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EDITORIAL

DEAR READER

We are pleased to launch the first EU4Nature Bulletin, a quarterly e-publication in English and Albanian, produced in the context of the EU4Nature project, funded by the European Union and Sweden, and implemented by UNDP, AICS, and Albania's Ministry of Tourism and Environment. This bulletin serves as a vital platform to share updates on conservation efforts, scientific insights, and challenges in managing Albania's protected areas.

EU4Nature project supports the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, the National Agency of Protected Areas, and Regional Administrations in preserving vital ecosystems while advancing Albania's EU integration goals and the EU Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. By aiding the transposition of EU Birds and Habitats Directives and aligning with the National Plan for European Integration, EU4Nature strengthens Albania's environmental framework. We invite biodiversity and conservation professionals to contribute their expertise, fostering collaboration to enhance the management of national parks and cultural landmarks. Our heartfelt thanks go to all partners for their dedication to balancing nature preservation with sustainable development. Your feedback is invaluable to ensure the EU4Nature Bulletin remains a key resource for all stakeholders.

EU4NATURE PROJECT OVERVIEW

EU4Nature, funded by the European Union and the Swedish Government[1] and implemented by UNDP and AICS, aims to protect and conserve 25% of Albania's land and sea by 2030 through an effective system of Protected Areas (PAs), including NATURA 2000 sites. The project strengthens institutional frameworks and advances the transposition of the EU Nature Protection Acquis by enhancing the capacities of authorities in PA design and management. It provides technical assistance to revise the Law on Protected Areas, define the role of the Special Fund for Protected Areas, while supporting secondary legislation to ensure compliance through robust enforcement measures.

EU4Nature improves the management of existing and new PAs by updating management plans, establishing Performance Monitoring Systems, and prioritizing conservation and restoration activities.

It promotes sustainable management of priority habitats, species, and forest products. Additionally, the project empowers Albanian civil society organizations through a Small Grant Program, supporting innovative pilot actions, Nature-based Solutions, and measures to combat environmental crime.

Fully aligned with Albania's strategic objectives, EU4Nature underscores biodiversity's role in achieving sustainable development.

[1] Namely through "Action Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III) Programming Framework for the period 2021-2027" W 3 - Green Agenda and Sustainable Connectivity - TP 1 - Environment and climate change

ALBANIA'S PROTECTED AREAS TEAMS BOOST SKILLS THROUGH INTERACTIVE E-LEARNING: EU4NATURE HOSTS NATIONAL TRAINING IN TIRANA

Tirana, 28 May 2025 — The EU4Nature project, in partnership with the **National Agency for Protected Areas (AKZM)**, hosted a dynamic, one-day interactive training with management team leaders from 12 regions across Albania. Held at the InNature Room in the iconic Pyramid of Tirana, the event aimed to strengthen the capacity of those on the frontline of nature conservation through innovative learning tools and regional cooperation.

At the heart of the training was the "Introduction to Nature, Business and Finance" course — part of the international Learning for Nature platform, now fully available in Albanian thanks to EU4Nature support. The course introduces key concepts such as the economic value of nature, environmental risk and opportunity, and the links between ecosystems, sustainable business, and finance.

"*This platform is a powerful tool. Having it in Albanian makes it accessible to environmental professionals, local partners, and students across the country*," said one participant.

EU4Nature guided participants through the platform, helping them register, navigate the interface, and complete several modules during the workshop. Practical group exercises and collaborative discussions helped reinforce course content while encouraging local adaptation of the material.

The training emphasized:

- Nature's relevance to economic planning and development
- How to assess nature-related risks and opportunities
- The importance of integrating environmental considerations into decision-making

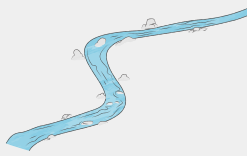
The event generated strong engagement and interest, with many participants committing to promote the course among local teams and institutions. As a next step, they will continue the course online and submit certificates of completion to the EU4Nature team.

THE COURSE IS OPEN TO EVERYONE

Environmental staff, local actors, students, and professionals seeking to deepen their understanding of the intersection between nature and sustainable finance.

Learning for Nature – An Introduction to Nature, Business and Finance

VJOSA RIVER, AN EU4NATURE PILOT SITE ON THE BRINK OF UNESCO RECOGNITION



Stretching 272 kilometers from Greece's Pindus Mountains to Albania's Adriatic shores, the Vjosa River is one of Europe's last wild, free-flowing rivers. In March 2023, Albania made history by declaring the Vjosa and its tributaries a Wild River National Park —the first of its kind in Europe. Already globally recognized as a protected area, the Vjosa is now on the threshold of joining UNESCO's Biosphere Reserve network, marking a new chapter in global river conservation.

