

Governance Model Proposal for the Aragvi Protected Landscape



Prepared by: Michael Hošek, Eva Knižátková, Jiří Flousek, Jindřich Chlapek, Eva Zelenková, Jan Materna

October, 2020

Content

- Abbreviations 4
- Terminology 4
- 1. Introduction..... 2
- 2. Background and context 2
 - 2.1 Current system of protected landscapes governance in Georgia 2
 - 2.2 Specific characteristics of the APL relevant to governance 3
- 3. Proposal of the governance system for the APL 4
 - 3.1 Competences 5
 - 3.2 Advisory Board 5
 - 3.3 Aragvi PL Administration – strategic tasks 6
 - 3.4 Structure of the Aragvi PL Administration..... 7
 - 3.5 Recommendations for the operation of the Aragvi PLA 11

Abbreviations

AB – Advisory Board
APA – Agency of Protected Areas of Georgia
APL – Aragvi Protected Landscape
APLA – Aragvi Protected Landscape Administration
DM – Dusheti Municipality
MP – management plan
NFA – National Forestry Agency
NGO – non-governmental organization
NP – national park
PA – protected area
PL – protected landscape
PLA – protected landscape administration
SNR – strict nature reserve
ToR – Terms of Reference (for the APLA units and staff)
TPL – Tusheti Protected Landscape

Terminology

For the purpose of clear understanding of commonly used terms in this proposal, they are defined here:

Governance covers the administration, enforcement, field management, and monitoring of activities and state of the PL.

Management of the PL is defined by a valid MP (approved by the Government of Georgia). The MP specifies rules for sustainable use of the area, appropriate measures that should be implemented in the field as well as monitoring of all activities in the field.

Protected landscape is a category of protected area defined by the Article 8 of the Georgian Law on the System of PAs (1996): *'A protected landscape may be established to protect nationally important, aesthetically distinctive, natural landscapes, or those of natural/cultural character, established as a result of harmonious correlation of nature and a human; as well as to protect living nature and to conduct recreational/tourist and traditional economic activities.'*

Protected Landscape Administration is a body established by a competent municipality as its separate unit.

1. Introduction

The aim of the project and this paper is to assist the Municipality of Dusheti in the process of establishing the efficient and fully functional Aragvi Protected Landscape and its Administration (PLA), based on the best international and national practices, experience and solutions in protected landscape (PL) governance, management structure and management planning. The authors have direct experience not only with Czech PLs, but also from the existing Tusheti PL and proposed Machakheli PL.

This document was prepared in October 2020, after the law on Establishment and Management of the APL came into force. The law provides legal basis for the governance model of the APL and this document further elaborates on details of its practical implementation. It is intended to provide the Dusheti Municipality representatives with a base for their decisions on the PL governance.

This paper was developed within the project ‘Establishment of Sustainable Management of Aragvi Protected Landscape’ (No. GE-2018-022-FO-43040/4), supported by the Czech Development Cooperation.

2. Background and context

2.1 Current system of protected landscapes governance in Georgia

PL as a category is defined by the Law on the System of PAs in 1996. The country PAs system is fully inspired by the IUCN PAs classification, i.e., categories of nationally designated PAs are identical with categories as defined by the IUCN¹, although their names do not correspond fully.

The national PAs classification is, as well as in case of the IUCN classification, based on a management approach. Because a vast majority of PAs in Georgia are designated as NPs and SNRs, mainly non-intervention management approach is implemented. Opposite to that, PLs are a specific case requesting to maintain or improve a valuable mosaic of natural and cultural heritage that has developed thanks to long-term specific and balanced traditional use of a particular area by a local community or communities. It results not only in a high value of their landscape characteristic, but also in a need to manage PLs actively in accordance with traditions and local conditions. While NPs and SNRs are more or less strictly protected against human impact, PLs must be conserved via their active management and traditional use.

¹ Guidelines for applying protected area management categories':
https://www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/import/downloads/iucn_assignment_1.pdf

The above-mentioned fact is closely related to the current country PAs governance system. Majority of PAs in Georgia are under the responsibility of the APA as a key nature conservation authority (esp. for NPs and SNRs). All existing administrations of large-scale PAs in regions, except for the Tusheti PLA, are the APA regional branches. It also means that existing technical capacity in Georgian nature conservation is available almost exclusively within the APA. In other words, the PAs governance system is significantly centralized and allows only limited involvement of local communities and stakeholders.

