



## **LIFE Prespa Waterbirds - LIFE15 NAT/GR/000936**

“Bird conservation in Lesser Prespa Lake: benefiting local communities and building a climate change resilient ecosystem”

# **Report of the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Transboundary Wetland Management Technical Group (TWMTG)**

**Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> April 2021, Online meeting**

### **Members of the TWMTG:**

Greece: Management Body of the Prespa National Park (MBPNP), Society for the Protection of Prespa (SPP)

Albania: Regional Authority of Protected Areas (RAPA), Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA)

North Macedonia: Galicica National Park (GNP), Resen Municipality (RM), Macedonian Ecological Society (MES)

### **List of participants at the 4th TWMTG meeting:**

#### Presenters:

Fokion Papathanasiou - University of Western Macedonia

Fanourios Sakellarakis / Giorgos Fotiadis - Agricultural University of Athens

Olga Alexandrou - Society for the Protection of Prespa

Constanze Schaaff - Transboundary Biosphere Reserve Prespa project

#### Participants:

Lazar Nikolov - MES

Dragan Arsovski – MES

Daniela Zaec – MES

Danka Uzunova - MES

Daniela Zaec - MES

Biljana Rimcheska – Municipality of Resen

Angela Ivanoska – Municipality of Resen

Klaudja Koci – PPNEA

Cveta Trajce – PPNEA

Zydjon Vorpsi – PPNEA

Ledi Selgjekaj – PPNEA

Ilir Shyti – PPNEA

Sabina Cano – PPNEA

Ristana Trajce – PPNEA

Eglon Kondura - RAPA

Julia Henderson – SPP

Giorgos Catsadorakis - SPP

Myrsini Malakou - SPP

Unfortunately, Andon Bojadzi from Galicica National Park and Mr. Iljon Thanas representative of the Regional Authority of Protected Area were unable to attend the meeting.



**A) Agenda of the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the TWMTG:**

<b>Action C5 - Transboundary Wetland Management Technical Group</b> <b>4<sup>th</sup> Meeting – Monday 26<sup>th</sup> April 2021</b> <b>Online meeting</b>		
10:00 – 10:10	<b>Welcome and introduction</b>	
10:10 – 10:40	Results on studies for the use of reed biomass extracted from wetland management as fodder and soil conditioning <b>Presentation and discussion</b>	Dr. F. Papathanasiou (University of Western Macedonia)
10:40 – 11:20	Transboundary wetland habitats in Prespa <b>Presentation and discussion</b>	F. N. Sakellarakis / Dr. G. Fotiadis (Agricultural University of Athens)
11:20 – 11:40	<b>Short break</b>	
11:40 – 11:45	Brief update on bird flu incidences in Greece in early 2021	Dr. O. Alexandrou (Society for the Protection of Prespa)
11:45 – 12:05	Prespa Project (Phase II) – an update on wetland management and monitoring activities	C. Schaaff, Transboundary Biosphere Reserve Prespa
12:05 – 12:25	New PrespaNet project: wetland management components	K. Koci (PPNEA) D. Zaec (MES) J. Henderson (SPP)
12:25 – 12:35	Summer webinars on wetland management	G. Catsadorakis (SPP)
12:35 – 13:00	<b>Any other business, next steps</b>	



## B) Minutes on presentations and discussions

### Part A: Main presentations: results on studies

#### ***1) Results on studies for the use of reed biomass extracted from wetland management as fodder and soil conditioning***

The meeting started with a presentation by **Dr. Fokion Papathanasiou** from the University of Western Macedonia – Department of Agriculture, regarding the results of the two studies conducted on reed biomass uses. The first study was about the use of reed biomass extracted from the wetland management of Lesser Prespa lake as soil conditioner in cultivated land in the area of Prespa, while the second one concerned quality characteristics of reed biomass and its use as fodder.

Introducing the first study, Dr. Papathanasiou initially mentioned the more common uses of extracted reed biomass, such as energy production, fodder, production of biogas and use of the sludge as organic fertilizer, compost production, direct application of the reed biomass to the field etc. As he quoted, adding reed directly to the field can improve the soil structure, increase the organic matter and soil fertility and it does not require large investments or special treatment. The aim of the study was to evaluate the effect of the direct use of reed biomass on the mechanical and chemical composition of cultivated soils and on the productivity of common bean (*Phaseolus vulgaris* L.) type "plake", the main crop in the Prespa region. Two years of experimentation took place during the 2019 and 2020 cultivation periods, while three representative experimental bean fields were used where two fertilization methods and two reed biomass doses were applied. Dr. Papathanasiou explained all the different measurements that were taken to assess the reed biomass soil conditioning properties and bean productivity, i.e. soil analyses, germination and seedling establishment, plant height, chlorophyll concentration at different growth stages, yield and seed quality characteristics. The main results presented included an increase on soil organic matter with reed biomass addition and a reduction in nitrates where reed biomass was added, something important for the agroecosystem since it could limit nitrate leaching into groundwater. According to the study's final conclusions, reed addition treatments affected bean yield positively and this could be attributed to the better utilization of water due to the improvement of soil water capacity. This observation could lead to the adoption of practices for continuous and systematic addition of reed biomass in the bean fields of Prespa.

