

JOINT CALL FOR GRANT PROPOSALS

PONT – CEPF COOPERATION ON THE PRESPA-OHRID ECOREGION

Joint call to Environmental Actors on the Prespa-Ohrid Ecoregion

Overview

The Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust (PONT) and the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) have recently agreed to combine their efforts in the Wider Prespa-Ohrid Area by issuing a joint call for proposals. PONT and CEPF invite applications from eligible organizations to address conservation needs outlined in this Call.

PONT is a foundation established under German Law, supporting Protected Areas (PAs) and Environmental Actors (EAs) in the Wider Prespa-Ohrid Area in North Macedonia, Greece and Albania, with the mission to “*Conserving nature for a sustainable future in the Prespa-Ohrid ecoregion through long-term partnerships and financing*”. PONT implements its mission through two main grant programmes: (1) co-financing operational costs of PAs, and (2) co-financing the work of EAs. The EAs include Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), municipalities, and scientific or academic institutions, but no private persons or businesses. The Wider Prespa-Ohrid Area includes the entire Prespa and Ohrid basins, including the entire territory of Pelister National Park in North Macedonia and Shebenik-Jablanica National Park in Albania. For more information about PONT, its mission, approach and programme please visit: www.pont.org.

In 2017, in close cooperation with PAs, EAs and national authorities responsible for managing PAs, PONT has identified a set of 40 priority actions to be addressed by the EAs in the Wider Prespa Area over the period from 2018 to 2027, that complement the actions included in the Management Plans for the PAs and together constitute the Strategic Framework that informs PONT’s financing decisions¹. The priorities are grouped into five Focus Areas: 1) capacity development; 2) improved PA & forest management; 3) sustainable use of PAs (incl. tourism/recreation; traditional grazing; Non-Timber Forest Products); 4) conservation of species; and 5) conservation of habitats & landscapes. The actions under the last four Focus Areas are classified as related to either (1) applied research, studies and experimentation directly linked to real measures; or (2) real measures/implementation of conservation actions. In 2021, the PONT Supervisory Board decided to expand the PONT operations and to additionally include the Wider Ohrid Area. As part of the feasibility study for the geographical expansion a draft Strategic Framework for Environmental Actors has been developed taking the inputs of stakeholders into account. The draft Strategic Framework will undergo public participation in September 2021. The main focus areas are: 1) Governance, management and administration; 2) Understanding and conserving biodiversity; 3) Sustainable development. For the PAs, the grants will be in line with the approved PA management plan.

¹ PONT Funding Priorities are available at: <http://pont.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/2017-PONT-Funding-Priorities.pdf>

CEPF is a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, the European Union, the Global Environment Facility, the Government of Japan, and the World Bank; CEPF receives extra support in the Mediterranean Basin from the MAVA Foundation. A fundamental goal of CEPF is to ensure civil society is engaged in biodiversity conservation. For more information about CEPF, its mission, approach and programme please visit: www.cepf.net.

The Mediterranean Basin Hotspot is the second largest hotspot in the world and the largest of the world's five Mediterranean-climate regions. CEPF's niche for investment in the Mediterranean was formulated through a participatory process that engaged civil society, donor and governmental stakeholders throughout the region. The resulting Investment Strategy (2017-2022) is documented within the Ecosystem Profile, [here](#). This investment strategy comprises of strategic directions, broken down into investment priorities outlining the types of activities that will be eligible for CEPF funding.²

The CEPF small grant programme in the Mediterranean is led by BirdLife International, serving as regional implementation team (RIT) for the hotspot. In the Balkans, BirdLife International works with the Bird Protection and Study Society of Serbia (BPSSS) with support of DOPPS – BirdLife Slovenia, to manage the small grants. Additional funding to the small grant programme in the Balkans is provided by the MAVA Foundation, which will be used to extend CEPF's reach and further empower the smaller grassroots organizations.

Scope of cooperation between PONT and CEPF

With similarities in both their strategies, and the view to enabling longer-term interventions with greater impact, PONT and CEPF have come together to launch a second combined Call for proposals. There is a potential to build synergies between a number of conservation actions in the Wider Prespa-Ohrid Area under the objectives of the PONT's Strategic Framework, and some of the investment priorities of CEPF under Strategic Direction 2 (Sustainable management of water catchments) and Strategic Direction 5 (Sharing of best practices and knowledge among grantees across the hotspot) for the Mediterranean Basin Biodiversity Hotspot. PONT and CEPF, as well as BirdLife International and BPSSS as the RIT, have joined forces to provide capacity building and technical support to successful applicants, alongside grant funding.