Due to a limited capacity of state administration bodies (both technical and financial), local stakeholders in particular large-scale PAs often establish some 'Friends Associations' with status of NGOs. Those associations support administrations of respective PAs by implementing projects (often international development ones). This is also a case of all three PLs that have been designated or are under designation process². If there are more categories of PAs in one area, associations usually operate in all and thus help to communicate among their administrations. Activities of those associations are mutually beneficial for all involved PAs administrations. Therefore, it is recommended to support such associations and cooperate with them on a regular basis.

Besides state administration bodies and associations, there are nation-wide operating NGOs working in PAs (e.g. NACRES or CENN). These are focused on specific areas and have a significant track in their topic (the NACRES in biodiversity monitoring, and the CENN in local communities' involvement and education). They can be an important partner in a period of capacity building of the APLA in establishing a knowledge base about the PL.

By 2020, there is only one existing PL (Tusheti PL) and two soon-to-be established PLs (Aragvi and Machakheli). First-hand experience can be therefore taken only from the Tusheti PL, which was established in 2003. It covers settlements, infrastructure and cultural landscape within the Tusheti area, and is surrounded by the Tusheti NP and the Tusheti SNR. Although the PL has been designated 17 years ago, its Administration was established much later, in 2012. The TPL Administration is a separate unit of the Akhmeta Municipality, led by the Director. The PLA has a separate budget provided by the Akhmeta Municipality plus income from timber sale and grants. The area managed by the Tusheti PLA covers 31,517 ha.

2.2 Specific characteristics of the Aragvi PL relevant to governance

When establishing a governance model and an efficient PLA, it is important to take into account specific characteristics of the APL and to tailor the proposal to its specific needs and conditions. Full description and analysis of the APL and its unique natural and cultural values is provided in the draft Management Plan. Here we present only a brief summary of the most important facts relevant for the governance model and PLA structure and functions.

Size: The APL is due to its historical and natural values relatively large – with 99,802 ha it belongs to the largest protected areas in Georgia, more than three times larger than the only existing PL – Tusheti PL. There is a need for the PLA to have sufficient staff to cover the whole area. Moreover, it is important, that citizens can approach the staff easily – it is advisable to establish also seasonal detached offices/stations in areas more distant from the headquarters of the PLA.

² Tusheti Friends Association, Pshav-Khevsureti PAs Friends Association (for Aragvi), and Machakhela and Mtirala PAs Friends Association.

Three distinctive territories: The APL covers three distinctive territories – Gudamakari, Pshavi and Piraketa Khevsureti. It is important that representatives of all three communities equally participate in the decision making process concerning the PL. It is advisable that the above mentioned regional offices are located (placed) one in Gudamakari valley and one in Piraketa Khevsureti, if the headquarters is placed in Pshavi or vice-versa.

Natural variety: The APL covers broad variety of ecosystems: mainly forests, grasslands, alpine habitats and rivers and it is therefore rich on natural resources. It is crucial task of the PLA to ensure their sustainable use that will not put the unique biodiversity of the area at risk. Therefore, experts with solid background in natural resources management (water resources, forestry, agriculture and biodiversity) have to be hired. Another specific aspect important for the governance is the fact that state forests in the APL shall be managed by a different authority (NFA), which brings extra needs for coordination efforts.

NP Pshav-Khevsureti buffer zone: The APL serves also as a buffer zone to the adjacent NP. Special attention should be given to the cooperation with the NP Administration, so that the efforts are harmonized.

Cultural traditions and potential for sustainable development: Comparatively preserved historical and cultural heritage makes all three regions of the APL attractive for visitors, but also offers an example of sustainable use of resources. Respecting and learning from these traditions is crucial task for the PLA management. Setting clear rules for sustainable development of urban areas and infrastructure that will not spoil the preserved character of the landscape is another priority of the PLA. Specialists in urban planning, architecture and cultural heritage should be employed to complement the PLA staff.

Challenging living conditions: Mountain regions all around the world, with APL being no exception, have specific conditions that make livelihoods more difficult (landslides, bad accessibility especially in winter, low job opportunities, poor infrastructure, etc.) and thus lead to abandonment and depopulation of the areas. Biodiversity and specific landscape of the PL is however closely related to traditional use of such areas. PLA needs to implement such solutions that would increase willingness of local inhabitants to stay in their communities and contribute to the sustainable use of the area.

