

## CEPF FINAL PROJECT COMPLETION REPORT

<b>Organization Legal Name:</b>	World Wide Fund for Nature Armenian Branch (WWF-Armenia)
<b>Project Title:</b>	Enhancing the integrity of the East Lesser Caucasus corridor through the establishment of Gnishik Community Managed Sanctuary, Armenia.
<b>Date of Report:</b>	31 August 2014
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**CEPF Region:** Europe and Central Asia

**Strategic Direction:** Strategic Direction 1; Caucasus Biodiversity Hotspot, Armenia, identified in the CEPF ecosystem profile site #125, Program of Consolidation: Investment priority 3

**Grant Amount:** 160,000 USD

**Project Dates:** July 2011 – June 2014

**Implementation Partners for this Project (please explain the level of involvement for each partner):**

**The Ministry of Nature Protection (MoNP) of the Republic of Armenia** was involved in project implementation as the state authorized body in the field of Protected Areas (PAs). The draft documents of official establishment of Gnishik PA were developed in close cooperation with the MoNP. The MoNP with respective subdivisions (Bioresources Management Agency) was involved also in the planning processes as one of the main stakeholders.

**UNDP Armenia** was involved as the partner in terms of co-financing as well as one of the main international organizations involved in development of PAs in Armenia. It implemented the project "Developing Protected Areas System in Armenia" with various activities aimed at improvement of legislative basis, establishment of new Protected Areas (extension of Zangezur State Sanctuary, establishment of Khustup State Sanctuary and Gnishik community managed PA (Gnishik Protected Landscape).

**Vayots Dzor Regional Administration** was involved as one of the main state stakeholder to participate in establishment, planning and implementation of Gnishik PA. It was involved in discussion of Management Plan and Support Zone Plan of Gnishik Protected Landscape (PL).

Local three **communities of Areni, Khachik and Gnishik** were involved in planning process of the PL through direct participation in the working groups. They were involved also in implementation of the plans, while final decisions were made on the basis of full agreement with the communities. Establishment of Gnishik PA was eventually approved by the relevant three landowning communities.

**Fund for Biodiversity Conservation of Armenian Highland and Gnishik Intercommunity Environmental Fund** were involved in the project as sub-grantees and have implemented various field activities, such as activities aimed at provision of alternative livelihoods, implementation of awareness rising activities and regular consultative meetings with community mayors and council members.

## **Conservation Impacts**

*Please explain/describe how your project has contributed to the implementation of the CEPF ecosystem profile.*

The project goal was to enhance the existing network of protected areas of Armenia and enable active conservation of biodiversity of south-central Armenia within the East Lesser Caucasus Corridor through establishment the country's first community managed protected area – Gnishik Protected Landscape. Project efforts resulted in a better equipped national protected area system including under-represented ecosystems (arid mountain steppe and mountain meadows steppe) and associated species. The project invested in community areas improving management of productive landscapes and helping in promotion of connectivity and in alleviation of poverty.

*Please summarize the overall results/impact of your project.*

### **Planned Long-term Impacts - 3+ years (as stated in the approved proposal):**

- contribution to establishment of Gnishik sanctuary with the aim to conserve rich and threatened biodiversity of the target area, which identified in the CEPF ecosystem profile site N 125 (Noravank),
- promotion of nature based tourism development in the area,
- further development of a national protected area system to include and conserve currently under-represented ecosystems and associated species,
- improvement of management of productive landscapes while helping to promote connectivity and alleviate poverty
- establishment of a model for community-led protected areas management, as a basis for wider replication in Armenia.

### **Actual Progress Toward Long-term Impacts at Completion:**

The newly created Gnishik Protected Landscape, was established at 6,010.74 ha of underrepresented in PAs of Armenia habitats, which will primarily ensure conservation of rich biodiversity of Vayots Dzor region, but also maintain and improve closely interweaved associations between local nature, region's cultural and historical heritage and modern mode of life of local communities.

Basic ecotourism infrastructure was established to promote and further develop ecotourism and the relevant income generating opportunities in the protected area and adjacent community lands.

