capacitate the National Ecological Funds to collect pollution charges and redirect these funds towards critical restoration work. These amendments will be assessed and discussed with the Ministry of Regional Development, Agriculture and Environment and political support will be sought. At the same time, the project will implement awareness activities (directed towards the decision makers and politicians) that will highlight the risks and threats to the wetlands. It is expected that the project will create the necessary critical mass of understanding and awareness over wetlands problems, especially in the Royal Forest Nature Reserve, where key habitats are drying out in absence of regular flooding. These problems are known by the politicians, maybe the extent of the threats is not properly understood, and the project will address that gap. Furthermore, the project will support effective planning of the investment and will provide incremental support to the development of technical feasibility study in order to mobilize adequate funding for the hydrological work needed to restore the regularity of flooding in the area (Output 2.2.1)
Political instability and reshuffled political priorities may weaken political support and decision makers interest to increase investments in wetland management and restoration	Moderate	Moderately likely	The project will capitalize on the good relations and cooperation between UNDP and the Ministry of Regional Development, Agriculture and Environment and will work closely to maintain the issue of financing of PAs in general and of wetlands in particular, high on the political agenda.
COVID-19 related travel limitations may affect intended project's support to alternative livelihoods and PA financing through local eco-tourism	Moderate	Moderate	The project will seek to restore tourists confidence through various awareness raising measures, however as a flexible and adaptive project management manner will be maintained, the project will explore jointly with local communities, applicable alternative ways to support local livelihoods and PAs financing. In addition, the project will work with the Local Action Group Lower Prut and local communities' representatives as well as with Moldova's Association of Inbound Tourism (ANTRIM) and with line ministries (the ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment and the Ministry of Health) to develop Safe Tourism standards, that will be applied by the project initially in the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve <i>(to be explored</i>

Note on COVID-19:

Risk analysis: During the PIF preparation a preliminary risk analysis of the COVID-19 related containment measures on the project outputs have been considered and appropriate mitigation measures have been included in the Risks Section. Possible consequences of the reinstatement of COVID-19 situation, will be re-assessed in a more detailed manner at PPG stage. Availability of technical expertise of dedicated staff and co-financing will be re-assessed and appropriate interventions will be designed and included in the project document. UNDP together with the Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment have adaptive management capacities and possibilities to ensure COVID-19 related mitigation measures and effectiveness of the proposed overall project implementation and stakeholders engagement. The PPG stage will include consultations with a wide range of stakeholders in as much as possible, and the Stakeholders Engagement Plan will entail dedicated measures aimed at enabling the participation of all stakeholders in the project implementation, with appropriate mitigation measures in case of COVID-19 restrictions, including ways to reach out to the most marginalised groups.

Opportunity analysis: In response to the Government's COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan (approved on 13th of March 2020 by the Prime Minister), the United Nations in Moldova has developed a Response and Recovery Plan with a 12-18 months horizon, based on the UN Framework and with the support of different development partners. The Response and Recovery Plan has highlighted the amplified vulnerabilities and widening inequalities during the COVID-19, and the existing critical capacity gaps that are hampering adequate responses, focusing largely on health equipment in the short term. The medium term recovery opportunities that this proposed project will support, are aligned with UNDP portfolio "Beyond recovery Towards 2030" and with the integrated UN System in Moldova's support to COVID-19 response under the "Economic Response and Recovery" pillar, including: integration of environment-friendly technologies, stimulating green innovation and circular economy and supporting smallholders access financing. The project is fully aligned with the medium post COVID 19 recovery opportunities by supporting communities recovery through facilitation of green and sustainable entrepreneurship and small holder farms' accessing of affordable financing for sustainable natural resources management, promoting rural entrepreneurship including women entrepreneurship, and supporting environmental friendly and safe local eco-tourism and other biodiversity friendly alternative income leveraging activities. In the long term the project will support the green recovery efforts by enabling strengthened natural and livelihoods resilience and protecting and restoring the natural capital and wetland ecosystem services in the Prut basin.

6. Coordination

Outline the institutional structure of the project including monitoring and evaluation coordination at the project level. Describe possible coordination with other relevant GEF-financed projects and other initiatives.

The project will be implemented within the context of the United Nations Partnership Framework for Moldova and UNDP Country Programme in Moldova (2018-2022), aligned with Moldova's National Development Strategy Vision 2030. The project implementation will be National Implemented (NIM), led by the Ministry of Regional Development, Agriculture and Environment.