Proximity of Tbilisi and tourism potential: The APL has thanks to its natural and cultural values a distinct tourism potential, which is even strengthened by the relative proximity of the capital city. This is both an opportunity, but also could be a threat. The PLA should focus on finding sustainable solutions for tourism development from the beginning of its operation.

Specific recommendations for the Aragvi PLA are given in the following chapters.

3. Proposal of the governance system for the Aragvi PL

The frame of the PL governance system is outlined by the respective law:

- 1) PL is designated by the Georgian Parliament (law on establishment of a respective PL);
- 2) PL is managed by an administration established by a relevant municipality.

In the case of the APL, competences are divided between two bodies (Dusheti Municipality and NFA), with the Advisory Board that ensures participation of local stakeholders in decision-making. The aim of this chapter is to propose governance system that will suit well conditions of the Aragvi area considering specificities of governance (three local communities).

3.1 Competences

The law on the Establishment and Management of the APL assigns competences as follows:

- The **Dusheti Municipality** is responsible for the management of the PL with the exception of state forests;
- **National Forest Agency** (NFA) is responsible for the management of state forests in the PL; however, the law foresees the possibility that also the state forests could be managed by the Dusheti Municipality in the future: this arrangement should be reconsidered in 2025 (after 5 years);
- A body of representatives – in this document further referred to as the **Advisory Board** – is to be established to ensure participation of stakeholders in the governance of the PL.

3.2 Advisory Board

Purpose of the Advisory Board (AB) is defined by the law on the establishment of the APL. In the case of the APL, the AB is defined by the Article 6 of the law on its designation. Based on legal rules, the AB is established by the DM. Its composition, rights, duties and other procedural issues are to be defined by the Statute of the AB, approved by the DM. As stated in the law, the AB is a representative body that is involved in the APL governance, and its decisions are valid for the area of the PL except for the state forest management.

Further in this chapter, we present a proposal for the AB composition and mode of operation tailored to the specific situation and main stakeholders of the APL, within the framework given by the law:

The AB is an advisory (consulting and initiative) body, not an executive body. Its decisions and recommendations have to be considered by the Director of the APL in future steps. Main rights and responsibilities of the AB are:

- developing/cooperating at development of strategies and plans, including annual operation plans for the PL management;
- consulting budget use and planning with the PLA;
- proposing/initiating appropriate activities linked to the PL management and governance;
- approving annual reports prepared by the PLA.

The AB members are appointed by the Mayor of the DM upon recommendation of the Director of the PLA. The position of the Chair of the AB is regularly rotating between three local representatives of the three communities (Gudamakari, Pshavi, Piraketa Khevsureti) in three-year-long period (each having the seat for a year). The Director of the APL is present at all the meetings, but with no voting rights. The AB meets at least twice per year.

For the purpose of well-structured working flow and systematic prioritization of tasks, the AB approves the AB approves its Statutes (including rules of procedural and organizational matters), proposed by the Director of the APL. The proposal submitted by the APL Director might be changed before the approval if appropriate.

All costs of the AB members related to their service in the AB (except of the state and municipality employees) shall be covered from the PLA budget.

Proposed composition of the AB (odd number of 11 positions):

- 1) Representative of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia
- 2) Representative of the Mskheta-Mtianeti Region
- 3) Representative of the Dusheti Municipality
- 4) Representative of the local community: Gudamakari
- 5) Representative of the local community: Pshavi
- 6) Representative of the local community: Piraketa Khevsureti
- 7) Representative of the APA (Pshav-Khevsureti NP Administration)
- 8) Representative of the NFA
- 9) Representative of a local NGO partner
- 10) Representative of a local business sector (agriculture/fishery/tourism etc.)
- 11) Representative of an university/research institution (biology/ecology)

The number of the representatives in the AB can be modified or even extended in the future if needed, it should however always remain odd for voting purposes and not to be too large for flexible decision making.

In 2018, an ad-hoc advisory body of, to a certain extent, similar composition was already established for the purpose of the implementation of the project 'Establishment of Sustainable Management of Aragvi Protected Landscape'. It is possible to build on the experience of its members, who already participated in several activities related to the PL (consultations of the draft zonation, management plan, study visit to the Tusheti PL, etc.), and consider their nomination to the AB.

3.3 The Aragvi PL Administration – strategic tasks

The DM should establish the Aragvi PLA as a separate unit of the Municipality with clearly defined competences. Head of the PLA should be subordinated directly to the Mayor of the DM. The proposal of the PLA structure with detailed descriptions of the duties of the staff is given in chapter 3.4.