This next designation is more than symbolic. It would cement protections across the entire Vjosa Valley, preserving its rich ecological integrity from source to sea. A total of 1,725 species are known to date in the Vjosa basin, 653 plant species and 1,072 animal species, including numerous threatened and endemic species of European and global concern. The river corridor also hosts one of the highest concentrations of endangered floodplain habitats protected under the EU Habitats Directive.

Unlike most European rivers, fragmented by more than a million dams and barriers, the Vjosa flows freely through gorges, wetlands, and a near-pristine delta. Its natural dynamics, like uninterrupted sediment transport and seasonal flooding, support a broad range of life and offer crucial climate resilience.

But the Vjosa is not just a natural wonder, it sustains towns, communities, and traditional ways of life. From Përmet's vineyards to Tepelena's hiking trails, the river supports agriculture, local economies, and a growing ecotourism sector. It is a powerful example of how nature-based tourism can offer sustainable economic growth without compromising environmental integrity.

UNESCO Biosphere Reserve status would strengthen existing protections and foster a legal and institutional framework that supports sustainable development. This includes low-impact agriculture, biodiversity conservation, and local livelihoods, all integrated within a climate-resilient landscape.

EU4Nature, a major partner in this effort, has identified the Vjosa National Park as a flagship pilot site. The project supports habitat restoration, biodiversity monitoring, and capacity-building for protected area staff, ensuring long-term protection that's rooted in both science and community.

A NEW MODEL FOR RIVER STEWARDSHIP

The UNESCO Biosphere Reserve status is a designation given by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) under its Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme. This status is granted to areas that demonstrate a balanced relationship between conservation of biodiversity, sustainable development, and logistical support for research and education.

UNESCO's final decision on the Vjosa's Biosphere Reserve status is expected in September 2025. Until then, momentum continues to build across policy, civil society, and local communities.

The Vjosa River is already a protected river system, but its future as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve would set a global precedent. It is a living model for how people and nature can thrive together.

WHAT IS EU4NATURE DOING FOR VJOSA

EU4Nature is playing a significant role in supporting the ecological integrity, institutional capacity, and sustainable management of Vjosa River National Park. The site was selected as one of 10 pilot protected areas under EU4Nature, with its status as a National Park (DCM nr. 155, dated 13.3.2023) and a surface area of 12,727 hectares. The main activities will focus on conservation and restoration, biodiversity monitoring and capacity building.
EU4Nature is identifying priority conservation and restoration measures for the Vjosa River National Park, which include habitat restoration, support for traditional land-use practices, improved working conditions and equipment for PA staff.

Vjosa is part of the dataset development and GIS mapping for Natura 2000 sites. This includes habitat/species inventories and the completion of Standard Data Forms (SDFs) for EU compliance.
The project supports capacity building for NAPA/RAPA staff, including those managing the Vjosa area, via e-learning platforms and workshops on EU Birds and Habitats Directives, effectiveness evaluation, and species/habitat monitoring, in order to ensure long-term conservation based on scientific data and with the support of local communities.

PORTO PALERMO, AN EU4NATURE PILOT SITE FOR MARINE RESTORATION AND SUSTAINABLE ECOTOURISM

Nestled along Albania's southern coastline, the Bay of Porto Palermo is a jewel of biodiversity and heritage. Today, it stands at the forefront of marine conservation thanks to its selection as a pilot site for the EU4Nature project, which supports Albania's national goal of protecting at least 25% of its terrestrial and marine territory.

In May 2025, an interdisciplinary team from the University of Genoa (DICCA and DiSTAV departments) conducted a detailed field survey in Porto Palermo, focusing on restoring seagrass meadows and monitoring the status of Artificial Reefs (ARs). Their work builds upon previous efforts under the AICS funded NaturAlbania project, expanding scientific knowledge and laying the groundwork for nature-based solutions (NBS) in the area.

Seagrass meadows, especially those formed by Posidonia oceanica, are among the most productive and valuable marine habitats in the Mediterranean. However, in Porto Palermo, these meadows face degradation due to unregulated anchor mooring from tourist boats, particularly during the high season. Evidence of seabed scarring and seagrass uprooting is now prompting urgent calls for intervention.

To address this, the project's ecological surveys are supporting the identification of suitable areas for future reforestation with *Posidonia oceanica,* with a technical design document under preparation and the combined installation of floating mooring buoys, preventing anchor chains from scraping the seabed thus protecting both existing and newly planted seagrass.

Porto Palermo is already home to 18 Artificial Reefs, installed in 2022 in the frame of the NaturAlbania initiative. These underwater structures already host a thriving marine community, from damselfish and groupers to moray eels and wrasses, demonstrating their positive impact on marine biodiversity. The University of Genoa team conducted underwater censuses and GIS mapping of each AR, collecting vital data to assess their stability and ecological role.

Beyond biodiversity, these ARs hold great potential for sustainable ecotourism. Their design and aesthetic value, enhanced by future possibilities in 3D printing, make them ideal anchors for the creation of underwater trails for scuba divers.

