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Vjosa Wild River National park

2023

ToR Stakeholder consultation

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1 BACKGROUND

In March 2023, the Vjosa Wild River National Park (VWRNP) was officially established, making it the largest national park in Albania. The VWRNP covers the entire Vjosa River in Albania, from the Greek border to the mouth of the Adriatic Sea, as well as the three main tributaries: Drinos, including Kardhiq, Bënçë and Shushicë. This corresponds to a stretch of about 400 km.

In the coming years, all free-flowing rivers and streams, as well as the most valuable areas with the highest biological and geomorphological values around the rivers, should be added to capture the important ecosystems that feed and influence the health and biodiversity of the river or that are influenced by the river, such as key areas of the delta. These include, but are not limited to, all free-flowing tributaries and adjacent areas of highest biological and geomorphological value, including the Vjosa Delta area, that will be included in the expanded area of the National Park.

In addition, a procedure has been initiated for the establishment of a transboundary protected area between Greece and Albania, which will ensure adequate protection of the entire Aaos-Vjosa river basin.

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 initial capacity building plan assumes that the limited number of staff currently employed in four RAPA units (Vlore, Gjirokastra, Divjaka and Korca) will be temporarily relocated to the area of the newly created VWRNP before a dedicated management authority and staff are appointed in 2024. Start of the management of the Vjosa area as the National Park according to the IUCN standards requires extensive public consultation. It is expected that some changes in legislation will be necessary to adapt to these new and innovative management options.

When designating protected areas in Albania, the boundaries of the protected area and dialogue with stakeholders are two important and essential components. This process must be supported by active participation, and support, of the different target groups, including national and international public.

Phase I, which led to the establishment of the VWRNP, was supported by the stakeholder engagement process, the main objective of which was to inform local communities and stakeholders about the establishment of the national park. In the next phase, the stakeholder engagement process was intended to move from 'receiving information' to developing an active participatory process and engaging stakeholders to actively participate in the integrated management of the VWRNP and the broader watershed.

The Phase II process of VWRNP management will interact with the strategic interests of various public policy sectors, such as agriculture, forestry, water-management, tourism, infrastructure, industry, transportation, energy etc.

Public and stakeholder input is an important component of planning during the information gathering, analysis, and decision-making phases. The project aims to engage all stakeholders and involve them in the process of designating and managing the protected area from the very beginning. To this end, an intensive stakeholder engagement process will be conducted.

2 OBJECTIVE

The objectives of this consultancy are to:

1. Deliver a robust stakeholder consultation process on the key elements of the VWRNP integrated management plan and the extended boundaries and support the positive reception of the proposals with all the key stakeholders in the Vjosa catchment
2. To assist in the set up of a formal stakeholder advisory board for the ongoing operation of the park from 2024

3 SCOPE OF WORK AND SPECIFIC TASKS

Several parallel activities are planned for 2023 with regard to the management and development of the VWRNP. These include the preparation of:

- the long-term and annual integrated management plan for the VWRNP;
- the master and action plan for tourism in the VWRNP; and
- the strategy for interpretation and visitor's experience of the VWRNP.

In developing policies, orientations and management documentation for the VWRNP, it is essential to develop a participatory and integrated approach to the WVRNP management and intensive interaction with all stakeholders, including local communities and other interested parties is essential for achieving this goal.

The consultants are charged with providing:

- More and different types of background information than MoTE could collect and evaluate on its own.
- Information on how conservation status and management proposals would affect different groups of people to provide the social and economic context for decision making and to enable dialogue with these groups.
- The opportunity to promote understanding and consensus on various management proposals among diverse populations and stakeholders.
- The opportunity to raise awareness of the value of the Vjosa Wild River National Park and increase the sense of stewardship among local people and stakeholders.

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The basic stakeholder analysis has already been done as part of the previous work on the Vjosa River and is available to the consultant. He/she needs to review the document and modify it if necessary.

Consultants are required to develop a process of free, prior, and informed consent consisting of three phases: gathering information, collaborating on planning and implementation, and ensuring accountability of the process.

