Protected areas are essential for the protection of biodiversity in the Western Balkans region. They also hold a potential to stimulate economic development and promote human well-being.

The region is characterised by high biodiversity, wealth of cultural heritage, shared political history, complex conflicts, economic crisis and social instability. A large number of international boundaries where many protected areas are located, transact the region. Although transboundary conservation potential is high and desirable, this approach in dealing with conservation issues is largely missing. Some of the main challenges include: lack of capacity in protected area management, conservation planning, financing nature conservation, establishment of partnerships, and the value of transboundary approaches, different institutional arrangements, levels of technical expertise and resources dedicated to nature conservation. All these gaps strongly relate to capacities required for initiating and establishing a well-functioning transboundary conservation process.

WWF’s transboundary conservation work in the region focuses on promoting locally based transboundary conservation initiatives, ensuring participatory approach and strengthening the capacity of transboundary conservation proponents.

**GOALS**

- Develop capacity of local stakeholders, primarily protected area staff, civil society organizations and local communities, on the value and process of initiating transboundary conservation
- Explore feasibility of transboundary conservation in selected sites in the region
- Initiate local cooperation in the pilot potential Transboundary Conservation Area

**RESULTS**

Local transboundary conservation proponents will:

- Improve their understanding of transboundary conservation benefits, especially in terms of balancing nature conservation and sustainable development
- Strengthen their capacity on know-how of the process of initiation and establishment of Transboundary Conservation Areas
- Establish and/or enhance transboundary cooperation in the region, supporting friendly relations, confidence and trust building
- Apply participatory approach in the development and implementation of a Road Map for locally led transboundary initiative in the selected pilot site
RELEVANCE OF TRANSBOUNDARY CONSERVATION

Encouraging cooperation for achieving shared conservation goals

There are more than 220 Transboundary Conservation Areas in the world, spanning from relatively small to continent-wide initiatives, where cooperation across international boundaries is an essential strategy to conserving species and natural habitats. Some examples include: Waterton Glacier International Peace Park, Maritime Alps-Mercantour, Wadden Sea, and Maloti-Drakensberg Mountains.

International boundary areas often contain some of the last habitat to species and provide critical ecosystem services. Divided by political boundaries, ecosystems are exposed to many different policy, legal, governance and management regimes, as well as diverse social, cultural and economic systems. Transboundary conservation, as a process of cooperation to achieve conservation goals across one or more international boundaries, has emerged as an essential approach to encourage transboundary cooperative management and to offer ways to learn how to work with differences between countries.

Protected areas and other sustainably managed approaches to land use can all represent areas where many actors across different scales can be engaged in transboundary cooperation through a variety of informal or formal arrangements. While nowadays there are many successful transboundary initiatives worldwide that were built on locally organized efforts, ensuring political support can enhance cooperation.

Transboundary conservation approaches are recognized by several intergovernmental agreements/programmes, including the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention), the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme, and the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention).

Approximately one-third of all terrestrial high-biodiversity sites straddle international land borders.

Transboundary conservation governance is a form of shared governance that involves diverse actors across an international boundary and may imply both formal and informal arrangements between parties.

International conservation community developed guidelines on common stages of implementation and facilitation of transboundary conservation process. These guidelines are very helpful for transboundary conservation proponents who should also be aware that adapting the guidance to the needs of each specific geographical area is the key to success and sustainability of the initiative.
Transboundary conservation may result with a plethora of ecological, management, social, cultural, economic, and political benefits.

- Enabling greater ecological integrity by enhancing the connectivity
- Contributing to the long-term survival of species, including migratory species
- Strengthening ecosystem resilience
- Improving day-to-day management effectiveness and efficiency via cooperation in, e.g., fire management, sharing of heavy equipment, joint patrolling, poaching, monitoring of species, management of invasive species
- Enhancing the potential for knowledge exchange and development of skills of protected area staff
- Enabling joint fundraising opportunities with higher chances of obtaining grants
- Promoting peace and regional stability
- Enhancing the spirit of cooperation, friendly relations and building of trust between local communities, protected area staff, civil society organizations, scientists
- Enabling learning about other’s culture, history and language
- Improving opportunities for trade of local products
- Encouraging cooperation on tourism management, e.g., joint marketing, common regional identity, joint visitor management planning, simplified border crossing, supporting local entrepreneurs in organizing tours to the whole Transboundary Conservation Area
- Reinforcing diplomatic relations between countries through strengthened negotiation and communication

Transboundary conservation always implies some form of cooperation between parties across the international boundary.

Monitoring of birds is a common transboundary activity

Cooperative management, i.e., actions that are undertaken together by parties from two or more countries, is essential in advancing transboundary conservation initiatives. Parties need to think carefully about why, where and when they intend to cooperate.

Parks for Peace, often called Peace Parks, are Transboundary Conservation Areas dedicated to the promotion, celebration, and/or commemoration of peace and cooperation.

“I know of no political movement, no philosophy, no ideology, which does not agree with the peace parks concept as we see it going into fruition today. It is a concept that can be embraced by all.”

Nelson Mandela
WWF has a long history of working on facilitation and strengthening of transboundary cooperation in the Western Balkans. One of the key successes of WWF’s influence at political level was facilitation of signing of a regional Big Win for Dinaric Arc Joint Statement during the 9th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) in Bonn, Germany, in 2008. Six countries of the region then recognized the importance of transboundary cooperation in the implementation of the CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas. These efforts were promoted as part of the then Dinaric Arc Initiative that consisted of major international conservation players in the region. Big Win 2 initiative followed in 2013, highlighting the importance of regional cooperation.

Adding to the influence at high political level, WWF aims to continue implementing best practice and globally available tools to foster transboundary cooperation between protected areas and local stakeholders. These tools and materials will be adjusted to regional interests and needs, and include:

- Implementation of globally applicable training module to raise capacity of local stakeholders on the value of transboundary conservation approach and effective and efficient planning and initiation of transboundary conservation processes. The training module was initiated by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN), and developed by IUCN and Transboundary Conservation Specialist Group of IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA).
- Implementation of WCPA Transboundary Conservation Specialist Group’s Diagnostic Tool for Transboundary Conservation Planners to assess the feasibility for transboundary conservation in selected sites in the region.
- Building on best practices on the process of designing and initiating transboundary conservation, outlined in “Transboundary Conservation: A systematic and integrated approach”, prepared by WCPA Transboundary Conservation Specialist Group and published within a renown IUCN WCPA Best Practice Protected Area Guidelines Series in 2015.