Next, Dr. Papathanasiou presented the results of the second study that aimed to evaluate the quality characteristics of reed biomass which could be potentially used as fodder. The samples were taken in summer and autumn of 2020 from six different sites and were analysed for the concentrations of macronutrients, trace elements and other quality characteristics. The results showed that site and sampling date had a significant effect on all macronutrient concentrations with lower values in the autumn sampling, while the highest concentrations of protein, fat and carbohydrates appeared in August. The study confirmed the potential use of reed biomass as a high-quality coarse fodder, especially when direct grazing or cutting takes place at an earlier stage of the plant development.



## 2) *Transboundary wetland habitats in Prespa*

The second presentation was carried out by **Fanourios Sakellarakis** and **Dr. Giorgos Fotiadis** of the Department of Forestry and Natural Environment Management, Agricultural University of Athens on the results of collaborated work with MES, PPNEA and SPP on wetland habitat mapping of Lesser and Great Prespa Lakes. Fanourios first mentioned the background work carried out on wetland habitat mapping in the area of Prespa, from the work in the Greek part in 2011 to the latest developments in North Macedonia, Albania and Greece from 2018 to 2021, showing the maps where habitat assessment took place in the littoral areas of the two lakes. Next, he briefly described the field data methodology and the data recorded in each plot, including general data such as plot size, water depth, relief, cover of vegetation, soil type etc., as well as data for the evaluation of conservation degree, presented the relevant protocol used. The main result of the study was the identification of seven habitat types included in Annex I of the Habitats Directive, namely 3150. + Natural eutrophic lakes with Magnopotamion or Hydrocharition-type vegetation, 3260. + Water courses of plain to montane levels with Ranunculion fluitantis and Callitriche-Batrachion vegetation, 3270. Rivers with muddy banks with Chenopodion rubri p.p. and Bidention p.p. vegetation, 6260. \*Pannonic sand steppes, 6420. + Mediterranean tall humid herb grasslands of the Molinio-Holoschoenion, 91E0. \* Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae) and 92A0. + Salix alba and Populus alba galleries. All the above habitat types were briefly described and for each one a distribution map and respective cover area, as well as pressure, threats and proposed measures were presented. He then presented the maps created based on the results. Another important aspect of the study was that for the first time a syntaxinomic table of different vegetation units classified under the aquatic vegetation of the study area was created. In total 50 different vegetation types were identified, of which there were 27 plant associations and 23 plant communities, which are considered as extremely high numbers.

After the presentations of the first part, some questions were posed and issues were discussed focusing mainly on overgrazing or undergrazing, both being considered as potential threats for certain wetland habitat types, the grazing management plans in North Macedonia and Albania and also reedbed fires that according to Dragan Arsovski were numerous in spring 2021 in the North Macedonian part.

## **Part B: Updates on various matters related to the wetland and waterbirds**

### **1) *Avian influenza incidences in Dalmatian pelicans in northern Greek wetlands – winter/spring 2021***

**Dr Olga Alexandrou** from the Society for the Protection of Prespa made a short presentation about the mass deaths of Dalmatian pelicans (DP) recorded in several Greek wetlands in winter/spring 2021, deaths that were caused by avian influenza, according to laboratory analyses. The phenomenon occurred in February and March 2021 in various wetlands in northern Greece, including Lake Lesser Prespa, but also the adjacent lakes of Kastoria and Chimaditida (also a DP breeding colony), as well as Lake Kerkini in northcentral Macedonia, another DP breeding colony. In total 183 DPs were found dead, with the highest numbers recorded at the species' largest colony, i.e. Lesser Prespa Lake, whereas an important finding was that all individuals were adult birds, signifying a severe loss of breeding individuals and the greatest loss caused by avian influenza ever recorded. Olga briefly mentioned the actions taken, such as the communication with veterinary authorities, the patrols, the exchange and sharing of news with all wetlands affected, the protocol kept etc. The SPP had long before this incident identified this potential threat to the large waterbird colony of Prespa and had proactively prepared a local contingency plan for this cause under LIFE Prespa Waterbirds, aiming mainly to ensure effective collaboration and coordination of efforts at local level and support to local



veterinary authorities. She reminded PrespaNet partners that the material that had been prepared, namely three booklets under the general title “Contribution to the management of incidences of disease outbreaks in waterbirds in the Prespa National Park”, had been shared with them in electronic form.

