

SUBJECT: BALKAN NATURE TALKS CONFERENCE

Background

The Western Balkan (WB) region retains some of Europe's richest areas with regards to natural habitats, biological diversity, karst landscapes, lakes and rivers. With a host of valuable ecosystems, and a high degree of endemic fauna and flora, the Western Balkans comprise the southernmost part of the European Green Belt which encompasses a network of protected areas with a unique array of wildlife and plants. Despite the importance of this region for European biodiversity, its biodiversity is increasingly under threat from rapid economic development in the region. The region's unique natural habitats are suffering from ecosystem degradation and fragmentation, due to drivers such as rapid urbanization, climate change and pollution. For these reasons, there is an urgent need to protect the biodiversity of the Western Balkans, including through accelerating efforts towards the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

The adoption of the GBF (also known as Biodiversity Plan) in 2022 significantly raised the ambition of the international community to protect biodiversity. The Sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP16), which will take place in Cali, Colombia, 21 October - 1 November 2024, will be the first Biodiversity COP since the adoption of the GBF. During COP16, governments will review the progress made towards the implementation of the GBF, including the level of alignment of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) with the GBF. The high-level segment will be dedicated to the multilateral mechanisms to share benefits from the use of digital sequence information on genetic resources, as well as mobilization of resources to support the alignment with the objectives and closing the biodiversity finance gap (Goal D and Target 18 of GBF). Other key issues include health and biodiversity, defining and protecting key marine and coastal biodiversity areas, mechanisms for planning, monitoring, reporting, and reviewing the progress in the plan's implementation.

In the lead up to COP16, UNEP will be hosting a 2-day event on **10–11 October 2024** in Vienna for the countries of the Western Balkans, titled "**Balkan Nature Talks Conference**". This event aims to bring together a range of stakeholders, including policymakers, CBD and GEF Focal Points, donors, and the offices of UN Resident Coordinators, to exchange knowledge and foster collaboration on biodiversity conservation actions in the Western Balkans, as well as to explore progress towards NBSAPs' alignment with the GBF.

Over the course of the Conference, UNEP aims to facilitate and foster discussions on current and innovative strategies, possibilities, policies and practices that promote biodiversity conservation;

confer trends and ongoing needs in the Western Balkans on biodiversity conservation; and present the linkages between health and biodiversity. Additionally, participants will also explore how biodiversity conservation can be best embedded into the new Common Country Analysis and the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework cycles.

Regional and cross-border collaboration plays a pivotal role in exploring opportunities for biodiversity cooperation across borders. By fostering regional partnerships and collaboration between neighboring jurisdictions, the conference will serve as a platform to share resources, and collectively address the shared environmental challenges prevalent in the region.

Description of the event	
Title	Balkan Nature Talks Conference
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present the global and regional trends, tools and actions for biodiversity conservation, • Present and discuss the progress of alignment of the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) with and support in achieving the GBF targets, • Inception meeting to present the project “Experience Exchange between Central Asia and Western Balkan on climate change informed wildlife conservation and ecosystem-based adaptation”, • Discuss challenges in implementation and enforcement, but also showcase good cooperation practices on biodiversity conservation and sustainable management, • Hear about other related initiatives and discuss funding opportunities, • Engage with RCOs on mainstreaming nature and biodiversity conservation aspects into the new Common Country Analysis (CCAs) and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) cycles.
Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hybrid event • For those attending in presence/person: Vienna International Centre – Vienna, conference room CR-5, 7th floor, C building • Link for online participation: https://zoom.us/j/92431017270 •

Date	10-11 th of October 2024
Duration	Two-days event
Target Group	Representatives of the government and relevant institutions of the Western Balkan Sub-region, relevant international organizations, UN Resident Coordination system and donor community
Topics	Biodiversity conservation, GBF, GBFF, NBSAPs

Agenda

Agenda – Day 1 October 10, 2024		
Time	Item	Speaker
Introduction: Moderator: Harald Egerer, UNEP		
9:00 – 09:30	Registration of the participants and welcome coffee (with pastries)	All participants
09:30 -10:15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcoming participants • Introduction to the event • Introduction of participants 	Arnold Kreilhuber, Director, Europe Office Harald Egerer, Head UNEP Vienna Office All participants
Session 1: Global and Regional actions on Biodiversity		
Moderator: Sonja Gebert, UNEP Associate Programme Management Officer		
10:15 – 10:50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNEP Programme of Work on Biodiversity Conservation and One Health • Summary of UNEP biodiversity conservation activities in the Western Balkans 	Thierry Lucas, Regional Programme Coordinator for Biodiversity, UNEP ROE Pablo Sagrado Martin, Associate One Health Officer UNEP ROE Iskra Stojanova, WB Projects Coordinator, UNEP Vienna
10:50 – 11:05	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding Global Biodiversity Framework Action (Global GBF Funds) 	Ersin S. Esen, Programme Management Officer, GEF Task Manager, UNEP ROE
11:05 – 11:20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainstreaming biodiversity into the Common Country Analysis and Cooperation Frameworks • IBC work and coordinated actions 	Marika Palosaari, Programme Coordinator, UNEP ROE