Comprehensive management plan was developed for Gnishik Protected Landscape to ensure adoption of long-term practice of sustainable and effective management of the area.

**Planned Short-term Impacts - 1 to 3 years (as stated in the approved proposal):**

- management plan, zoning plan and sustainable resource use plans in place for Gnishik Community Managed Protected Area;
- Gnishik Community Managed PL formally established by the 3 communities (Areni, Khachik and Gnishik);
- human and technical capacities for the PL management improved;
- pre-conditions created for improved livelihoods of communities and reduced pressures on natural resources.

**Actual Progress Toward Short-term Impacts at Completion:**

Management plan developed for Gnishik Protected Landscape will deliver guidance in ensuring conditions for conserving rich biodiversity of Vayots Dzor region in southern Armenia.

Support Zone Economic Development Plan for Gnishik Protected Landscape, developed in close cooperation with and approved by the involved communities of Gnishik, Khachik and Areni, prioritizes their most important rural problems, opportunities for generating alternative livelihoods and ecotourism development, as well as summarizes conditions for solving these problems.

Gnishik Intercommunity Environmental Fund, jointly created by the communities (Areni, Gnishik and Khachik) is appointed as the managing organization for Gnishik Protected Landscape, has initiated the process of execution of conservation and development programs in accordance with the Gnishik Management Plan and Support Zone Economic Development Plan.

Gnishik PL staff were recruited from the members of relevant communities, and rangers were trained and equipped with necessary field and office equipment.

Small-scale alternative livelihood activities implemented in the support zone of Gnishik Protected Landscape have incorporated donation of 50 beehives with bee families, 6.25 ha of apple and walnut orchards and 3.4 ha of vineyards established in Gnishik, Khachik and Areni communities.

**Please provide the following information where relevant:**

**Hectares Protected:** 6,010.74; additional 9,736ha represent buffer zone around the protected area.

**Species Conserved:** over 900 species of plants and about 525 species of animals, of which 55 species of plants and 80 species of animals are listed in the Red Book of Armenia and registered in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

**Corridors Created:** South East Lesser Caucasus Corridor.

***Describe the success or challenges of the project toward achieving its short-term and long-term impact objectives.***

The success of the project is the fully implemented attempt of bringing together rural communities, regional administration and other stakeholders in the mutual initiative of conserving local biodiversity and establishing Armenia's first community managed protected area. Direct involvement of members of local communities into the project fieldwork and the process of protection and tourism infrastructure development in combination with awareness raising, strongly contributes to the increase of their sense of ownership and responsibility towards the homeland's natural and cultural values, which is an important precondition for acquiring pro-active conservation attitude. The main challenge was connected with provision of sustainable financing of the Gnishik PL which was solved during the project implementation. Actually after official

establishment of the PL Caucasus Nature Fund (CNF) and partially WWF provide budget for the operation of the PA.

***Were there any unexpected impacts (positive or negative)?***

None.

## Project Components

**Project Components:** *Please report on results by project component. Reporting should reference specific products/deliverables from the approved project design and other relevant information.*

**Component 1 Planned:** Planning, consultative and informative meetings with key stakeholders organized, including local government and communities

**Component 1 Actual at Completion:**

Planning, consultative and informative meetings on establishment of Gnishik community-managed PA with various stakeholders (rural communities, local and international NGOs, regional administration of Vayots Dzor province, Ministry of Nature Protection of Armenia) were organized in various periods from autumn 2011 to summer 2012, supported by UNDP-GEF project "Developing the Protected Area System of Armenia". Meetings involved discussion of community land maps, areas provisioned for the protected area, traditional land use issues, zoning of the proposed protected area etc.

There were held also participatory workshops with involved rural communities adjacent to proposed Gnishik PA. The workshops were aimed at identification of the needs for community development, possible livelihoods projects, as well as at identification of capacities both from the perspective of human resources (development and cooperation) and local services and production. This processes facilitated genuine and meaningful community participation in protected area establishment.

**Component 2 Planned:**

A management plan, zoning plan and sustainable use plans for respective natural resources developed and approved by the communities.