The combined deployment of floating mooring buoys, seagrass restoration, and artificial reef enhancement reflects the integrated, science-based approach promoted by EU4Nature. With technical support from Italian and Albanian partners, the project is setting a new standard for how marine protected areas can simultaneously preserve biodiversity, combat human pressures, and boost climate resilience and sustainable tourism.

Such initiatives could help transform Porto Palermo into a hub for responsible marine tourism, supporting local livelihoods without compromising environmental integrity.

As Porto Palermo moves forward as an EU4Nature pilot site, it offers a compelling vision of how Albania's coastal jewels can be protected, not just for today, but for generations to come.

“BREDHI I SOTIRËS” NATURE PARK – FROM NATURE MONUMENT TO PILOT SITE FOR SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT

“Bredhi i Sotirës” Natural Park, located in the south of Albania within the territory of Dropull Municipality, is one of the country’s most remarkable areas for its biodiversity and ecological value. Once designated as a Nature Monument, in January 2022 the area was expanded and officially gained the Natural Park status, marking a new phase of conservation and resource management.

Covering an area of 4,927.67 hectares, the park stretches across the slopes of the Stugara and Murgana mountains, featuring a mosaic of reliefs that host a wide range of ecosystems. The park includes relict forests of Macedonian Fir (*Abies borisii-regis*) and Sweet Chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), while recent studies suggest that actually the Cephalonian Fir (*Abies cephalonica*) might be the one present. In total, 9 natural habitat types have been identified, alongside endemic species and IUCN Red List species. The park’s territory is divided into two management zones: the Core Zone (2,803.27 ha) and the Traditional Use and Sustainable Development Zone (2,124.4 ha).

The Core Zone encompasses areas of high biodiversity value, including relict habitats with fir and chestnut forests. This zone is subject to strict protection measures, allowing only low-impact activities such as scientific research and nature-based ecotourism.

In contrast, the Traditional Use and Sustainable Development Zone aims to preserve traditional practices such as agriculture, grazing, and the collection of medicinal plants, ensuring the sustainable use of natural resources without compromising the park’s ecological integrity. The staff of the Regional Administration for Protected Areas (RAPA) in Gjirokastër, with support from the project team, conducted an analysis of existing threats in the “Bredhi i Sotirës” Nature Park using the METT-4 tool. This initial assessment serves as a baseline to understand the current situation and guide priority interventions for safeguarding the park’s natural values, including relict fir and chestnut habitats, as well as the protected species inhabiting this unique ecosystem. The assessment is expected to improve progressively in line with the enhancement of local administrative capacities and the strengthening of monitoring and reporting mechanisms in the field.

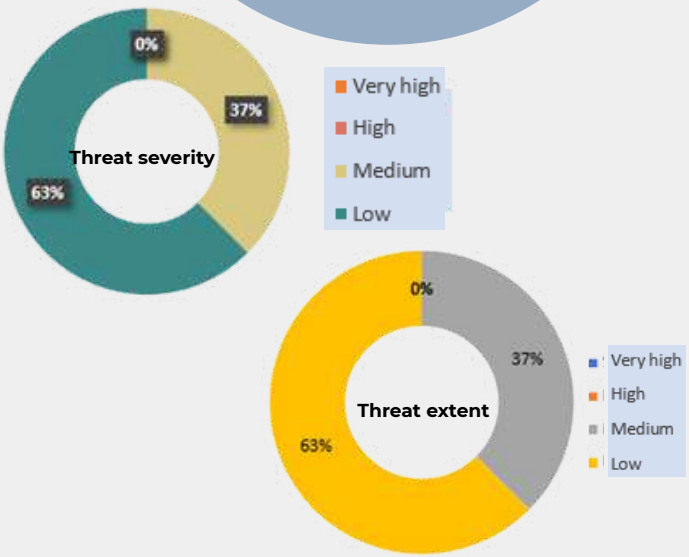
The two charts below illustrate the scope and severity of threats identified during the assessment. Most threats were rated as low to moderate in both scope and severity, yet they still require coordinated attention to prevent the escalation of their impacts on biodiversity.

The main threats identified in the “Bredhi i Sotirës” Nature Park include overgrazing, wild plant collection, agricultural effluents, poaching, and fire incidents. These factors affect ecological processes, biodiversity, and the quality of habitats. Continuous management and monitoring efforts are needed to prevent these threats from intensifying. The analysis also highlights information gaps regarding potential threats such as invasive species, habitat fragmentation, etc, which suggests the need to establish a more advanced monitoring and reporting system.

Despite its undeniable values, “Bredhi i Sotirës” Natural Park faces significant challenges. The absence of a management plan and limited administrative capacity have so far hindered the development of an effective approach for conservation and sustainable use.
In this context, the EU4Nature Project, has selected the park as one of its pilot sites for direct interventions aimed at improving management and biodiversity conservation.

