

ALBANIAN ALPS, KORABI MOUNTAIN RANGE AND SHEBINK - JABLANICA RANGE-THE NEW BACKBONE OF THE EUROPEAN GREEN BELT

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ABSTRACT

Trans-boundary cooperation has been so far one of the aspects of protection and conservation efforts in many countries. The first trans-boundary protected area was established in the year 1932 and in the last decade it has becoming a very popular approach in nature conservation. The “Iron Curtain” running from the Barents Sea to the Black Sea, divided Europe for almost 40 years. No activity was allowed in the “forbidden zone” along this inhumane barrier. While landscape all over Europe have been shaped and modified by processes of intensive agriculture (all industrial) development, many habitats lying in the vicinity of the border line remained untouched: in the countries of former Eastern Block the utilization of border land was mostly prohibited, whereas on the western side remote borders area were less attractive for investors, and no major traffic infrastructure was needed (RIECKEN, et al., 2006). Almost all the north-eastern part of the country comprises very important natural chains in the designed European Green Belt. The chain from the geographic and nature points looks so un-interrupted and very connected with frontier nature entity. The chain from Albanian Alps-Korabi Mountain-Shebeniku Jabllanica-Ohrid and Prespa ecosystem – Gramozi mountain- Sotira forest is well connected with ecosystems from the neighboring countries. It is very difficult to concept such entity as parts of one, two, three of four sides.

The ecosystem functioning does not meet with administrative or state boundaries. The barriers are human beings artifices.

Keywords: Albanian Alps, Korabi Mountain, protected areas, European Green Belt, Balkan Green Belt

INTRODUCTION

Albania is distinguished for its rich biological and landscape diversity. This diversity is attributable to the country’s geographic position as well as geological, hydrological, climatic, soil and relief characteristics. The mountainous terrain combined with steep cliffs creates ideal conditions for maintaining and protecting a large number of ancient species, some of which are endemic or sub-endemic. The high diversity of ecosystems and habitats (marine and coastal ecosystems, wetlands, river deltas, sand dunes, lakes, rivers, Mediterranean shrubs, broadleaf, conifers and mixed forests, alpine and sub-alpine pastures and meadows, and high mountain ecosystems) offers rich habitats for a variety of plants and animals. There are around 3,200 species of vascular plants and 756 vertebrate species. There are 27 endemic and 160 sub-endemic species of vascular plants (BCSAP, 1992).

Approximately 30% of all European floras occur in Albania. The high Albanian forests maintain communities of large mammals such as wolf, bear, lynx, and chamois, and also characteristic bird communities.

Until the 1990s, protected areas in Albania were small in number and size. Recommendations that emerged from the ecological survey and the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan led to an important step in protected area planning in Albania. A new system was adopted for classifying existing and proposed protected areas, incorporating six IUCN management categories. The following table summarizes the improved system of protected areas that already cover up to 10.42% of the country total area (the new protected areas established after November 2007 are not included).

Management categories (IUCN, 1994)		Number of protected areas	Area (ha)
Category	Description		
I	Strict nature reserve	3	9500 ha
II	National parks	14	143 522 ha
III	Nature monument	6	3490 ha
IV	Managed nature reserve	23	62 848 ha
V	Protected landscape	5	95 864 ha
VI	Protected areas of multiple use	4	18 200 ha
Total		798	55

Table 1. The protected areas in Albania (Source, DNCB, 2008)

Six protected areas identified as areas of special conservation interest-ASCI are included in the first pilot phase of Emerald Network in Albania. During the second phase of EMERALD Network project in that has started recently other protected areas (ASCI) will be added to the Emerald Network (MoEFWA, 2007)..

Some 19 sites along the coast have been identified since 1996 (under Coastal Area Management Program – CAMP (UNEP/MAP, 1996) and proposed to be given the status of specially protected areas—SPAs. Albania is a party to other International treaties, such as the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention); the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention); the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (Bonn Convention); the Convention on the Conservation of World Cultural and Natural Heritage (UNESCO).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In-situ conservation of biodiversity is a primary approach to the conservation of biological diversity. In these terms adopting an international effective system (IUCN categories) will serve as mechanism for protection of biodiversity, landscapes, flora and fauna.

In this context the Balkan Green Belt (Fig.1) is a mechanism where the SPA are becoming functional part for conservation of the valuable nature and cultural biodiversity. The north eastern part of Albania, bordering with Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia and Greece is naturally self-selected as crucial chain in entire Belt. To that fact the designation and well planning is an important step in the future proper management and administration. Borders from the other site are both threat and opportunity (BRUNER, 2006). The extension in Alps and Korabi direction will be an excellent opportunity for conservation development.

The administration and protection of protected areas is based on Law No. 8906 dated 6 June 2002 “On protected areas”. The object of this law is the declaration, preservation, administration, management and use of protected areas and their natural and biological resources; the facilitation of conditions for the development of environmental tourism, for the information and education of the general public and for direct or indirect economic profits, by the local population, by the public and private sector (REC, 2002).

Protected areas can play an important role in species conservation. To help the process of preparation and designation of these trans-boundary protected areas we bring on the framework of the European Green Belt, an IUCN initiative promoting the idea of a large scale ecological corridor spanning in the former “iron curtain” - the border separating Eastern and Western Europe from 1945 to 1990 (SCHWADERER et al., 2008).

