

Vjosa Wild River National park

2023

ToR Interpretation and Visitor's Experience plan

14.04.2023

1 BACKGROUND

In March 2023, the Vjosa Wild River National Park (VWRNP) was formally established, becoming the largest national park in Albania. The VWRNP covers the entire Vjosa River in Albania, from the Greek border to its mouth in the Adriatic Sea, as well as three main tributaries: Drinos, including Kardhiq, Bënçë and Shushicë. The total length of the protected river ecosystem is more than 400 km. In the next phase, all free-flowing tributaries, together with the adjacent most valuable areas with highest biological and geomorphological values, including the Vjosa Delta area, shall be included in the extended area of the National Park. In addition, a procedure has been initiated for the establishment of a transboundary protected area (National Park) between Greece and Albania, which will ensure adequate protection of the entire Aous-Vjosa river basin. <https://www.iucn.org/press-release/202303/vjosa-one-our-last-wild-rivers-becomes-europes-first-wild-river-national-park#:~:text=Today%2C%20the%20Vjosa%20River%20in,benefit%20of%20people%20and%20nature>

Understanding the natural and landscape attributes (values, features), cultural heritage, history and tradition in the Vjosa Wild River National Park and in the wider Vjosa basin is a crucial prerequisite for effective protection of those sites. Gaining IUCN Category II: National Park status means the Vjosa will be afforded full national and transboundary protection, to the highest international standards, ensuring its ecological integrity, allowing natural processes to occur and sustaining populations of all native species.

The full operation of the VWRNP is expected to start in early 2024. However, the preliminary operation of the VWRNP is planned to start as early as 2023 (transition period).

The Ministry of Tourism and Environment and the National Agency for Protected Areas mandate the Working Group to prepare and publish as soon as possible an Integrated Management Plan for the area of the enlarged VWRNP in Albania that complies with internationally recognised standards.

In parallel, the Sustainable Tourism Master and Action Plan will be prepared separately.

The development of the Management plan for VWRNP, which will have the Tourism Master and Action plan as a supplementary document, will be accompanied by a comprehensive stakeholder engagement process, and supported by the communication strategy. This process should also be used for consultations with decision makers, local communities and other stakeholders on tourism development in the VWRNP.

In 2022, the Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism: Concept Study for the VWRNP was produced. It contains the concept study on ecotourism and sustainable tourism activities with details on the type, description, location, and management arrangements, as well as a description of the existing and planned infrastructure. Recommendations for an action plan for the first six months of operation of the VWRNP complete the report.

Interpretation involves deciding which stories to tell for which audiences and how to do so most effectively.

Interpretative planning:

- is a strategic process that, when implemented, achieves management goals for interpretation and education by enabling meaningful connections between visitors and park resources.

- determines appropriate interpretive services, facilities, programs, and media to most effectively communicate the park's purpose, significance, compelling stories, themes, and values while protecting and preserving park resources. Sound interpretive planning defines desirable and diverse experiences, recommends ways to provide those experiences, and ensures that they are accessible.
- also identifies key visitor experiences and makes recommendations to promote them.

Visitor experience is everything that visitors do, sense, and learn; it includes knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, and values; it is affected by experiences prior to the visit and affects behaviour after the visit.

The visitor experience is also influenced by:

- how the visitor can access key areas and attractions (are there access routes, car parks, footpaths, etc.),
- what information about the area can be obtained before arrival and on site,
- is the area adequately signposted and safe to visit,
- are basic facilities available (e.g. car parks, toilets, waste bins, refreshment kiosks, possibility to buy souvenirs and local products, access to promotional and information material, etc.).

The comprehensive interpretative plan should contain the 10 year Interpretive Plan and the action-orientated basic visitor's experience implementation plan for the years 2023 and 2024.

2 OBJECTIVE

The objective of this consultancy is to ensure prioritization and best value of investments in interpretive activities for the Vjosa Wild River National Park (VWRNP) to minimize impacts and maximize education and awareness opportunities related to all types of existing and planned activities and infrastructure. The objective will be reached in two parts:

- (a) Develop a 10-year interpretation plan with the basic information that will guide the development of the desired future interpretive program, including a description of the actions and resources needed to achieve that goal
- (b) Basic signage plan for 2023 in the form of an action plan, describing the minimum signage of the park and basic interpretive services to be provided to the public in 2023, together with budget and staffing information and a detailed description of operations.

3 SCOPE OF WORK

The consultant will be required to conduct the following specific tasks:

3.1 STUDY VISIT

A 7-day site visit will be organised for the consultant(s), covering the main river and three tributaries that are currently part of the National Park with the insight into the wider Vjosa River Valley. During the visit, the consultant(s) will:

- (1) assess the current status of natural and cultural values and resources, current visitor flows, natural resource use, and key indicators; and
- (2) conduct interviews with key informants associated with the VWRNP (e.g., managers, relevant agencies/ministries, and National Agency for Protected Areas (NAPA) / Regional Agencies for Protected Areas (RAPA) entities, etc.). Interviews will also be conducted with representatives of local communities, stakeholders, NGOs, and the private sector.

