



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 1st meeting of the Transboundary Wetland Management Technical Group (TWMTG)

Tuesday 27th of March 2018, Laimos, Prespa

List of participants:

Members of the TWMTG:

Mihallaq Qirjo – Prespa National Park, Albania/Regional Agency for Protected Areas
Lito Papadopoulou – Management Body of Prespa National Park, Greece
Myrsini Malakou – Society for the Protection of Prespa

Observers of the TWMTG:

Mirjan Topi – Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania
Danka Uzunova – Macedonian Ecological Society

Other participants:

Nikos Giannakis – Management Body of Prespa National Park, Greece
Zydjon Vorpsi – Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania
Fanourios-Nikos Sakellarakis– Tour du Valat
Giorgos Catsadorakis - Society for the Protection of Prespa
Thanos Kastritis - Society for the Protection of Prespa

A) Agenda of the 1st meeting of the TWMTG:

Transboundary Wetland Management Technical Group		
1st Meeting, Tuesday 27th of March 2018		
13:00-13:10	Welcome and introduction	SPP
13:10 – 13:30	Presentation of the LIFE Prespa Waterbirds project	SPP
13:30 – 14:00	LIFE Prespa Waterbirds: wetland vegetation management and monitoring activities	SPP
14:00 – 14:20	Wetland management and monitoring activities in the Albanian Prespa National Park	Regional Administration of Protected Areas
14:20 – 14:40	<i>Coffee break</i>	
14:40 – 15:00	Wetland management and monitoring activities in the Greek Prespa National Park	Prespa National Park (GR)
15:00 – 16:00	Discussion and next steps	
16:00 – 17:00	<i>End of the meeting - Light lunch</i>	



B) Presentation of the LIFE Prespa Waterbirds project and the wetland vegetation management activities in the Greek Lesser Prespa:

A general overview of the LIFE Prespa Waterbirds project was presented by Thanos Kastritis (project's conservation coordinator). The presentation covered the project's objectives, expected results as well as all project actions.

Following this, Myrsini Malakou (MM), Managing Director of the Society for the Protection of Prespa (SPP), presented in more detail the project activities related to the management of the wetland vegetation. MM presented the management efforts carried out in the previous years, both during the previous LIFE nature project (LIFE2002 NAT/GR/8494, 2002-2008) and the following 10-year period (2008-2017). The interrelation between the seasonal fluctuations of the water level and the management techniques, as well as the constraints affecting the vegetation management, such as land ownership, the presence of sensitive flora and fauna species and the topography of the study area were also presented. Finally, the operational plan with the intervention areas for 2018 and the machinery to be used was presented.

Following the presentations, the following topics were discussed:

- The development of the monitoring protocols and the opportunities for knowledge/experience exchange and training on monitoring techniques within the framework of the project.
- The model of cooperation between the SPP and the Management Body of the Prespa National park (MBPNP) for the management of wetland vegetation in Lesser Prespa.
- The different reed cutting techniques and their effect on reed growth.

C) Presentation of the wetland management activities in the Albanian Prespa National Park:

Mr. Mihallaq Qirjo from the Regional Agency for Protected Areas (Albania) presented the management activities taking place in the Albanian Prespa National Park (PNP-AL), classified in 4 categories: water, reedbeds, lakeshore and caves. The main points presented for each category are the following:

Water surface:

- In the framework of the 1st phase of the project "Transboundary Biosphere Reserve Ohrid-Prespa (PRESPA-Albania)", financed by the German development bank KfW, a series of studies related to water quality were carried out.
- The PNP-AL implements annually the midwinter waterbirds counts in collaboration with the PPNEA.
- Regarding the regulation of fisheries in Prespa, an agreement of co-management of fisheries between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Fisheries Association was signed which is considered as an important development.
- PNP-AL puts many efforts and human resources on wardening/patrolling in order to address the main threats of the park, i.e. illegal logging and illegal fishing.

Reedbeds:

- The 1st phase (2014-2015) of the project for reedbed management in Lesser Prespa was completed according to the relevant management plan, which was developed by the SPP in 2012.
- Reed biomass has been used for heating in the form of briquettes; the experience showed that the mixed reed-wood briquettes have the best result when used as fuel in house stoves.
- The 2nd stage of the project will start when the necessary funds are secured.
- The PNP-AL explores options for using natural platforms of dead reeds as sites for recreational activities.
- The PNP-AL collaborates with the local communities regarding the regulation of reed cutting by the locals in order to cover local needs.



Lakeshore:

- In the framework of the project “Conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity at Lakes Prespa, Ohrid and Shkodra/Skadar” (GIZ project) an index of lakeshore functionality was developed. The aim is to use this index for the improvement of the environmental conditions in the park.
- Planting activities (using poplar *Populus alba* trees) were implemented in Zaroshka village.

Caves:

- At the entrance of the protected Trenji cave a signboard will be placed presenting the natural and cultural value of the cave.

D) Presentation of the wetland management and monitoring activities in the Greek Prespa National Park (PNP-GR):

Ms Lito Papadopoulou from the MBPNP presented the administrative structure and the area of jurisdiction of the management body, as well as its main activities, such as:

- The operation of the Wetland Management Committee.
- The implementation of the National Park’s Management Plan, especially the activities for the management of the wet meadows.
- The wardening activities and the main threats addressed, such as the reed bed fires.
- The maintenance and operation of the Koula sluice.

MM highlighted the important role of the Management Body as a coordinating body for the management of the wetland and the importance of cooperation. Ms Dana Uzunova mentioned that in Ezerani wetland there is no such formal structure for wetland management, Mr Nikos Giannakis referred to the important role of both the SPP and the MBPNP for the collaboration of different local actors on wetland management.

E) Conclusions

During the final discussion of the meeting, the following conclusions were drawn:

- **Information and data sharing:** a common Dropbox account will be created to share reports and studies, such as the biodiversity survey for sensitive to reedbed management species and areas, the annual waterbird monitoring reports, the study for reed biomass use, etc.
- **Joint activities:** Apart from data sharing, the importance of implementing joint conservation and monitoring activities was highlighted. For example, the SPP could contribute by sharing methodologies and protocols, but also by actively participating in the fieldwork for the forthcoming assessment of the breeding populations of the Great Crested Grebe and the Goosander in the PNP-AL. Additional collaboration could be achieved on matters of wetland vegetation management activities in the three parts of Prespa, as well as on waterbird monitoring activities. A significant opportunity to enhance the transboundary cooperation on wetland conservation issues provides the potential implementation of the Prespa Park Agreement and thus the operation of the Transboundary Prespa Park.

The TWMTG decided that the main conclusions of its meetings should be summarized and be available to all members and observers. The next meeting of the TWMTG is planned to be organized in March 2019, when the 1st phase of the reedbed management in Greek Lesser Prespa will be completed.