11:20 – 11:45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, status of implementation 	Marv Barbullushi, Expert on Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, RCC
11:45 – 12:15	Q/A and open discussion	All participants
12:15 – 13:00	Lunch	All participants
13:00 – 13:30	Coffee break (after lunch)	All participants
<p>Session 2: Alignment process of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) with the Global Biodiversity Framework</p> <p>Moderator: Naser Nuredini, Environmental, Institutional and Legal Expert</p>		
13:30 - 13:50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alignment processes of the NBSAPs with the GBF in the Western Balkans 	Tanya McGregor, Programme Management Officer, UNEP HQ
13:50 - 15:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country Presentations regarding the progress of alignment of NBSAPs with the GBF 	<p>Klodiana Marika, Ministry of Tourism and Environment</p> <p>Adla Kahrić, Federal Ministry of Environment and Tourism</p> <p>Arina Maraš, Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Northern Region Development</p> <p>Vlatko Trpeski, Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning</p> <p>Jelena Dučić, Ministry of Environmental Protection</p> <p>Miradije Gërguri, Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure</p>
15:00 – 15:15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion and way forward considering CBD COP 16 	Tanya McGregor, Programme Management Officer, UNEP HQ
15: 15 – 15:25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mechanisms of GBF implementation for mountain biodiversity 	Matthias Jurek, Programme Management Officer, UNEP
15:25 – 15:40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carpathian Biodiversity Framework 	Elena Fischer, UNEP Vienna-SCC

15:40 – 15:55	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Biodiversity Task Force and the WB 2023 Biodiversity Strategic and Nature Restoration Plan, Biodiversity Monitoring and Evaluation Framework	Milica Miskovic, Conservation Officer, IUCN ECARO
15:55 – 16:15	<i>Closing remarks and expectations from the 2nd Day of the Conference</i>	

Agenda – Day 2 October 11, 2024		
Time	Item	Speaker
9:00 - 9:30	Registration of the participants and welcome coffee (with pastries)	All participants
9:30 – 9:45	Summary of Day 1	Sonja Gebert, Associate Programme Management Officer, UNEP Vienna
Session 3: Inception of the project “Experience Exchange between Central Asia and Western Balkan on climate change informed wildlife conservation and ecosystem-based adaptation” Moderator: Iskra Stojanova, WB Projects Coordinator		
9:45 – 10:05	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductory session 	Nils Wortberg, Policy Officer, German Federal Ministry of Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection
10:05 – 11:05	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of the project “Enhancing the conservation of flagship migratory mammal species of Central Asia through climate change-informed management and decision making” (CAMCA) • General overview and PAs/corridors management experience from CA • Presentation of project “Experience Exchange between Central Asia and Western Balkan on climate change informed wildlife conservation and ecosystem-based adaptation” (BAMCA): Workplan and initial assessment, pilot areas 	Maarten Hofmann, Associate Programme Management Officer, UNEP Ecosystems Division Azamat Isakov, CAMCA project co-coordinator, UNEP Salamat Dzumbaeva, Project Coordinator, CAMP Alattoo (Kyrgyzstan) Sonja Gebert, Associate Programme Management Officer, UNEP Vienna
11:05 – 11:45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment Agency Austria’s activities in the Western Balkans – TRATOLOW and EU4Green 	Violeta Philippitsch, Head of Division EU and International Services, UBA

11:45 – 12:15	Q/A and open discussion	All participants
12:15-13:00	Lunch	All participants
13:00 – 13:30	Coffee break (after lunch)	All participants
13:30 – 13:50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overview of the initial legal assessment of Chapter 27 for the Western Balkans 	Elena Stefanoni, Environmental Governance Expert, UNEP Vienna Iskra Stojanova, Western Balkans Projects Coordinator, UNEP Vienna
13:50 – 14:20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental crime (enforcement challenges) 	Lejda Toci, Programme Officer, Global Programme on Combatting Crimes that Affect the Environment, UNODC
14:20 – 14:40	Q/A and open discussion	All participants
Session 4: Tools and mechanisms for biodiversity conservation Moderator: Valmira Bozgo, Environmental Coordinator		
14:40 – 15:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Biodiversity Finance (BIOFIN) 	Tracey Cumming Senior Technical Advisor, BIOFIN
15:00 – 15:15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased management effectiveness of Protected Areas and enhancing connectivity conservation 	Mirjam de Koning, Executive Director, Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust
15:15 – 15:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ESS valuation case study – SLM GEF6 Project in North Macedonia 	Katerina Atanasovska Environment Consultant, Macedonian Ecological Society
15:30 – 15:45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ecosystem services valuation, challenges and opportunities 	Salman Hussain, Programme Management Officer, UNEP
15:45 – 16:15	Closing remarks and takeaways from the meeting	Government representatives from the Western Balkans Sonja Gebert, Associate Programme Management Officer

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