The information-gathering phase should focus on understanding the current legal and local context, including the legal rights of local communities and other stakeholders.

As part of the collaboration to design the VWRNP and implementation activities, consultants should develop a culturally sensitive approach that reflects local needs and traditions and ensures full and effective participation of communities and stakeholders. They should also ensure that information sharing between the agencies and local communities and stakeholders is effective; the main working method in interacting with stakeholders should be consensus building on all major decisions.

Process accountability will be achieved by creating a grievance mechanism that includes how violations of free, prior, and informed consent will be handled and by seeking agreements with communities and stakeholders on how the process will be monitored to achieve full transparency of decisions.

The MoET will be informed of all public and stakeholder discussions and comments throughout the participation process, and experts will document which inputs are considered (or not) and for what reasons.

Consultants will be expected to work under the supervision and guidance of the project's national and international coordinators and in close collaboration with the expert team and leadership positions in the MoET.

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 costs of local transportation, food and accommodation for the selected consultant(s) will be covered by the client.

The consultants are expected to perform the following duties and responsibilities:

- Review all documents that define the MoTE's mandate and scope of work, including the proposed VWRNP designation plan, and review the existing stakeholder identification document, which will be provided by the International Coordinator,
- Develop structured questionnaires for the in-depth interviews with key stakeholders and conduct interviews with MoTE representatives in leadership positions, local communities,

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NGOs, and other stakeholders to learn their position on the establishment of the protected area,

- Developing the workshop agenda and programme for two rounds of workshops (first workshop at the beginning of the process of preparation of the management plan; the second one at the time when management orientations from the draft Integrated Management Plan will already been prepared) in each of four main territorial units of the VWRNP (Vlore, Permet, Tepelene, Gjirokastra) local communities for the selected stakeholders, distributing the invitations, organising the venues for the workshops (including translation, if needed), conducting the workshops, and preparing the minutes of each workshop,
- Documenting and reporting on the key outcomes of the stakeholder dialogue on the plan for designation of the protected area,
- Analyse the outcomes of the stakeholder's involvement process, prepare reports from the workshops and the summary report on key findings and deliver them to the management planning expert team for their consideration and inclusion in the draft Plan.

4 DELIVERABLES AND TIME FRAME

Consultants must prepare in advance a proposal on how they will develop a participatory approach and use the free, prior and informed consent process and send it to the client. The client will select the team of consultants on the basis of the prepared approach and based on the financial offer.

Other deliverables are:

- Building on the stakeholder analysis from Phase 1, develop a recommendation for the minimum number and type of people who need to be consulted on and the approach required. This should include:
 - A two stage review (1st and 2nd draft) of the key elements of the management plan and the boundaries. (consulted on together).
 - Have separate approaches for municipal leaders (from each village/town) / tourist service businesses / Other businesses / Effected ministry stakeholders (eg. Agriculture) and agencies (eg. NAPA, RAPA)
- Confirm key stakeholders with MoTE
- Plan, arrange and deliver 1st draft consultation and summary of key findings
- Plan, arrange and deliver 2nd draft consultation and summary of key findings
- Deliver the proposal for who should be on the stakeholder advisory board in consultation with MoTE and the lead expert on the Integrated management plan
- Deliver final report for integration into the management plan and the EsIA.

Deliverables should be provided in Albanian.

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The expected date for organising the study tour (and starting the work) is the second week of June 2023, and the work should be completed no later than 31 October 2023. The expected working days for this consultancy are about 85-92.

5 QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERTISE OF THE CONSULTANTS

The consultant or team of experts who are employed or associated with the company, should have the minimum of the following qualifications and skills:

- A degree from a recognized university in public administration, social services, humanistics or relevant fields;
- At least 5 years of experience of working with stakeholders and preparing analysis of their participation in specific processes;
- Experience of dealing with public and local administration;
- Knowledge of analytical capacity for communication strategies;
- High communication and moderation skills;
- Albanian national with good English skills.