Key project objectives include:

- Developing the first management plan for the park, setting a clear framework for conservation and sustainable resource use;
- Strengthening the capacity of local staff through specialized training in monitoring, conservation, and integrated territory management.
- Providing equipment and infrastructure for monitoring and improving on-site control.



Graphic presentation of the threat Assessment Results, “Bredhi i Sotirës Nature Park” (METT Evaluation 2024)

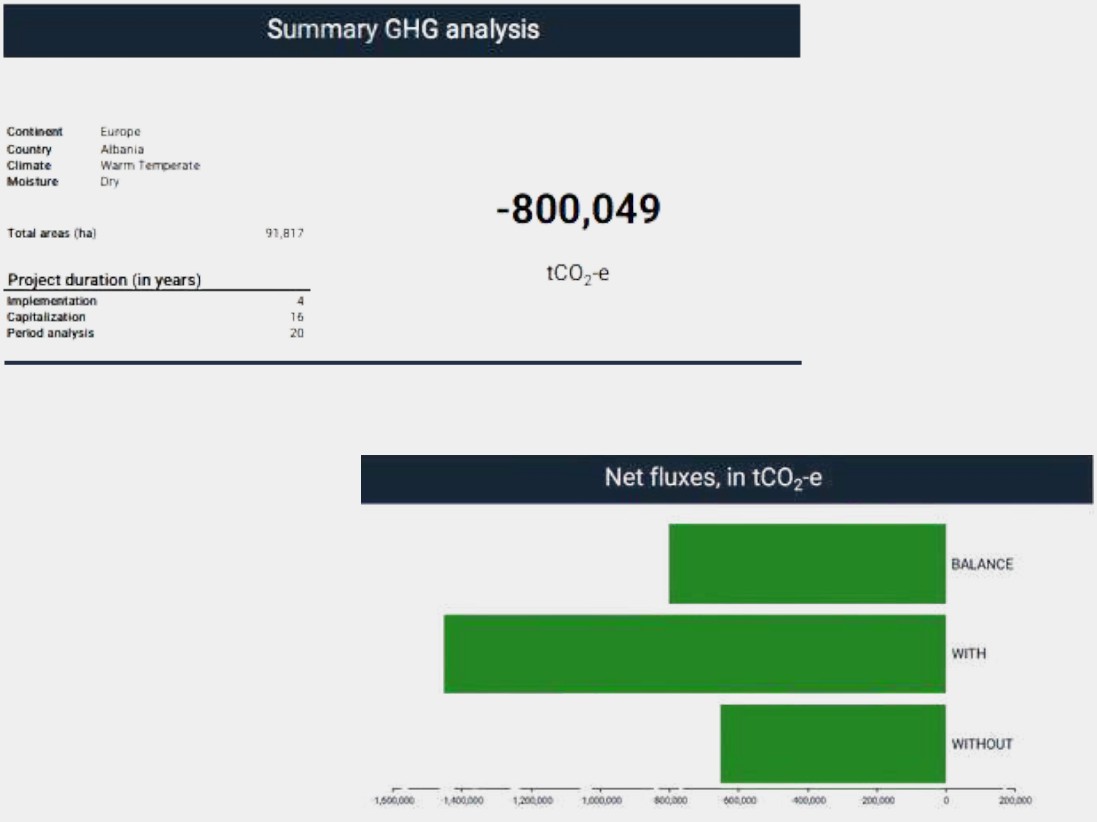
These interventions aim to create a functional management model for protected areas in southern Albania, paving the way for sustainable activities such as ecotourism and environmental education, aligned with conservation goals.

ODDS OF A BIODIVERSITY CREDITS MARKET IN ALBANIA

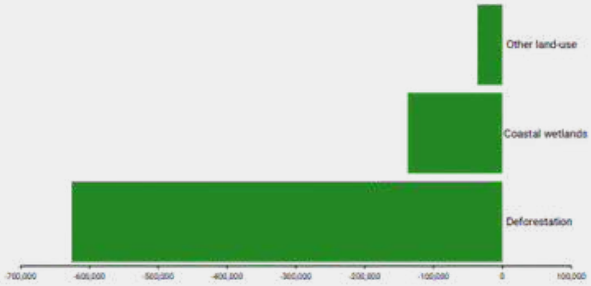
As per Biodiversity credits Alliance (BCA), Biodiversity credits provide a potential mechanism to finance conservation, restoration and interventions addressing drivers of biodiversity loss, such as habitat degradation and destruction, overexploitation, and pollution, representing also an opportunity to access new sources of finance to conserve the life-supporting value nature provides through a wide range of ecosystem services, including carbon sequestration. The voluntary biodiversity credit market size as of mid-2023 totalled around $8 million (according to Bloomberg NEF). Estimates for the potential growth of the biodiversity credits market range from $760 million-$2 billion by 2030 to $6-69 billion by 2050.