The most important policy and planning documents the PLA should develop (update or participate at), approve and implement in the long run, are:

- a) Management Plan of the APL and subsequent operation plans;
- b) Forest inventory as a background for setting rules for the forest use (in close cooperation with NFA);
- c) Guidelines for (traditional) construction activities;
- d) Waste and Waste Water Management Plan;
- e) Sustainable Tourism Development Plan ;

- f) APL Communication Strategy;
- g) APL Fundraising Strategy;
- h) Spatial Development Plan.

3.4 Structure of the Aragvi PL Administration

It is suggested to implement the structure as follows (Figure 1):

N	Position title
1 !!!	Director (and Head of Administration and Projects Unit at the same time)
2 !!!	PLA Assistant / Accountant
3	Fundraiser / Projects Coordinator
4 !!!	Head of Natural Resources Management Unit (forestry or biodiversity specialist)
5 !!!	Ranger 1 (Gudamakari)
6 !!!	Ranger 2 (Pshavi)
7 !!!	Ranger 3 (Piraketa Khevsureti)
8	Agriculture Specialist
9 !!!	Biodiversity Specialist
10 !!!	Natural Resource Manager
11 !!!	Head of Sustainable Development Unit (urbanism or tourism specialist)
12 !!!	Tourism specialist
13 !!!	Urban Planning and Development Specialist / Architect
14	Historical and Cultural Heritage Specialist
15	Eco Education and Public Relations Specialist

Figure 1: Recommended structure of the Aragvi PLA. Various colours distinguish units or positions directly responsible to the PLA Director. The symbol '!!!' represents priority positions, that should be present from the very beginning of the operation of the PLA.

The number of the staff should be increased when the PLA is settled. The proposal is valid for the first 5 years of operation of the PLA, when the state forests (a majority of the PL territory) fall not under the PLA jurisdiction. Should this change, the number of staff (particularly forest rangers and forestry specialist) should rise proportionally.

The PLA should be divided into three units. Details regarding the structure and description of positions are given below:

3.4.1 Administration and Projects Unit

The Unit is directly managed by the Director of the PLA.

ToR of the Unit: Administration and Projects Unit assists the Director in management of the PLA and provides services at an administrative level to all PLA units (accountancy, organizational arrangements, maintaining the equipment of the PLA, etc.). Besides that, the Unit is responsible for searching project opportunities and coordination (or supervision) of projects on which the PLA

participates or carries out as the only implementing body. The Unit is also responsible for developing and implementing the Fundraising Strategy covering not only project opportunities, but all potential opportunities for income or a cooperation with suitable partners.

Besides the Director as an independent position (Head of the Unit besides management of the whole PLA), two positions are fully staffed there:

- **PLA Assistant / Accountant.** Administrative position.
ToR of PLA Assistant / Accountant: Responsibility for keeping the budget of the PLA plus separate budget lines for projects and other activities the PLA participates at. PLA Assistant fulfils the role of the Director assistant and can, if asked, be directly involved in the management of the PLA upon decision of the Director for well specified tasks. The Assistant also supports all units in arranging events and communication with partners.
Requirements: Experience with accountancy or economy, speaking English as an advantage (at least basics).
- **Fundraiser & Project Coordinator**
ToR: Fundraiser is in regular touch with the PLA Director and PLA Assistant in order to have an opportunity to participate in the management of the PLA and having overview about the PL budget and prospects for the next period. The main task of the fundraiser is to develop 'PLA Fundraising Strategy' that defines financial sources used by the PLA (e.g., funding and projects sources besides the regular budget, donors, potential partners for framework partnerships, etc.). Fundraiser coordinates implementation of the PLA Fundraising Strategy. Besides that, the employee will lead, supervise, or coordinate projects managed or co-managed by the PL Administration, including project and finance (together with the PLA Assistant) management.
Requirements: University degree in economy, project management and/or communication, fluent in English.

3.4.2 Natural Resources Management Unit

ToR of the Unit: The Unit is responsible specifically for four topics related to the natural resources in the PL: biodiversity, forest ecology, water resources management and agriculture. The Unit is responsible for coordination of development, regular update, and implementation of the PL Management Plan including the PLA zoning. The Unit also cooperates closely with the NFA regarding implementation of the PL goals to the management of the state owned forests (potentially, this unit should be enlarged, if state forests are to be managed by PLA in the future as foreseen by the law). Staff of the Unit is responsible for setting rules for use or management of natural resources in the PL and harmonization of various interests of stakeholders, so that they are in compliance with the goals of the PL. The Unit closely cooperates with the Sustainable Development Unit.

