

Project: Improving the conservation effectiveness of wetlands

Acronym: WetMainAreas

Funded under Transnational Cooperation Programme Balkan-Mediterranean 2014-2020 in accordance with Subsidy Contract BMP1/2.1/2342/2017

Priority Axis 2: Environment

Thematic Objective 6: Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency

Investment Priority 6c: Conserving, protecting, promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage

Specific Objective 2.1.: Biodiversity

Project duration: 01.09.2017 – 31.05.2020 (**33 months**)

Budget: 1 159 383.93 euro

Funding: 85% ERDF/ IPA – 985 476.34 euro, 15% national fund from the participating countries – 173 907.59 euro

Partnership:

- **Lead Partner:** Faculty of Ecology and Landscape Architecture, University of Forestry (Bulgaria)
- **Project Partner 2:** Goulandris Natural History Museum/ Greek Biotope - Wetland Centre (Greece)
- **Project Partner 3:** Faculty of Economics, South-West University "Neofit Rilski" (Bulgaria)
- **Project Partner 4:** Management Unit of Special Research Account, National Observatory of Athens (Greece)
- **Project Partner 5:** National Environmental Agency (Albania)
- **Project Partner 6:** Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality – Ohrid, “St. Kliment Ohridski” University – Bitola (North Macedonia)
- **Project Partner 7:** Region of Thessaly (Greece)
- **Project Partner 8:** Municipality of Gotse Delchev (Bulgaria)
- **Observer Partner:** Ministry of Environment and Energy (Greece)
- **Observer Partner:** State Environmental Inspectorate (North Macedonia).

The project obtained Letters of Support from:

- The Minister of Environment and Water (Bulgaria)
- The Coordinator of Horizon 2020 European research project Satellite based wetland observation service – SWOS
- The Initiative coordinator of Ramsar regional initiative for the Mediterranean Wetlands (MedWet).

Project Manager: PhD Petar Petrov, Department: Ecology, Protection and Remediation of the Environment, Faculty of Ecology and Landscape Architecture

The overall objective of WetMainAreas project is protection, conservation and development of wetlands as shared asset of the Balkan-Mediterranean territory (Bulgaria, Greece, Albania, North Macedonia and Cyprus).

The project's main specific objectives are:

- To assess Balkan-Mediterranean wetland connectivity beyond the boundaries of protected areas and national borders, in order to improve knowledge on ecological connectivity and transnational ecosystems' integration in the Balkan-Mediterranean territory.
- To support policy and action plans by integrating scientific knowledge into guidance documents, available to everybody and thus improve the capacity of authorities, spatial planners, and developers to take informed decisions and to cooperate towards ecosystem integration and sustainability.

The project territory covers 3 568 225 ha, including Bulgaria, Greece, Albania, North Macedonia and Cyprus.



The project identified 4 pilot demonstration sites, that will represent good practices for management and conservation of wetlands in the context of European Directives.

Project methodology:

- Mapping and satellite-based monitoring (through satellite Sentinel-2) of wetlands within the project territory (during project implementation 5376 wetlands were mapped in Bulgaria)

- Creation of database

- Assessment on ecological connectivity of wetlands within the project territory.

The assessment is based on connectivity indicators connected with assessment on wetlands' ecosystem potential to provide ecosystem services.

- Detailed research on the pilot sites, completing the database, raising proposals for improving the conservation effectiveness of wetlands in the pilot sites.

- Assessment on cultural heritage within the pilot sites.

- Development of Guideline with conservation techniques for wetlands.

- Assessment on wetlands relevant policies within the project territory.

- Recommendations to the wetlands conservation policies within the project territory.

- Publications about the wetlands in national and regional relevant policies, addressing key stakeholders.

- Living Lab with participation of key stakeholders and policy makers aiming at discussion on project results and opportunities for improving the wetlands policies.

Project results:

- Database and maps of wetlands ecosystems in the Balkan-Mediterranean territory, available through Geoportal.

- Identified indicators for ecological and spatial connectivity of wetlands in and outside protected areas and protected sites;

- Guideline and pilot assessments on ecological connectivity of wetlands ecosystems within the pilot sites.

- Guideline and pilot assessment on cultural heritage within the pilot sites.

- Assessment on wetlands conservation policies.

- Integration of project results into wetlands policy.

- Interactive map of wetlands within the project territory.

Project website: <https://wetmainareas.com>

Video: <https://youtu.be/Zk01ZMAK1SA>

Project leaflet: <https://wetmainareas.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/leaflet.pdf>