**Component 2 Actual at Completion:**

The Management Plan for the period of 2014-2018 was developed in coordination and discussion with the communities of Areni, Khachik and Gnishik. All the comments and suggestions by the communities were evaluated and incorporated into the document. The final version of the Management Plan was approved by all the communities and coordinated with the regional administration and the Ministry of Nature Protection.

The draft Support Zone Economic Development Plan (earlier called "Individual Sustainable Natural Resource Use Plans") was similarly developed with involvement of the communities of Areni, Khachik and Gnishik. The plan highlights the most urgent community problems and summarizes relevant costs for their resolution. Drafts of the plan were coordinated and discussed with the communities and received comments and updates were reviewed and incorporated into the final version of the plan. The document was approved by all of the relevant communities and was submitted to regional administration and the Ministry of Nature Protection. Range Management Plan was developed and coordinated with the target communities.

**Component 3 Planned:**

Draft governmental decision on establishment of Gnishik Sanctuary including respective documentation prepared and submitted to relevant governmental bodies for review and approval.

**Component 3 Actual at Completion:**

Since Gnishik is a community managed protected area there was no need of the Governmental decision. Only communal councils' decisions were needed. All landowner communities (Areni, Khachik, and Gnishik villages) have provided and confirmed their decision on allocation of lands for Gnishik PA and have signed the map of the planned Gnishik PA. After approval of the Management and Support Zone Economic Development plans the map of Gnishik Protected Area was submitted to respective state bodies - regional administration of Vayots Dzor region and the Ministry of Nature Protection of Armenia.

**Component 4 Planned:**

Human and material capacities of the protected area management unit improved, training courses for community rangers organized, and equipment for the sanctuary purchased.

**Component 4 Actual at Completion:**

As a result of a number of meetings and discussions with UNDP Armenia office, Ministry of Nature Protection and administration of the communities of Gnishik, Khachik and Areni a managing body for the newly established Gnishik community managed protected area was selected and appointed. The appointed Gnishik Intercommunity Environmental Fund was established in 2010 jointly by the communities of Gnishik, Khachik and Areni as a non-commercial and non-governmental foundation aimed at conservation and sustainable use of local biodiversity and natural resources, sustainable agricultural practices and social and economic development of local communities.

Presentations about future operation of Gnishik PA and its protection and visitor programs were conducted for members of local communities and members of Gnishik Intercommunity Environmental Fund. Ranger candidates were appointed from each of the relevant communities and core staff was then recruited.

Guest House and Visitor Center were established near the Yeghegnadzor town. The Guest House and the Visitor Center were fully furnished with bedroom, kitchen and office furniture and equipment, such as fridges, air conditioners, TV etc., and are ready to receive guests and operate as Gnishik PA office and Information Center.

Various field, office and guest house equipment and furniture was procured and delivered to the Gnishik PA, including computers, printer, scanner and other necessary supplementary technique. Borders of Gnishik Protected Landscape were demarcated with pillars featuring the name of the protected area and individual pillar number.

As part of applying traditional protection tools, such as limiting access to prime habitat of threatened species, improved signage, and patrol systems there were installed roadblocks, preventive and information signs. At various places of the protected area there were installed a ranger shelter, roadblocks (including two repaired), preventive signs, information and road signs. The newly established patrol team was set in place, equipped with a 4x4 UAZ 315142-012 vehicle and supplied with summer and winter field uniform and field equipment, such as land radio, digital photo cameras, binoculars, handheld GPS.

Trainings were conducted with the field staff of Gnishik PA, primarily focused on use of field equipment - binoculars, GPS, digital cameras, radios etc. Training has been conducted on the monitoring of target species (large mammals), data collection and guiding eco-tourist groups and individuals.

Based on information collected in the field, basic ecotourism information materials and field signage was developed in the territory of Gnishik PA, with ecotourism trails designed and mapped. Overall, 7 hiking, biking and horse riding trails were developed. For each trail and at each of the protected areas there were prepared and installed trail signs featuring the trail scheme, trail length, relative difficulty, highlights of the trail (historical and wildlife objects) and

camping sites. Additionally, all trails were trailblazed. Large wall tourist trail wall map of Gnishik Protected Landscape was prepared for the Visitor Center of the PA.

