# Executive Summary

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| Project Title: | Strengthening Governance and Sustainability of the National Protected Area System | | | | |
| GEF Project ID: | 1027 |  | *At endorsement (million US$)* | | *At completion (million US$)* |
| UNDP Project ID: | 1275 | GEF financing: | $1.80 | | $1.80 |
| Country: | Ukraine | IA/EA own: | $0.05 | | $0.04 |
| Region: | ECA | Government: | $3.12 | | $2.50 |
| Focal Area: | Biodiversity | Other: | $0.90 | | $0.10 |
| FA Objectives, (OP/SP): | SP-1 | Total co-financing: | $4.07 | | $2.63 |
| Executing Agency: | Department of Protected Areas, Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources (formerly State Service for Protected Areas) | Total Project Cost: | $5.87 | | $4.43 |
| Other Partners Involved: | Multiple relevant stakeholders not directly responsible for execution. | ProDoc Signature (date project began): | | | March 6, 2008 |
| (Operational) Closing Date: | | Proposed: March 31, 2012 | Actual: October 31, 2012 |

1. The project “Strengthening Governance and Financial Sustainability of the National Protected Area System” is a Global Environment Facility (GEF) funded Full-sized Project (FSP), with $1.80 million in GEF resources and planned co-financing of $4.07 million, for a total budget of $5.87 million. Implementation was planned for approximately 48 months (April 2008 – March 2012), but this has been extended to the end of December 2012. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the GEF Agency, and the project is executed under “National Execution-Direct Execution” (NEX-DEX) arrangements. The original national executing entity was Ukraine’s State Service for Protected Areas, but this government agency has been re-organized within the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources (MoENR) as the Department for Protected Areas.
2. According to the project document, the overall project goal is “*to secure long-term conservation of biodiversity within Ukraine’s Nature Reserve Fund, specifically focusing on PAs of global, national or regional significance.*” The project objective is “t*o enhance the financial sustainability and strengthen institutional capacity of the PA system in Ukraine.*” The project’s three expected outcomes are:

**Outcome 1:** Development and implementation of a strategic vision for protected area financial sustainability;

**Outcome 2:** Improved governance of the national protected area system; and

**Outcome 3:** Capacity in place to replicate the improved management approach across the national protected area system.