Eligible applicants

This Call is open to applicants that are based in Albania, North Macedonia or in both countries, which have been active in the Wider Prespa-Ohrid Area and have interest and experience in the relevant conservation actions eligible under this Call.

For the purpose of this Call the applicant applying must be a legally established and tax registered organization for at least the last 3 years in either Albania or North Macedonia. The lead applicant must be registered as a local NGO with its base within the Wider Prespa-Ohrid Area.

Applicant organizations must be composed of basic staff, infrastructure, financial systems and a basic financial budget.

² CEPF Funding Priorities in the Mediterranean are available at: www.cepf.net/our-work/biodiversity-hotspots/mediterranean-basin

Applicants must have their own bank account and be authorized under relevant national laws to receive charitable contributions.

Individuals, community groups, municipalities or businesses must work with eligible applicants (only local NGOs) to develop applications.

Eligible activities

The scope of this call is limited to the types of activities described below:

- **Strategic Direction 2: Support the sustainable management of water catchments through integrated approaches for the conservation of threatened freshwater biodiversity**
- **Strategic Direction 5: Strengthen the regional conservation community through the sharing of best practices and knowledge among grantees across the hotspot**

Proposed interventions must support either Strategic Direction 2 or Strategic Direction 5, and the specific Investment Priorities stated below. Applicants wishing to apply for both Strategic Directions must complete a separate concept note application for each Strategic Direction.

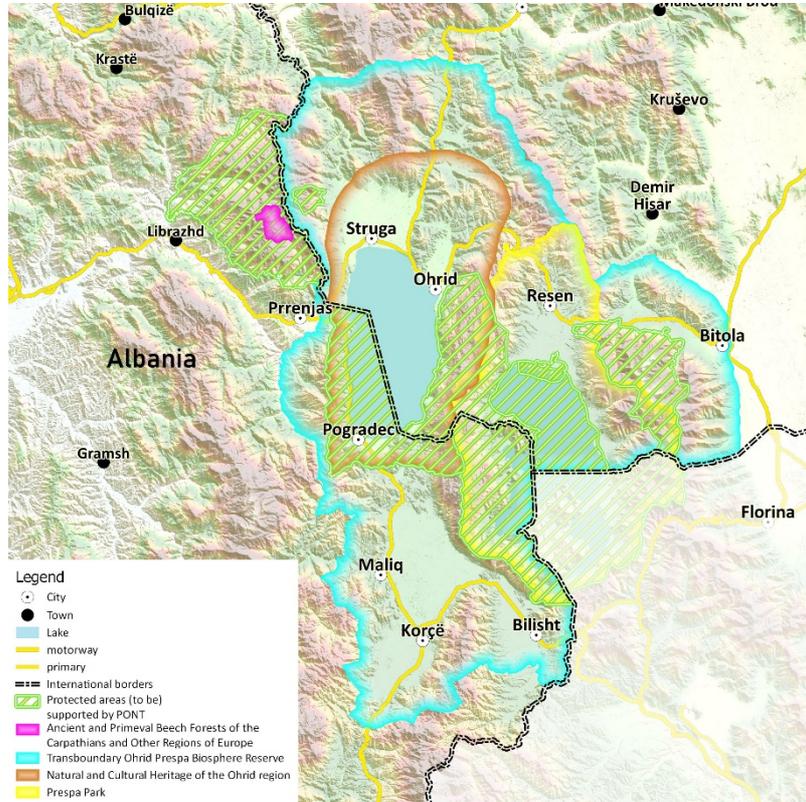
Both Investment Priorities provide opportunities for applicants to work with groups of existing CEPF grantees across the Balkan sub-region or the Mediterranean hotspot, to identify themes for events on shared learning and capacity building, a key focus of this call.

The geographic scope of the activities for this joint Call is limited to the Wider Prespa-Ohrid Area covering not only the Prespa and Ohrid basins, but also the entire territory of Pelister National Park in North Macedonia that extend outside the watershed of the Prespa Lakes as well as Shebenik-Jabllanicë National Park in Albania that extends outside the watershed of Lake Ohrid. Protected Areas included in the Wider Prespa-Ohrid Area are Shebenik-Jabllanicë and Prespa National Parks as well as the Pogradeci Lake Land and Water Protected Landscape in Albania. In North Macedonia, Galicica and Pelister National Parks as well as Vevchancki Springs Monument of Nature, Ezerani Nature Park and Prespa Lake Monument of Nature are included (see map below).



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CRITICAL ECOSYSTEM PARTNERSHIP FUND



Grant proposals should be built on biodiversity conservation as a fundamental component, and should contribute to improving the conservation status of biodiversity.