UNDP Country Office (CO) in Moldova will provide quality assurance, in accordance with the requirements of the GEF and UNDP Policies and Procedures. Most of UNDP's work for the project will be based in its Country Office in Chisinau under the supervision of the Programme Specialist for Environment and Energy and other senior programme staff, including the UNDP Resident Representative and Deputy Resident Representative as warranted. UNDP will also engage contractors to carry out Midterm and Final Evaluations of the project. The UNDP Regional Technical Advisor, based in the UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub, will provide technical support in terms of project cycle management and oversight, to ensure consistency with expectations from UNDP and GEF.

National Implementing Partner: The Ministry of Regional Development, Agriculture and Environment is the government institution responsible for the implementation of the project in accordance with the UNDP National Implementation Modality (NIM), implying full ownership of the project. This is in line with the Standard Basic Assistance Agreement (SBAA) and the UN Partnership Framework for Moldova between the UN and the Government of Moldova. The Ministry, acting as the Implementing Partner for this project, will be responsible for the overall coordination of project implementation, efficient use of project resources and achievement of the planned project objectives. At the same time, the Ministry is the focal agency of Moldova for the GEF.

Project Implementation: The project organization structure will consist of a Project Board, Project Assurance, Project Management Unit. Roles and responsibilities will be further detailed at PPG stage. A Project Management Unit will be established following UNDP National Implementation Modality (NIM). The project management team is likely to include one international Chief Technical Advisor and several technical national and international experts. UNDP office will support the Ministry in ensuring coordination and synergies with other similar projects and international initiatives. Implementation of the proposed project will be fully coordinated with a number of on-going relevant multilateral and bilateral financed initiatives, in order to avoid possible duplication and increase synergies and effectiveness. At regional level, strong coordination will be sought with the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve in Romania and Ukraine, for the designation of the MAB UNESCO Trilateral Biosphere Reserve Lower Prut and Danube Delta.

Under Component 1, the proposed project will work with the Ministry of Regional Development Agriculture and Environment to ensure intersectoral policy coordination and will support alignment of project targets and measures with existing and future commitments on biodiversity and climate. The proposed project will coordinate with the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) and the Emerald Network of Protected Areas initiative of the government, aimed at expanding the national system of protected areas to complement the EU Nature 2000 protected areas and both project areas are included in the Emerald Network. The proposed project will build on successful lessons learned and best practices and technical assessments of the prior GEF funded in Moldova PIMS 4183 "Environmental Fiscal Reform" (2011-2015) which has developed legal assessments to support the reform of the National Ecological Fund and on the former GEF funded project PIMS 5355 "Mainstreaming biodiversity in local development plans " (2015-2019) which has produced legal assessments and recommendations to mainstream biodiversity in the land use and spatial planning.

Under Component 2 the project will work on improved protection of KBAs/IBAs and species population through increasing the management effectiveness of existing wetland protected areas and will implement restoration works. In the Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve, the proposed project will work together with the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) funded project *“Enhancing climate resilience in Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve”* and will build on the climate vulnerability assessments developed under this project and integrate main findings and adaptation and biodiversity conservation measures into the revised Management Plan of the Lower Prut Biosphere reserve. The proposed project will also work with the NGO “Verde e Moldova”, implementing the project *“Restoring Danube Delta Wetlands and Steppe”* together with “Rewilding Europe”. This project is currently conducting topo-bathymetric studies in Lake Beleu based on which restoration measures will be implemented in order to remove siltation. Similarly, the *WWF Project Danube River Basin Hydro-morphology and River Restoration (DYNA)* will focus on awareness and soft restoration measures around Lake Beleu. The proposed project will coordinate with both initiatives and will build on these studies and proposed measures to introduce future restoration actions in the revised Project Management Plan (especially the replication of the works to remove siltation in Beleu Lake). Furthermore, as the proposed project will restore riparian strips around lakes Beleu-Manta (to act as buffer against the agriculture and waste pollution) coordination among all projects will be very important. Under Component 3, the project will coordinate and work with the EU funded project *EU4Cahul* and will facilitate for facilitating the local entrepreneurs’ access to micro-grants aimed at increasing local livelihoods. The proposed project will also support the Local Action Group Lower Prut through technical assistance to develop local biodiversity monitoring plans to be included in local Environment Strategies in the localities situated on the biosphere reserve’s territory. Ecotourism activities will be further supported by working and coordinating with the Local Action Group and various local entrepreneurs. Under Component 4, the proposed project will join efforts with all the current on-going initiatives to organize awareness raising seminars.