1. Ukraine’s protected area system covers only ~5% of its national territory, but the central government has made expanding the protected area system a priority. There are national policy measures seeking to increase protected area coverage in Ukraine, with a national target of 10% within the next 5 – 10 years. Yet the current protected area system is significantly underfunded, with only about 60% of budgetary needs met from government sources. Addressing this shortfall, and increasing management effectiveness throughout the national protected area system, is the rationale for this project.
2. According to GEF and UNDP evaluation policies, terminal evaluations are required practice for GEF funded FSPs, and the terminal evaluation was a planned activity of the monitoring and evaluation plan of the Ukraine PAs project. This terminal evaluation reviews the actual performance and progress toward results of the project against the planned project activities and outputs, based on the standard evaluation criteria: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, results and sustainability. The evaluation assesses project results based on expected outcomes and objectives, as well as any unanticipated results. The evaluation identifies relevant lessons for other similar projects in the future in Ukraine and elsewhere, and provides recommendations as necessary and appropriate. The evaluation methodology was based on a participatory mixed-methods approach, which included three primary elements: a) a desk review of project documentation and other relevant documents; b) interviews with key project participants and stakeholders; and c) field visits to relevant project sites in Ukraine. The evaluation is based on evaluative evidence from the start of project implementation (April 2008) through September 2012 (with expected project closure in December 2012). The desk review was begun in August 2012, and the evaluation mission was carried out from September 24 – 28, 2012.
3. The project objective was relevant to Ukraine’s national biodiversity conservation priorities and strategies, to implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and to the GEF biodiversity focal area strategic priorities. The rating on this aspect is assessed as ***relevant***.
4. Overall the project implementation approach has been strong in terms of carrying out the project workplan and activities. Following the change in government around the mid-point of the project there has been a breakdown in the level communication and coordination with the national executing body, the MoENR, which indicates a reduction in the level of ownership of the project results by the government. Overall, the project has been implemented in a cost-effective manner, in line with GEF, UNDP, and Ukraine national standards and procedures. The **efficiency** of the project is rated as ***satisfactory***.
5. The project has made a number of important contributions to strengthening financial sustainability and improving management effectiveness, particularly at the demonstration site level. The establishment and ongoing operation of the national PA association is a critical element that should continue to contribute to improving the financial status and management effectiveness of Ukraine’s PAs. At the same time, despite intensive efforts of the project team, the project was not able to fully reach a number of results that would have more significantly contributed to achievement of the project objective, including adoption and implementation of a national PA financing strategy, and broader uptake of business planning approaches within the PA system. There remains a long and arduous path to financial sustainability for Ukraine’s PAs. Project **effectiveness** is considered ***moderately satisfactory***.
6. The project produced a number of valuable outputs under Outcome 1, but there remains a need for further progress toward achievement of this outcome, including adoption (and subsequent implementation) of the national PA financing strategy. Some of the most significant long-term results from the project have been achieved under Outcome 2, with perhaps the most important being the establishment of the national PA association for Ukraine. The project’s work on vocational training for PA management has also been a highlight, and the project’s contribution to the develop of an approach to cross-oblast cooperation on PA management is a notable achievement that is likely to have catalytic effects in Ukraine in the future. Outcome 3 primarily covered the project M&E activities, and the planned replication approach. Some activities supporting replication were carried out, but the actual extent of catalytic effects thus far is limited. There are opportunities for further replication and scaling-up of some project activities (e.g. business planning), but greater support will be required from the MoENR.
7. Based on the four components of sustainability, the **sustainability** of project results is considered ***moderately likely***. The main consideration with respect to financial sustainability is the future status of the PA association; the current outlook is cautiously optimistic. At the local level the project activities and results have strong support, and are likely to be sustained. The reduced support at the national level from the MoENR at the end of the project presents some risks in this regard, but at least the majority of project results are expected to be sustained. The institutional framework for PA management in Ukraine remains fragmented, and the project was not fully successful in strengthening PA governance under Outcome 2. By the nature of the project activities there are limited or no direct environmental risks to the sustainability of project results.
8. The main **lessons** identified in this evaluation are briefly summarized below, with greater detail on each provided in the lessons section of this report.
9. ***Lesson:*** Systemic change is rarely possible without the full support of all necessary stakeholders. In the case of the Ukraine PAs project, the level of support from the most critical government stakeholder, the MoENR, shifted following the change in government in 2010. As a result the project was not able to make significant progress in further institutionalization of some key results in the second half of the project.
10. ***Lesson:*** Any GEF projects that seek to invest in local stakeholder capacity through micro-finance or micro-grant facilities need to strongly consider the level of capacity in the target region, and assess the potential level of absorption of funds in the region. In the Ukraine PAs project the amount of funds to be invested, and the co-financing required, was far too ambitious for the conditions of the target area.
11. ***Lesson:*** Most, if not all, projects would benefit from a clearly defined and articulated Theory of Change during the project development phase. The practical aspects of project design can then be clearly linked with the necessary mechanisms for change within the Theory of Change.
12. ***Lesson:*** Project activities must be closely aligned with national strategies and priorities, and in some cases it may be necessary to make significant changes to project plans to adapt to changing conditions. In the case of the Ukraine PAs project, following the development and approval of the project the government of Ukraine announced an initiative to significantly expand the national PA system by 2020. The project might have been able to contribute to more significant systemic changes if it had been able to become well-integrated with and relevant to the new PA expansion effort. At the same time, some of the project results, particularly the establishment of the national PA association, are expected to provide important support for the development of the new PAs being established.
13. The lessons identified in the mid-term evaluation also remain relevant, and are included below.
14. ***Lesson:*** Innovative public events that require relatively little financial investment, such as the hand hay-mowing tournament, can generate significant benefits in terms of public buy-in, awareness, publicity, and revenue generation.
15. ***Lesson:*** Building on previous initiatives, such as the protected areas training program, can increase the cost-effectiveness of investments and leverage greater results than would otherwise be possible if starting from scratch.
16. ***Lesson:*** A well-designed project with realistic goals and objectives can set the foundation for effective project management, leading to efficient achievement of results. The clarity of the Ukraine PA financing project document allowed the project team to make a strong start on implementing project activities and outputs on time and within budget, instead of having to spend a large amount of time at the beginning of the project trying to discern the objective.
17. The terminal evaluation identifies the following key **recommendations** for additional follow-up and for stakeholders following project closure. These recommendations are included with further detail at the end of this report, along with additional lower-level recommendations.
18. ***Key Recommendation:*** The stakeholders and government of Ukraine should urgently work to adopt a national financial strategy for the protected area system, using the strategy produced under the project as the major basis for a document that could be adopted by the government, with any necessary updates and revisions to ensure full conformity with necessary government approval procedures and legal requirements. [MoENR]
19. ***Key Recommendation:*** Apply whatever means necessary and possible to ensure the financial sustainability of the national protected areas association, upon which the sustainability of project results heavily depends. [PA Association, UNDP, MoENR]
20. ***Key Recommendation:*** There is still a significant opportunity to support establishment of additional protected areas. The government has laid out the PA expansion plan, but the oblast departments don’t have the capacity to implement it. There is a need to seize the moment – this is potentially being supported by GIZ to some extent, but could likely use additional support. Ex: Rivne oblast department is tasked with reaching 15% coverage by 2015, but they only have 11%, and only 3 years to go. [UNDP, GEF, other donor organizations]
21. ***Key Recommendation:*** There should be further replication of the business planning process demonstrated in the two project pilot areas. This should be done through a multi-pronged approach, with continued support from the PA Association and the MoENR. The business planning approach was originally supported by the State Service on PAs through training and seminars, but this needs to be an ongoing process, including dissemination and training with the tools (templates, guidelines, examples) required. In addition, PA business planning needs to be integrated with the PA management planning process through the relevant legislation. [PA Association, MoENR]
22. ***Key Recommendation:*** There needs to be an institutionalization of the training program supported under the project. The previous training modules, and the modules to be developed based on the Training Needs Assessment (TNA) feedback should be institutionalized through the Kaniv training center, if not other programs (e.g. government public servant professional development program). [PA Association, MoENR]
23. ***Key Recommendation:*** There should be further institutionalization of the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT), including the management of the METT database. Ideally this would be through the government, but lacking government capacity to take responsibility for it, it could also potentially be through the PA Association. It will also be necessary to continue developing capacity to further implement the METT in the PA system. [PA Association, MoENR]