Where relevant, applicants are encouraged to submit concept notes which harmonize with existing national or regional initiatives. Synergies with other organizations are also eligible, with one lead organization submitting the application, and project partners with clear roles stated in the concept note application. Especially businesses as project partner of the local NGO are encouraged.

CEPF is committed to integrating gender into its portfolio. Applicants should design and write grant proposals that consider gender issues in the achievement of their conservation impacts. CEPF has developed several resources that can help applicants to design, implement and evaluate gender-aware projects ([CEPF Gender Toolkit](#)) and understand what CEPF seeks in a proposal ([CEPF Gender Fact Sheet](#)). Visit the [CEPF and Gender webpage](#) to learn more about how CEPF addresses gender in the projects it supports.

Grants cannot be used for:

- the purchase of land, involuntary resettlement of people, or activities that negatively affect physical cultural resources, including those important to local communities.
- activities adversely affecting Indigenous Peoples or where these communities have not provided their broad support to the grant proposal.



- removal or alteration of any physical cultural property (includes sites having archaeological, paleontological, historical, religious, or unique natural values).

Proposed activities should observe all relevant safeguard and social policies, as explained on the [CEPF website](#).

I) Strategic Direction 2: Support the sustainable management of water catchments through integrated approaches for the conservation of threatened freshwater biodiversity

The Prespa and Ohrid Lakes are among the most ancient lakes in Europe; they are isolated and surrounded by mountains with different types of geological substrates. Humans have been present in the area from prehistoric times, playing an important role in the formation of the natural landscape and biodiversity. This unique combination of characteristics contributes to the very high diversity of habitats and species, the high endemism and the important populations of rare and threatened species.

- PONT/CEPF funding will support actions with local stakeholders and engagement with government and private sector stakeholders to ensure connectivity within the Lake Prespa and Lake Ohrid watersheds.
- PONT/CEPF is looking for concept notes which address Strategic Direction 2 through Investment Priority 2.3 (see table below), and which clearly demonstrate how proposed activities will benefit globally threatened species as per the [IUCN Red List](#), within the Wider Prespa-Ohrid Area.

Table: Strategic Direction 2 and Investment Priority

| Strategic direction | Investment priority |
|---|--|
| 2: Support the sustainable management of water catchments through integrated approaches for the conservation of threatened freshwater biodiversity. | 2.3: Engage with government, private sector and other stakeholders to support integrated river basin management practices that reduce threats to biodiversity in priority Catchment Management Zones (CMZs). |

Details on the eligible Investment Priority under Strategic Direction 2:

Investment Priority 2.3

Engage with government, private sector and other stakeholders to support integrated river basin management practices that reduce threats to biodiversity in the Lake Prespa and Lake Ohrid watersheds. Although the most appropriate level for direct action by applicants is at clearly defined sites, the connectivity of freshwater systems makes it highly likely that action will also be needed at the watershed level to address problems with water quality (e.g., from nutrient pollution, agriculture and forestry run-off, sewage disposal, etc.), water volume and flow and disturbance to habitat. This will

involve influencing those actors from government and/or the private sector who are involved with or have the authority to influence these issues.

The proposed activities may involve cooperation with protected areas and transboundary cooperation, where necessary.

Potential themes and actions likely to be funded under Investment Priority 2.3:

- Engaging with environmental actors in river basin management policy and planning processes to encourage alignment of conservation with land-use, economic development and sustainable water management priorities in the catchment.
- Networking and awareness raising to inform, and then influence, the actions of local authorities and government agencies responsible for protecting and monitoring river basins, supporting them to carry out their role more effectively with the assistance of improved data and expertise.
- Engaging with private sector actors, including those who contribute to threats and those who have an interest in sustainable management.
- Support the relevant PA authorities with the conservation actions for the sustainable management of watershed catchments as outlined in the PA Management Plans.

II) Strategic Direction 5: Sharing of best practices and knowledge among grantees across the hotspot

During the formulation of the CEPF investment strategy (2017-2022), it was identified that there is a need to facilitate regional-level interactions, to share lessons learned and good practice approaches developed by grantees, and to establish connections among civil society organizations (CSOs) around the Mediterranean Basin. Such interventions are expected to contribute to the development of a regional community of conservation organizations that can provide mutual support to its members beyond the end of the CEPF investment phase. Therefore, CEPF created a strategic direction based around regional capacity building, with a focus on sharing best practices and knowledge between organizations and strengthening these networks.