**Component 5 Planned:**

Alternative livelihoods provision and awareness raising activities for 4 local communities implemented (sub-granting to Fund for Biodiversity Conservation of Armenian Highland (FBCAH)).

**Component 5 Actual at Completion:**

Small-scale alternative livelihood activities were implemented by the FBCAH in accordance with the agreements and memorandums of cooperation signed with the relevant community heads. It was agreed to provide community members with opportunity of establishing orchards and vineyards, and thus for them to generate income for living and at the same time to reduce pressure on natural resources used by the communities. It was decided to help selected families in Areni to establish vineyards, and the families in Kachik and Gnishik – to establish orchards of apple (represented with 3 varieties) and walnut.

Apple and walnut seedlings were distributed to Gnishik and Khachik communities, while vineyard support poles and vine holding wire – to Areni.

Gnishik community received and planted 800 apple seedlings with 3.25ha of planted area in this community.

Khachik community received 1,000 apple and 1,000 walnut seedlings, covering about 3ha of land.

In Areni community, 3.4ha in total were transformed into vineyards with the aid and provision of 2,000 concrete poles and 1.5 ton of metal wire.

Overall, there were selected 10 beneficiary families in Gnishik, 56 families in Khachik and 14 families in Areni community. As was preliminary agreed, the priority in selection of beneficiaries was given to poor families and the families with many children.

In total, 80 households benefited from the orchards and vineyards (about 320 persons in total, of which 34% comprise men, and 66 % - women).

Awareness rising activities implemented in the project area by FBCAH, were primarily linked to sustainable agricultural practices and organic products, conservation of local biodiversity and use of the combination of these as a tourist attraction and as a basis for socio-economic development of rural communities.

As part of awareness raising activities, the communities of Areni, Khachik and Gnishik/Mozrov were provided with business plans on development of small-scale farming with a particular aim of provision of up to date knowledge on effective and sustainable orchard and vineyard culturing in specific climatic and physical-geographic conditions of Vayots Dzor province.

***Were any components unrealized? If so, how has this affected the overall impact of the project?***

None.

***Please describe and submit (electronically if possible) any tools, products, or methodologies that resulted from this project or contributed to the results.***

None.

**Lessons Learned**

***Describe any lessons learned during the design and implementation of the project, as well as any related to organizational development and capacity building. Consider lessons that would inform projects designed or implemented by your organization or others, as well as lessons that might be considered by the global conservation community.***

***Project Design Process: (aspects of the project design that contributed to its success/shortcomings)***

During implementation of the project, field on office tasks were frequently and tightly interweaved, causing working overlaps. This was especially topical with regards of some high mountain field tasks that are confined to short periods, when the needed areas are accessible and not cut-off due to snow or rain-washed tracks. The planning in such tight schedule is never ideal. Therefore, it appears essential always to aim at finding way and reaching the extent when office and field work are relatively balanced and distribution of tasks during working period is as equal and well-adjusted as possible. This would help in accelerating processes where it's possible, to be able to unload working overlaps in other situations later on.

***Project Implementation: (aspects of the project execution that contributed to its success/shortcomings)***

Through the course of implementation of the project, continuous support and encouragement was received from the administrations and members of all communities involved, as well as from regional administrations of Vayots Dzor and from the Ministry of Nature Protection of Armenia. With this regards, particularly notorious are the strong partnerships and effective collaboration built with the communities of Gnishik, Khachik and Areni.

***Other lessons learned relevant to conservation community:***

None.

## Additional Funding

**Provide details of any additional funding that supported this project and any funding secured for the project, organization, or the region, as a result of the CEPF investment in this project.**

Donor	Type of Funding*	Amount	Notes
UNDP/GEF	A	140,000 USD	Surveys of potential for tourism, assessment of social-economic situation in the communities located around the sanctuary, mapping and demarcation of the sanctuary boundaries, zoning of the sanctuary, development of management, business and support zone plans, development of a draft decision on establishment of the sanctuary
WWF-Armenia	A	140,000 USD	Development of management plan, provision of Visitor Center and Guest House, touristic equipment (tents, sleeping bags, bikes, boat, saddles etc.).