**Summary Terminal Evaluation Ratings Table**

| **Criteria** | **Rating** |
| --- | --- |
| Project Formulation |  |
| *Relevance* | *R* |
| Conceptualization / design | S |
| Country-drivenness | S |
| Stakeholder involvement in design | S |
| *IA & EA Execution* |  |
| *Quality of UNDP Implementation* | *S* |
| *Quality of Execution – Executing Agency* | *MS* |
| *Overall Quality of Implementation / Execution*  (Efficiency) | *S* |
| Use of the logical framework | MS |
| Financial planning and management | S |
| Adaptive management | S |
| Use and establishment of information technologies | S |
| Operational relationships between the institutions involved | MS |
| Technical capacities | S |
| *Monitoring and Evaluation* |  |
| *M&E Design at Entry* | *MS* |
| *M&E Plan Implementation* | *MS* |
| *Overall Quality of M&E* | *MS* |
| Stakeholder Participation |  |
| Local resource users and civil society participation | HS |
| Involvement and support of governmental institutions | MU |
| *Assessment of Outcomes* |  |
| Outcome 1: Implementation of a strategic vision for PA financial sustainability | MS |
| Outcome 2: Improved governance of the national PA system | S |
| Outcome 3: Enhanced capacity to replicate the project’s PA management approach throughout the national system | MS |
| *Overall Project Outcome Rating* | *MS* |
| Progress Toward Project Objective (“To enhance the financial sustainability and strengthen institutional capacity of the PA system in Ukraine”) (Effectiveness) | MS |
| *Sustainability* |  |
| *Financial Resources* | *ML* |
| *Socio-political* | *ML* |
| *Institutional Framework and Governance* | *ML* |
| *Environmental* | *L* |
| *Overall Likelihood of Sustainability* | *ML* |
| *Progress Toward Impact* |  |
| *Environmental Status Improvement* | *N* |
| *Environmental Stress Reduction* | *M* |
| *Progress Towards Stress/Status Change* | *N/A* |
| ***Overall Project Results*** | *MS* |

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| ***Ratings for Outcomes, Effectiveness, Efficiency, M&E, Implementation and Execution***  6: Highly Satisfactory (HS): no shortcomings  5: Satisfactory (S): minor shortcomings  4: Moderately Satisfactory (MS): moderate shortcomings  3. Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU): significant shortcomings  2. Unsatisfactory (U): major problems  1. Highly Unsatisfactory (HU): severe problems | ***Sustainability Ratings***  4. Likely (L): negligible risks to sustainability  3. Moderately Likely (ML): moderate risks  2. Moderately Unlikely (MU): significant risks  1. Unlikely (U): severe risks | ***Relevance Ratings***  2. Relevant (R)  1. Not relevant (NR)  ***Impact Ratings***  3. Significant (S): Large-scale impacts  2. Minimal (M): Site-based impacts  1. Negligible (N): Little or no impacts |
| ***Additional ratings where appropriate***  Not Applicable (N/A)  Unable to Assess (U/A) | | |