## **2) Transboundary Biosphere Reserve Prespa Project - Phase II Albania, an update with focus to wetland management**

**Constanze Schaaff** presented an update of the project, focusing on wetland management. One activity that they have just finalized is the designation of temporary prohibited fishing zones in the Albanian side of Great Prespa Lake, a measure foreseen in the Management Plan of Prespa National Park – Albania. Restricted fishing areas include areas vital for fish reproduction, ensuring a stable stock of fish, while fishermen can continue their activities in other areas in the rest of the lake. Given the economic importance of this sector, a preparatory meeting with locals were organised in order to inform them about the new demarcation zones, depicting the conservation perspective of these restrictions. A table with the number of buoys placed along 15 km of the new strictly protected zone and a map with all these areas were presented. The expected results of the restricted fishing zones include undisturbed reproduction and egg release by fish populations, while monitoring of the restriction measures will be carried out through direct control and patrolling the lake during the fishing season. Constanze also made a brief reference on other relevant activities of the project, namely the planned monitoring and wetland management activities of 2021-2023.

After the presentations of the second part, **Leto Papadopoulou** provided a short update on the activities carried out by the Management Body of Prespa National Park, Greece, highlighting the 14<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Wetland Management Committee that took place in February. This is a consultative committee to the MBPNP that convenes once a year where decisions are taken on several issues regarding water issues, waterbird monitoring, vegetation management based on the relevant Management Plan. The decisions this year involved the continuation of vegetation management, the expansion of firebreaks around the littoral zone of Lesser Prespa Lake and the closed fishing season that started on 25<sup>th</sup> April and will last until the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 2021. Leto also talked about the MBPNP’s actions in regards to the avian influenza incidences and especially the patrol scheme that they applied.

The next item on the agenda was an update on PrespaNet’s current events and activities given by **Daniela Zaec** and **Klaudja Koci**. Daniela and Klaudja talked about the second phase of the transboundary PrespaNet project implemented by the three organizations, giving a short overview of the activities included in this project and reminding participants about MES’s activities on wetlands, such as alder reforestation and wet meadows restoration, highlighting the role of the local Forestry Service and the Municipality of Resen. Daniela presented Lazar Nikolov who has been working on wet meadows and the respective pilot management activities that include research, monitoring of indicator species and management of specific plots. In this respect, she highlighted SPP’s advisory role who has considerable expertise on wet meadows management. Following, Klaudja talked about the wetland management work that PPNEA is undertaking and specifically the beginning of pilot conservation measures after having finished wetland habitat mapping and assessment. Klaudja also mentioned the collaborations that PPNEA is seeking with the Agricultural University of Tirana or the Local University of Korce for the growing of alder seedlings. She also talked about the ongoing process of the grazing management plan, currently establishing experimental plots to check overgrazing and monitoring priority habitats and selected species. Finally, Klaudja gave an overview of the bird banding camp that was recently organized in Lesser Prespa Lake, where in 7 days 45 passerines of 20 different species were ringed.



Finally, **Giorgos Catsadorakis** gave a short update on LIFE Prespa Waterbirds activities, in particular he made a short announcement about a series of webinars that are scheduled to take place in late May and early June 2021, an activity within Action E4 of the LIFE project. This will be a series of webinars that will deal with issues of wetland management mainly with examples drawn from SPP's work in and around Lake Lesser Prespa. The invited audience will be people working in the transboundary Prespa, PrespaNet partners, personnel working in the protected areas, public bodies and municipalities. Giorgos referred to the themes of the webinars, which will be hydrology and vulnerability to climate change, wetland vegetation management, methodologies for waterbird and vegetation monitoring, use of harvested reed biomass and governance and conflict resolution at local level.

Closing the meeting Julia brought up the process of the revision of terms of reference of the TWMTG that Irene Koutseri, the LIFE Prespa Waterbirds project manager, has been working on, to update them and to accommodate the new formulation and also looking at having a forum web where the group can share documents and other files related to our work.

### **Next steps:**

Finally, Julia summed up the next steps:

- A report on the minutes of the meeting will be shared along with the presentations in the near future.
- The next meeting will be organized in autumn 2021, most probably September. All member organizations of the TWMTG will be contacted in the following months regarding availability and contributions to the preparation of the next meeting.