This mechanism could also support multiple nature-related objectives, providing the means to cost-effectively help reach climate net zero targets, Land Degradation Neutrality targets, and Global Biodiversity Framework targets. Therefore, the need for Biodiversity credit projects is obvious to address priorities and targets identified in these national-level strategies, which are structured to reflect global targets

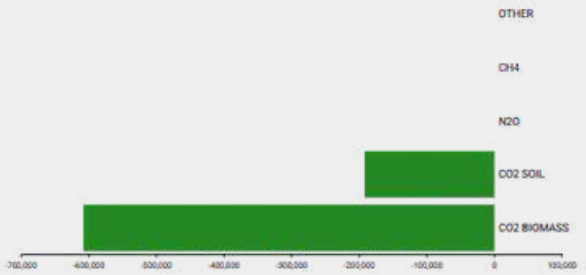
As per current BCA working definition, biodiversity credit is a certificate that represents a measured and evidence-based unit of positive biodiversity outcome that is durable and additional to what otherwise would have occurred.



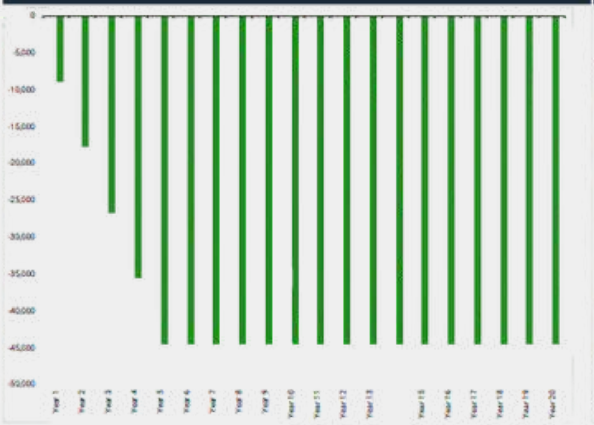
Carbon-balance, in tCO_2-e



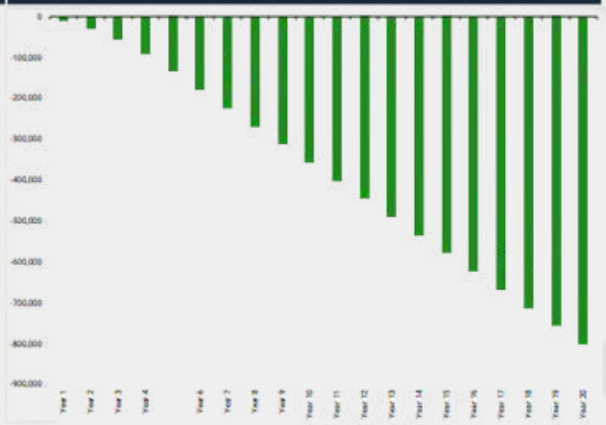
Share of the balance per GHG, in tCO_2-e



Annual carbon balance, in tCO_2-e (20 years)



Cumulative carbon balance per year, in tCO_2-e (20 years)



DETAILED RESULTS

Project name	Mainstreaming Biodiversity in Coastal Development and Planning for Sustainable Tourism Development
Continent	Europe
Country	Albania
Climate	Warm Temperate
Moisture	Dry

Project duration (in years)	
Implementation	4
Capitalization	16
Period analysis	20

Total area (ha)	91,817
Mineral soil	91,817
Organic soil	0
Waterbodies	0

Global warming potential	
CO_2	1
CH_4	28
N_2O	265

GROSS FLUXES

In tCO_2-e over the whole period analysis

PROJECT COMPONENTS		WITHOUT	WITH	BALANCE
Land use changes	Deforestation	626,199	0	-626,199
	Afforestation	0	0	0
	Other land-use	-1,416,567	-1,452,890	-36,322
Cropland	Annual	0	0	0
	Perennial	0	0	0
	Flooded rice	0	0	0
Grasslands & Livestock	Grasslands	0	0	0
	Livestock	0	0	0
Forest mngt.		0	0	0
Inland wetlands		0	0	0
Coastal wetlands		137,527	0	-137,527
Fisheries and aquaculture		0	0	0
Inputs & Invest.		0	0	0
Total emissions, tCO_2-e		**-652,841**	**-1,452,890**	**-800,049**
Total emissions, tCO_2-e/ha		**-7.1**	**-15.8**	**-8.7**
Total emissions, tCO_2-e/ha/yr		**-0.4**	**-0.8**	**-0.4**