**\*Additional funding should be reported using the following categories:**

- A** *Project co-financing (Other donors or your organization contribute to the direct costs of this project)*
- B** *Grantee and Partner leveraging (Other donors contribute to your organization or a partner organization as a direct result of successes with this CEPF funded project.)*
- C** *Regional/Portfolio leveraging (Other donors make large investments in a region because of CEPF investment or successes related to this project.)*

## Sustainability/Replicability

**Summarize the success or challenge in achieving planned sustainability or replicability of project components or results.**

One of the principal goal of the project was to warrant sustainability of its components. Among other things this was ensured through:

- five year (2014-2018) detailed operational plan for Gnishik PA presented in the developed Management Plan.
- appointment of appropriate local community-based managing body for Gnishik PA – Gnishik Intercommunity Environmental Fund (GIEF).
- financial support for Gnishik PA provided for the first 5 years by the Caucasus Nature Fund and WWF, before GIEF is able to implement fundraising independently

- considering biodiversity conservation, sustainable natural resource use and community development as interdependent components of a whole piece, enforced by the developed Support Zone Economic Development Plan for communities of Gnishik, Khachik and Areni. The Plan can be used by other potential donors for further investments in communities development programmes.

Gnishik PA is the first community managed protected area in the Caucasus, and that model appears to have great potential in establishing new protected areas in other parts of the region. The model of Gnishik PL can be replicated while implementing Ecoregional Corridor Fund programme managed by WWF and financed by the German Government (BMZ) through KfW. The programme will be implemented during 15 years and will provide sustainable financing for establishment of corridors including community based Protected Areas.

***Summarize any unplanned sustainability or replicability achieved.***

The experience of Gnishik PL is taken into account by the “Young Biologists Association” NGO while developing a new project proposal on creation of community managed PA.

### **Safeguard Policy Assessment**

***Provide a summary of the implementation of any required action toward the environmental and social safeguard policies within the project.***

Throughout the project implementation process all decisions related to the project area activities were made in agreement with and as a result of discussion with the involved communities. The overall project was completed in agreement with the National legislation on nature protection.

### **Additional Comments/Recommendations**

None.

## Information Sharing and CEPF Policy

CEPF is committed to transparent operations and to helping civil society groups share experiences, lessons learned, and results. Final project completion reports are made available on our Web site, [www.cepf.net](http://www.cepf.net), and publicized in our newsletter and other communications.

**Please include your full contact details below:**

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**\*\*\*If your grant has an end date other than JUNE 30, please complete the tables on the following pages\*\*\***

**Performance Tracking Report Addendum**

**CEPF Global Targets**

**(Enter Grant Term)**

Provide a numerical amount and brief description of the results achieved by your grant.  
Please respond to only those questions that are relevant to your project.

<b>Project Results</b>	<b>Is this question relevant?</b>	<b>If yes, provide your numerical response for results achieved during the annual period.</b>	<b>Provide your numerical response for project from inception of CEPF support to date.</b>	<b>Describe the principal results achieved from July 1, 2007 to June 30, 2008. (Attach annexes if necessary)</b>
1. Did your project strengthen management of a protected area guided by a sustainable management plan? Please indicate number of hectares improved.				Please also include name of the protected area(s). If more than one, please include the number of hectares strengthened for each one.
2. How many hectares of new and/or expanded protected areas did your project help establish through a legal declaration or community agreement?				Please also include name of the protected area. If more than one, please include the number of hectares strengthened for each one.
3. Did your project strengthen biodiversity conservation and/or natural resources management inside a key biodiversity area identified in the CEPF ecosystem profile? If so, please indicate how many hectares.				
4. Did your project effectively introduce or strengthen biodiversity conservation in management practices outside protected areas? If so, please indicate how many hectares.				
5. If your project promotes the sustainable use of natural resources, how many local communities accrued tangible socioeconomic benefits? Please complete Table 1 below.				

**If you answered yes to question 5, please complete the following table**