The study visit will be organised for the expert(s) working on the Interpretation and Visitor Experience Plan and for the expert(s) working on the development of the Sustainable Tourism Master and Action Plan for the VWRNP.

The costs of international travel to and from Tirana, local transportation, food and accommodation for the selected consultant(s) will be covered by the client.

3.2 VWRNP 10-YEAR INTERPRETATION PLAN

Definition of the interpretive themes

The consultant will define interpretive themes, the main ideas or concepts that are communicated to the public about a park and on which interpretive services and educational programs are based. The themes convey the tangible and intangible meanings and universal concepts inherent in park resources. They should be expressed in clear statements and accompanied by additional information when useful to clarify meaning. The themes should also be used to define the core content of the educational messages offered by the park.

Identification of the audiences

The consultant shall prepare a comprehensive description of the park audience and its needs, including actual and potential audiences (inside the park, outside the park, and educational audiences). Based on the identification of the various audiences, the consultant will describe how interpretation may change the way audiences (individual visitors and target groups) think, feel, or act as a result of their park experience.

Recommendation of interpretative approaches, facilities (with the needed infrastructure), storylines, media developments, tools and activities

Based on the above assumptions, the consultant will recommend a range of appropriate interpretative approaches, develop proposals for future interpretive facilities, draft recommendations for a detailed prioritized list of sites/locations with the storylines (texts, motives, effects...) ready for production of the interpretation tools/media to interpret the values of the VWRNP to best practice standards, as well as required visitor infrastructure, media development, tools and activities, along with an estimate of the financial resources required.

3.3 BASIC SIGNAGE AND INTERPRETATION PLAN 2023

The 2023 plan should prioritise the most urgent basic signage to ensure that the park area is understood by the public by the summer of 2023 and should include the proposed location and concept for the visitor centre(s).

The proposed basic signage will be prepared for fabrication of VWRNP signs at key park entry points to established international standards in accordance with national guidelines, along with cost estimates (sign fabrication and installation) and maintenance requirements.

4 DELIVERABLES AND TIME FRAME

	Tasks/Deliverables	Time
	Inception report with proposed methodology and contents	15 days after signing the contract
	Study Tour	Beginning of June 2023
	Draft 10-year interpretation concept (key messaging, locations of signage, conceptual proposal for visitor centres and facilities)	By 30 June 2023
	Production-ready materials for basic signage to delineate the location of the VWRNP	By 15 July 2023
	Draft Interpretation Plan (including phasing of the projects and costings (which can be put in funding proposals) and draft design	By 15 August 2023
	Final Interpretation Plan (including the contents for the interpretation points and proposal for the visitor centre(s))	By 15 September 2023

5 QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERTISE OF THE CONSULTANTS

The consultant should be competent in interpretive planning and team facilitation; he/she should also have skills in writing, problem solving, team building, an understanding of media applications and personal service programs. The consultant should work with the VWRNP management authority to assemble a team that may include: park staff, staff from other RAPAs and NAPA, other planners and designers, media specialists, educators, academia/experts, NGOs, local representatives, experts working on the Sustainable Tourism and Action Plan and 10-year Management plan for the VWRNP, and the public.

The consultant(s) should provide evidence on their qualifications and previous experience in the project topics and as a minimum:

- University Master Degree in natural or social sciences,
- Proven track record (including relevant reports and publications) of involvement in developing and implementing interpretation strategies or plans or similar projects,
- Excellent communication and networking skills and ability to work with a diverse range of stakeholders,
- Knowledge of the project region would be an asset,
- Excellent command of written and spoken English language (eligibility criterion).

6 PROCEDURES AND ORGANISATION OF WORK

The consultant will work in a team with the local interpretation/protected area expert and in close cooperation with the coordination and expert team of the Vjosa WRNP project. After signing the contract, a study tour will be organised where the consultant will be guided by the local experts and will have the opportunity to meet with community representatives, tourism operators and other stakeholders, as well as with the authorities responsible for protected area management and tourism development. A comprehensive binder of background information, studies, and other documentation, including maps from GIS, is available.

Those experts who express interest in consulting work will first be invited to an online interview with members of the project coordinator team. Based on these interviews, a group of potential candidates will be invited to submit written applications to the client.

The expected date for organising the study tour (and starting the work) is the first week of June 2023, and the work should be completed no later than 15 September 2023. The expected working days for this consultancy are estimated to be about 60.