Tier 2 Annual emissions

SHARE PER GHG OF THE BALANCE

In tCO_2-e over the whole period analysis

CO_2 BIOMASS	CO_2 SOIL	N_2O	CH_4	ALL NON-AFOLU EMISSIONS*
-626,199	0	0	0	
0	0	0	0	
18,244	-54,566	0	0	
0	0	0	0	
0	0	0	0	
0	0	0	0	
0	0	0	0	
		0	0	
0	0	0	0	
0	0	0	0	
0	-137,527	0	0	
0	0	0	0	0
	0	0		0
-607,955	-192,094	0	0	0
-6.6	-2.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
-0.3	-0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0

AVERAGE ANNUAL EMISSIONS

In tCO_2-e/yr

WITHOUT	WITH	BALANCE
31,310	0	-31,310
0	0	0
-70,828	-72,644	-1,816
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
6,876	0	-6,876
0	0	0
-32,642	-72,644	-40,002

DETAILED MATRIX OF CHANGES FOR MINERAL SOILS

WITHOUT PROJECT	Forest	Annual	Perennial	Flooded rice	Grassland	Degraded land	Other land	Total area (ha)
Forest	46,705	0	0	0	0	0	1,198	47,903
Annual cropland	0	837	0	0	0	0	32,650	33,487
Agroforestry	0	0	80	0	0	0	3,138	3,218
Flooded rice	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grassland	0	0	0	0	178	0	6,926	7,104
Degraded land	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other land	0	0	0	0	0	0	105	105
Total area without project (ha)	**46,705**	**837**	**80**	**0**	**178**	**0**	**44,017**	**91,817**

WITH PROJECT	Forest	Annual	Perennial	Flooded rice	Grassland	Degraded land	Other land	Total area (ha)
Forest	47,903	0	0	0	0	0	0	47,903
Annual cropland	0	0	0	0	0	0	33,487	33,487
Agroforestry	0	0	0	0	0	0	3,218	3,218
Flooded rice	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grassland	0	0	0	0	0	0	7,104	7,104
Degraded land	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other land	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total area with project (ha)	**47,903**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**43,809**	**91,712**

Given the current rapid development of the biodiversity credits market, and the potential future growth, it is important for Albania to assess and understand the extent to which biodiversity credits could provide new sources of financing for nature conservation within country borders. Few countries in the world yet have specific legislation related to biodiversity credits; Australia is one of the few examples, with its Nature Repair Bill (2023). In some countries, government laws and policies are being put in place that could lead to increased demand for biodiversity credits. For example, the UK Biodiversity Net Gain regulation requires developers to demonstrate a net gain in biodiversity before construction permit is received (going into effect in late 2023). The EU passed a nature restoration law in June 2023.

Total area (ha)	91,817
Mineral soil	91,817
Organic Soil	0
Waterbodies	0

The development of biodiversity credit markets at national level involves important legal considerations related to resource use tenure and land tenure, and the ability to enter into and enforce long-term contracts – carbon and biodiversity credit projects are usually in the range of 20-30 years. At the national level, there are often multiple possible existing legal mechanisms that could be applicable in the context of the development and sale of biodiversity credits, such as community forest leasing, hunting concessions, and pasture leasing.

It is necessary for Albanian to know what the key gaps or barriers may be to participating in the biodiversity credits market, particularly in terms of national policies, laws, and regulations, and other technical capacity gaps. It is also important to understand what the potential benefits to participation could be. Finally, it is necessary to identify what potential steps may be needed to successfully cultivate the development and sale of biodiversity credits, if desired. The biodiversity credit market is in many aspects being built off existing carbon regulation, and it will be crucial to learn from the mistakes of the carbon market (e.g., ensuring integrity, money flowing to local level, transparency, targeted government support including from ministries of finance / environment/ others).

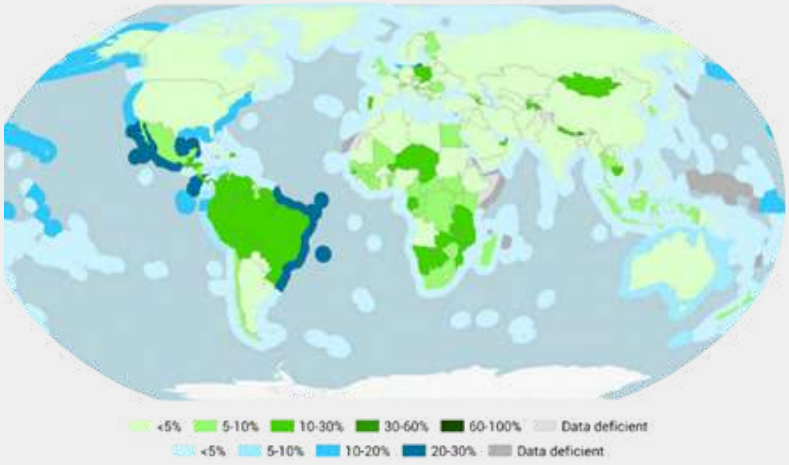
In the frame of a GEF project development phase (2021-2022), a very limited assessment was carried out to estimate then, it was fed with some discussions and closer look with the GIS expert as far as landcover app. in the protected areas is concerned and also sharing some of the potential expectations or norms we could apply in such exercise.
It is a fact that there is very limited almost null, the participate of Albania organizations/ institutions organizations in the international carbon market by selling or trading in carbon credits however, through UNDP support, late 2009 was developed National Strategy for Carbon Finance and, the general structure and approach could be relevant for developing a similar output in relation to biodiversity credits.