- PONT/CEPF is looking for concept notes which address Strategic Direction 5 through Investment Priority 5.1 (see table below).

Table: Strategic Direction 5 and Investment Priority

| Strategic direction | Investment priority |
|--|---|
| 5: Strengthen the regional conservation community through the sharing of best practices and knowledge among grantees across the hotspot. | 5.1: Support regional and thematically focused learning processes for civil society organizations and stakeholders. |

Potential Themes and actions likely to be funded under Investment Priority 5.1

- Promote learning and cross-fertilization of experience and encourage innovative governance arrangement for protected areas at site and transboundary levels.
- Promote the establishment of processes and mechanisms to get feedback and identify, hear and resolve complaints and disputes related to the governance or management of the protected areas.
- Facilitate meaningful and effective participation of stakeholders in participatory management effectiveness assessments of protected areas (e.g., using METT).
- Harness the skill and enthusiasm of volunteers through citizen science, and other programs to carry out needed management activities.
- Foster partnerships with CSOs and local community members to monitor and patrol protected areas.
- Support participatory monitoring by local volunteers and community groups to complement monitoring efforts by protected area staff, research institutes and environmental actors.
- Support the development of capacity and skills for citizen science data recording and reporting threats to major values of protected areas.
- Environmental Actors support and complement the environmental education efforts by protected area authorities.
- Organising thematic workshops, trainings or other learning opportunities for civil society organisations' and other environmental actors capacity building. The proposed activities may involve cooperation with protected areas and transboundary cooperation, where necessary.

How it works

The overall budget available under this Call is €116,000 (€58,000 from PONT and €58,000 (\$70,000) from CEPF).

The total budget of each grant may be up to a maximum of €20,000.

The timeframe for implementation of the grants is maximum 8 months (from November 2021 to end of June 2022).

The concept notes can be submitted by an individual organization or a partnership/group of organizations with one acting as a lead partner/applicant (locally-based NGO); shortlisted applicants will then be invited to develop a full grant proposal.

Project proposals on strategic direction 5 are strongly encouraged as PONT and CEPF did not invest in this strategic direction earlier. In case of many applications of similar quality those on SD5 will be in advantage.

Application for a Grant

To apply for a grant under this Call please complete the English **application form** available [here](#).

Interested applicants are to direct any queries and questions regarding the content or process of this Call to the PONT Grants Coordinator, Oliver Avramoski at oavramoski@pont.org.

Proposers may submit their queries relating to this Call no later than 20 August 2021. Any queries should clearly reference any appropriate paragraph in this Call and, to the extent possible, should be aggregated rather than sent individually. As far as is reasonably possible, PONT will respond to all questions submitted before 24 August 2021.

For all interested applicants an online open session will be organized which will take place on Zoom platform on 22 July 2021 in the period from 2 pm till 4 pm CET. On this open session you will be able to learn more about the requirements under this call and ask questions regarding the project proposal preparation. To participate in this open session it is mandatory to register using the form [here](#). Registration deadline is 21 July.

Deadline for Submission of Application

Interested applicants should submit their concept note proposals by no later than **3 September 2021** at 14:00 CET. Applications are to be sent to Oliver Avramoski by email (oavramoski@pont.org).

Review Process and Next Steps

The concept note review process will take approximately 2 weeks from the deadline date. The review committee will select the strongest concept notes which meet the eligibility criteria, as described above. All applicants will receive a response following the review of their grant proposal.

The applicants of the concept notes that have been accepted will proceed to the second stage and elaborate their full grant application with a more detailed budget and logframe (submit full proposal until 11 October 2021). The full grant application would include a detailed budget form that can distinguish between the two sources of financing (PONT and CEPF); individual actions may be financed from each of the two sources, individually or by combining them. However, the costs of each item have to be financed by either PONT or CEPF and cannot be divided. The co-financing to be requested from PONT is 50% of the total grant amount and CEPF can match the other 50%. Overheads can be included (up to 13% of the total grant amount).

Final approved grant applications will be awarded a grant upon signing two separate grant agreements, in English. An agreement with BirdLife International (on behalf of CEPF), as the regional implementation team (RIT) for the Mediterranean Basin Hotspot will cover the CEPF contribution and a separate agreement with PONT for the remaining contribution of 50%.

The grantee must establish two separate bank accounts to which the contributions from PONT and CEPF will be paid, independently. The grant will be paid in several instalments, with the last one an amount up to 10%, to be paid after the formal approval of the final report from the grantee.

COVID 19

All applications should take into account epidemiological measures instituted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Please consider the potential spread of new virus strains, which could lead to new and stricter measures.