7. Consistency with National Priorities

Is the Project consistent with the National Strategies and plans or reports and assessments under relevant conventions

Yes

If yes, which ones and how: NAPAs, NAPs, ASGM NAPs, MIAs, NBSAPs, NCs, TNAs, NCSAs, NIPs, PRSPs, NPFE, BURs, INDCs, etc

- National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plan (NBSAP) under UNCBD
- UNCCD Reporting
- CBD National Report
- Ramsar National Report

The project is contributing to several objectives of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) through its focus on increasing the wetland protected areas under international designation (Ramsar, MAB/UNESCO) and improving protected areas' management effectiveness and enhancing local livelihoods. The project is fully aligned with the National Development Strategy "Moldova 2030" which lists the fundamental right to a healthy and safe environment as a key objective, and the expansion of the protected areas, as a mean to realization of this desiderate. Furthermore, the project is contributing to the main priorities listed under the Environment Strategy of Moldova (2014-2023), particularly Objective 6.4 "Ensuring the efficient and sustainable management of natural ecosystems through the expansion of forested areas up to 15% and protected areas up to 8% of total land area). The project's focus on restoration of degraded riparian strips of grasslands and forests contributes to the national LDN target " *Improving land/soil conservation and ecological restoration of degraded lands and farmland buffer strips up to 100% to achieve by 2030 no net loss of productive land/soils and increase resiliency, adaptation capacity and agricultural ecosystem services*". The project is fully aligned with the implementation of the Management Plan of the Danube-Prut and Black Sea (2018) and supports Moldova's active role as a full partner in the EU macro-regional strategy for the Danube Region.

8. Knowledge Management

Outline the Knowledge management approach for the Project, including, if any, plans for the Project to learn from other relevant Projects and initiatives, to assess and document in a user-friendly form, and share these experiences and expertise with relevant stakeholders.

At the PPG phase a knowledge management plan for the project will be developed, building on lessons learned and best practices generated under different initiatives, and will actively disseminate the project results, seeking opportunities for replication and upscaling. The project will build on the successful lessons learned and best practices and technical assessments of the previous GEF funded in Moldova PIMS 4183 “Environmental Fiscal Reform” (2011-2015) which has developed legal assessments to support the reform of the National Ecological Fund and on the former GEF funded project PIMS 5355 “Mainstreaming biodiversity in local development plans “ (2015-2019) which has produced legal assessments and recommendations to mainstream biodiversity in the land use and spatial planning.

The proposed project’s Knowledge Management (KM) approach will be aligned with the GEF requirements to foster learning and sharing from relevant projects and initiatives and evaluations and contribute to the project’s overall impact and sustainability, and will employ the main elements of a KM approach regarded by the GEF as best practices, such as: Overview of existing lessons and best practice that inform project concept; Plans to learn from relevant projects, programs, initiatives & evaluations; Processes to capture, assess and document info, lessons, best practice & expertise generated during implementation; Tools and methods for knowledge exchange, learning & collaboration; Knowledge outputs to be produced and shared with stakeholders; Knowledge and learning contributing to overall project/program impact and sustainability and Plans for strategic communications. The knowledge management plan will facilitate access to information through a well-crafted online awareness raising campaign, and a suite of local seminars organized jointly with the existing initiatives in the targeted area. The project’s results will be further disseminated in the region through the International Commission for the Protection of River Danube ICPDR platform.

9. 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

Measures to address identified risks and impacts

Provide preliminary information on the types and levels of risk classifications/ratings of any identified environmental and social risks and potential impacts associated with the project (considering the GEF ESS Minimum Standards) and describe measures to address these risks during the project design.

Supporting Documents

Upload available ESS supporting documents.

Title

Submitted

6551 Moldova pre-SESP

Part III: Approval/Endorsement By GEF Operational Focal Point(S) And Gef Agency(ies)

A. RECORD OF ENDORSEMENT OF GEF OPERATIONAL FOCAL POINT (S) ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT(S): (Please attach the Operational Focal Point endorsement letter with this template).

Name	Position	Ministry	Date
Mr. Ion LICA	GEF Operational Focal Point, Environmental Project Service Unit	Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment of the Republic of Moldova	

ANNEX A: Project Map and Geographic Coordinates

Please provide geo-referenced information and map where the project intervention takes place

Fig. 1 Project areas



Fig 2. Padurea Domneasca (Royal Forest) targeted site proposed for Ramsar designation (including the existing nature reserve area, in dark green color)



Fig. 3 Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve-topographic map



Fig.4 Proposed Emerald sites in Moldova