Therefore authorities and concerned scientific bodies might engage in estimating all possible means and key areas in the national context that would be highly relevant for the development of successful and equitable biodiversity credit schemes based on the national context; such work must highlight key strengths and opportunities for potential participation in a biodiversity credits market, key weaknesses and threats related to potential engagement in a biodiversity credits market and the extent to which a sufficient enabling environment is currently in place to support the development and sale of biodiversity credits on a national and international biodiversity credits market, with quality and integrity

A very useful calculation tool was engaged with international assistance during GEF 7 (2021-2022), named EX-ACT tool, and adopted as the only GHG accounting tool that covers the entire agricultural sector including Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use (AFOLU) inland and coastal wetlands, fisheries and aquaculture, agricultural inputs and infrastructure, to estimate carbon calculations for CO2eq indicator. This was based on data provided in terms of Albanian landcover in the KBA areas. The total potential carbon savings (over 20 years) from the AFOLU sector is 800,049 tCO2eq. Obviously, there is much room to elaborate further on assumptions applied, etc., if necessary, but presumably the EX-ACT tool served the purpose.

The countries that are first movers for opening to the development of biodiversity credits will be positioned to access the greatest share of that market for nature conservation in their borders. In any case, building the awareness and capacity is not a quick and easy process, but it is good to start the conversation.

METT – A GLOBAL TOOL FOR ASSESSING THE MANAGEMENT EFFECTIVENESS OF PROTECTED AREAS



Per cent of area covered by protected areas with management effectiveness assessments at ational level. Coverage is shown for the terrestrial and inland waters realm and for the marine realm. ce: UNEP-WCMC and IUCN 2024.

Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) is an international instrument developed by WWF and the World Bank in 2002 to systematically assess the management effectiveness of protected areas. Harmonised with the IUCN Framework for Assessing Management Effectiveness of Protected Areas (PAME), METT has been applied in more than 120 countries and over 4,000 protected areas worldwide, establishing itself as a global standard for performance monitoring. The latest version, METT-4, was published in 2020.

METT is a practical and flexible tool widely used to measure management effectiveness progress over time. It is fast, does not require costly external consultants, and provides a qualitative assessment based on the honesty and experience of the managers themselves. The fundamental principle of METT is that good management of a protected area follows a structured six-stage process: first, understanding the status of key values and threats; second, planning priority measures; third, allocating resources (inputs); fourth, implementing management actions (processes); fifth, delivering concrete products and services (outputs); and finally, assessing the impacts and outcomes on the ground. This complete cycle supports progress monitoring, gap identification, accountability, and guides interventions for effective nature and biodiversity conservation.

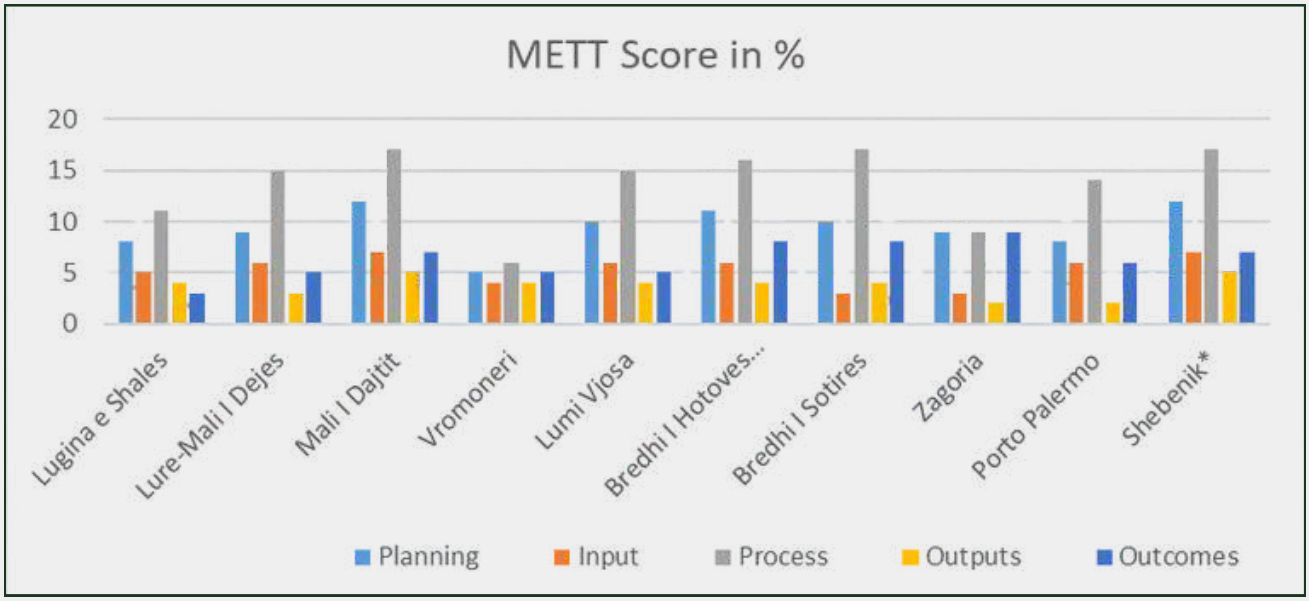
The IUCN WCPA framework for assessing management effectiveness of protected areas (Source: Hockings et al. 2006)

