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Meeting summary

Stakeholder Consultation Meeting:
Recommendations on Guidelines for Managing Forest Habitats in Georgia's Emerald Sites

Date: 30 April 2024

Venue: National Forestry Agency, main building (second floor meeting room, N1 Vladimir Tsitlanadze 1st Lane, Tbilisi 0114, Georgia)

The meeting began with an introduction on its purpose and the significance of the Emerald Network for the conservation of habitats and species. This was followed by a comprehensive presentation of draft Recommendations on Guidelines for Managing Forest Habitats in Georgia's Emerald Sites, developed by the Centre for Biodiversity Conservation and Research – NACRES.

An analysis of the challenges in managing the Emerald Network in Georgia was introduced, along with recommendations aligned with the requirements of the Bern Convention. Special attention was given to forest management in Emerald sites located outside the national system of protected areas. A meaningful Q&A session followed the presentation, covering the following key topics:

- Basic principles of the classification as well prioritization of habitats according to European directives; procedures for making any changes within the Emerald network, including change of the boundaries of sites.
- Linkage between the existing forest classification system used in Georgia and the European habitat classification system (EUNIS).
- Commercial use of forest resources within the Emerald network.
- Economic activities within the Emerald network.
- Criteria of and procedures for the determination of Favorable Conservation Status.

During the discussion, Forestry Policy Service of the Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture proposed piloting the recommendations outlined in the guidelines by selecting "reference forest areas" that closely mirror Georgia's geographical features. These areas would represent natural forest conditions, facilitating effective management of forest habitats. Forest assessments conducted in these selected areas would provide valuable data for the preparation of forest management plans for forested habitats included in the Emerald Network.

It was agreed that:

- NACRES will share with National Forestry Agency and Agency of Protected Areas an adapted version of the EUNIS habitat classification system manual.
- In case of more comments/questions of substantive nature arise pertaining the draft Guidelines, an additional meeting will be organized.
- The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture will consider and inform the World Bank on a possible request for adding a new activity in EU4Environment Program National Work Plan related to establishing "reference forest areas" for piloting implementation of the emerging Guidelines.

Meeting participants acknowledged the value of stakeholder consultation, highlighting that they got answers to multiple questions they had got pertaining the draft Guidelines. They emphasized the importance of such

meetings for both practicing foresters and the administration/management teams at central and regional levels, recognizing them as necessary and meaningful.