The limited access that bordering regions had within this period “helped” to preserve relatively intact ecosystems on both sides of the borders. These areas are in many cases overlapping with the distribution range of the Balkan lynx nowadays, and one possible reason why lynx still survived in this part of the Balkans might be attributed to the fact that there had been low human disturbances for a long period of time.



Figure 1. Potential sites for the BGB

Five areas were chosen as main project sites, these being: Jabllanica-Shebenik range (Macedonia/Albania), Shar Planina and Korabi Mountain (Macedonia/Albania), Albanian Alps (Albania) and Ilinska-Plakenska range (Macedonia).

In the selected areas the work concentrates in making proper biodiversity inventories as well as socio-economic assessments. To prepare the ground for a proper implementation of the protected areas, initiatives that promote the sustainable land use of the zones are supported. In May 2008, the ecosystem Shebenik-Jabllanica was proclaimed as a National Park by the Albanian Government – this being an important achievement where the work of the Balkan Lynx Recovery Programme played a key role.

Working towards north extension i.e. Korabi LPA and Alps PA will play a direct effect to valuable habitats and species conservation.

CONCLUSIONS

To our view the transboundary co-operation has gradually to be oriented on:

- Promoting international co-operation at different levels and in different fora;
- Enhancing environmental protection across ecosystems;
- Facilitating more effective research in the field of biodiversity values, nature conservation and economic prosperity;
- Bringing economic benefits to local economy, strengthening incomes generation; and

- Ensuring better cross-border control of problems such as fire, water management, poaching, water pollution and sustainable agriculture development.

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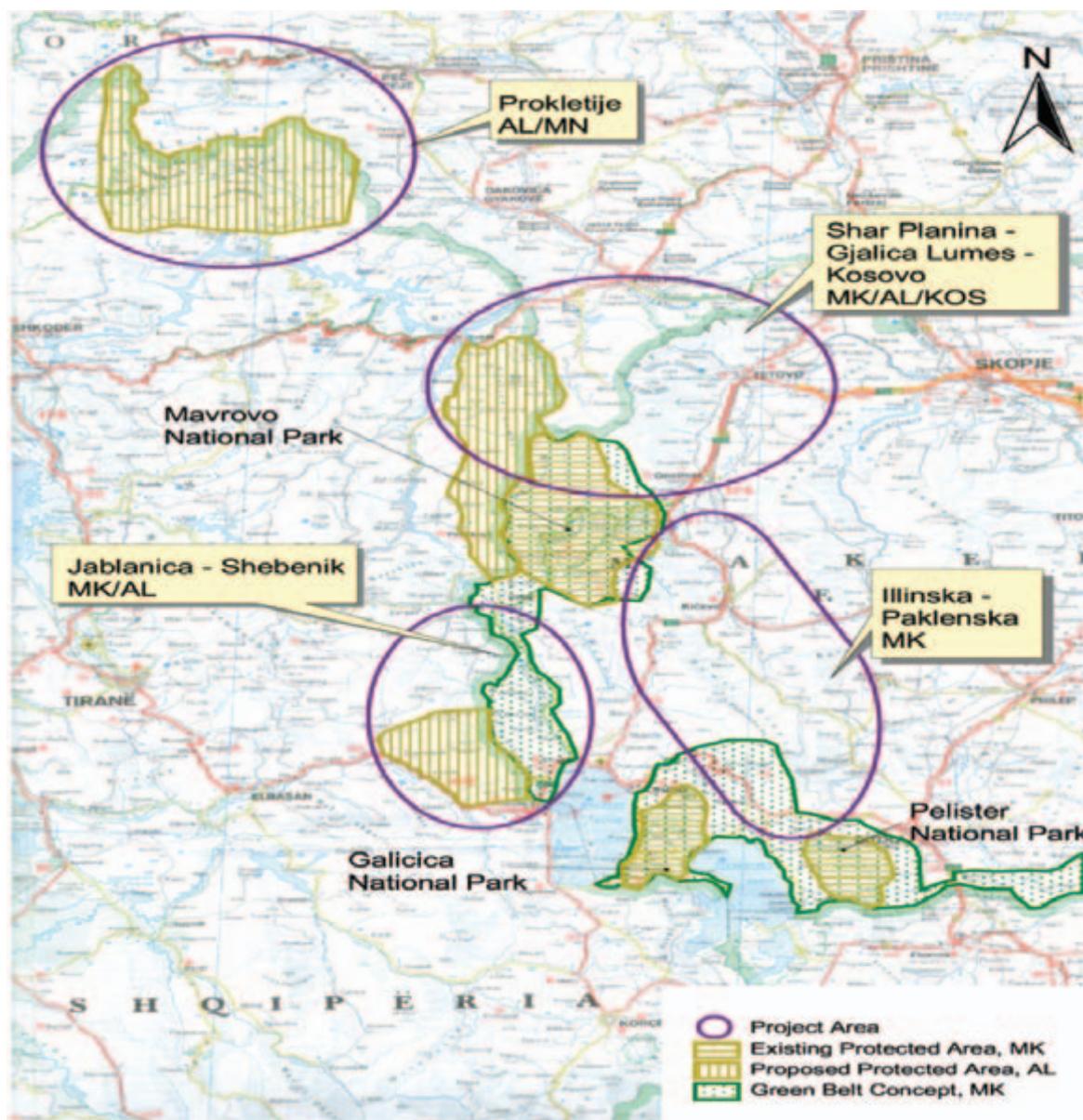


Figure 2. Location of the transboundary sites - chains in the BGB