In Albania, METT-4 is increasingly being adopted as a standard tool to monitor protected area management. The EU4Nature project supports efforts to institutionalize this tool through continuous training for protected area staff and the development of a digital platform for data registration (akzm.net). The assessment process is undertaken in 10 pilot areas, including Vjosa River National Park, Lurë-Deja Mountain National Park, Dajti Mountain National Park, Shebenik National Park, Bredhi i Hotovës-Dangëlli National Park, among others. METT-4 is also being widely used by other organizations in Albania for evaluation and reporting purposes, consolidating its role as a national standard.

As part of this process, training sessions have been conducted with staff from the 12 RAPAs and NAPA, building practical capacities for METT-4 implementation and reporting. Staff have been trained to score all 38 METT questions, record the supporting justifications, and interpret results to inform management improvements.

The first assessments carried out in 2024 revealed the current levels of management performance across a number of protected areas in Albania. As illustrated by the graphic, the component analysis shows that inputs (financial, human, and infrastructure resources) remain the weakest area, while processes (such as planning, patrolling, and community engagement) show stronger results, and ecological outcomes require more advanced, long-term monitoring. The “Planning” component scores relatively well in areas like Dajti Mountain, Vjosa River, and Shebenik, where management plans have been approved, while the situation differs for areas still lacking this fundamental instrument.

The initial recommendations emerging from this assessment include updating management plans in line with METT findings, ensuring dedicated budgeting to address identified gaps, strengthening performance monitoring, and establishing a regular cycle of staff training.



This first assessment serves as an important starting point for the continuous improvement of protected area management in Albania, better aligning strategic planning with the required inputs and tangible results for conserving natural values. It will act as a reference for measuring progress in the coming years and guiding the preparation and updating of management plans in line with the objectives of the Natura 2000 network.

MULTIPARAMETER PROBES: TECHNOLOGY SUPPORTING AQUATIC ECOSYSTEM MONITORING

Developing a reliable, science-based monitoring system for protected areas is essential for the long-term conservation of biodiversity. In this context, multiparameter probes have become one of the most important technologies being deployed to support informed decision-making and strengthen the technical capacity of protected area managers responsible for aquatic ecosystems.

These devices enable the simultaneous and precise measurement of a wide range of water quality parameters, including temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen, conductivity, turbidity, and oxidation-reduction potential (ORP). The generated data are vital for assessing environmental impacts, identifying ecological trends, and implementing rehabilitation measures.

There are two main types of multiparameter probes used in environmental monitoring practice:

- Fixed probes, installed at designated monitoring points and transmitting real-time data via cellular or satellite networks. These are ideal for continuous, long-term monitoring in sensitive or high-value natural areas.

- Portable probes, used by technical teams for rapid, repeated measurements at different sites without the need for permanent infrastructure. They are easy to transport and operate in challenging terrain, providing a practical tool for immediate response and targeted monitoring.

Under the **EU4Nature Project**, five portable multiparameter probes have been provided to the National Agency for Protected Areas (NAPA), already in use by RAPA Vlora, which oversees various protected areas with aquatic ecosystems, including the Marine Protected Areas of Karaburun-Sazan and Porto Palermo, Vjosa River National Park, Butrint National Park, and more. The aim is to strengthen the capacity for decentralized monitoring in areas with limited access or changing natural conditions.

In Albania, this technology was initially piloted by UNDP in the Karaburun-Sazan Marine National Park, laying the groundwork for a standardized approach to environmental monitoring in coastal and marine protected areas.

More information on the technology:

- Hanna Instruments – Portable Multiparameter Meters https://www.hannaservice.eu/
- https://www.ysi.com/exo
- ·https://www.ott.com/products/water-quality-sensors-1462/

Integrating multiparameter probes, both fixed and portable, represents an essential step towards professionalizing environmental monitoring practices in Albania and aligning them with national and international standards. This approach strengthens mechanisms for protecting water resources and improves the efficiency of biodiversity management in protected areas.