Almost half of the PL is covered by forests. However, as stated in the law, the state forests remain, at least for the first 5 years, under the management of the NFA. Therefore, no forest ranger and forest specialist is proposed for this initial period. It is the responsibility of the Head of the Unit to overlook the implementation of the Management Plan into the forestry planning and management of state owned forests as well as setting rules for use of parts of forest that are not state owned.

- **Head of the Natural Resources Unit**
ToR of a Head of the Unit: Managing the Unit and coordinating all activities related to sustainable use of natural resources. Coordinating development and implementation of the PL Management Plan and harmonizing natural resources use in the whole PL area (biodiversity conservation with forestry and agriculture).
Requirements: University degree in the natural resources management, environmental protection or biology is a necessary condition, speaking English at least at a basic level.
- **Rangers –** minimal number of rangers is 3 (one for each valley – Gudamakari, Pshavi and Piraketa Khevsureti)
ToR of a Ranger: Control and enforcement of regulations and policies in an assigned area, basic monitoring of natural phenomena and conditions in the PL, implementing practical management measures in the field, including general maintenance of tourist infrastructure, visitor assistance in the field
Requirements: High school degree or minimum of 3 years of relevant experience, good physical condition.
- **Agriculture specialist**
ToR of an Agriculture Specialist: Monitoring of activities in agriculture plots, including pastures, coordinating use of agriculture plots in relation to use of other natural resources, communication with stakeholders active in agriculture in the PL area.
Requirements: University degree or high school degree in agriculture, experience with agriculture of at least 3 years as an advantage.
- **Biodiversity Specialist**
ToR of a Biodiversity Specialist: Monitoring of biodiversity and coordination of research activities carried out by external partners (academic institutions, NGOs, etc.), collecting and systematic analyses of data on biodiversity (species and habitats). Provision of recommendation to the management plan related to setting baseline for a good state of biodiversity in the PL, overseeing the integration of biodiversity conservation measures into all policies and plans related to the PL.
Requirements: University degree in ecology (botany, zoology), knowledge of English as a condition (for use of sources of information available only in English and cooperation with external partners on biodiversity monitoring).
- **Natural Resources Manager**
ToR of a Natural Resources Manager: Monitoring and regulation of activities related to use of watercourses in the area so that they are in accordance with the goals of the PL, including waste water management, flood protection measures, etc. In the transition period (when the PLA is not responsible for state forest management issues and therefore no special position of forest manager is proposed) the Natural Resources Manager should also deal with issues related to forestry in non-state forests and coordination of activities with the NFA. Moreover, at the beginning of the operation of the PLA, if the position of Agriculture specialist is not occupied yet, the Natural Resources Manager together with the Biodiversity Specialist should also ensure implementation of biodiversity goals into agricultural policies and management in the PL.
Requirements: University degree in natural resources management.

3.4.3 Sustainable Development Unit

The unit should be led by a head graduated in urbanism or tourism, i.e. one of two main sectors the unit will be responsible for.

ToR of the Unit: The Unit is responsible for tourism development, activities related to settlements and their development, cultural and architecture heritage maintenance, and spatial planning in general. In addition, the Units assess road infrastructure development and recommends to the Director limits for its enlargement. For fulfilling well all those competences, the Unit develops, regularly updates and implements the following planning documents: Traditional Architecture Rules, Waste Management Plan, Tourism Development Plan, and Spatial Development Plan. Lastly, the Unit is competent to develop and implement the Communication Strategy incl. international cooperation.

- **Head of the Sustainable Development Unit**

ToR of a Head of the Unit: Managing the Unit and coordinating all activities related to sustainable development of the PL. Coordinating development and implementation of the various plans and strategies (mainly Traditional Architecture Rules, Waste Management Plan, Tourism Development Plan, Spatial Development Plan and Communication Strategy) and overlooking their implementation.

Requirements: University degree in the urbanism or tourism, speaking English at least at a basic level.

- **Tourism Specialist**

ToR of a Tourism Specialist: Responsible for development, regular update and implementation of Tourism Development Plan. The plan covers tourist infrastructure planning and development, monitoring of tourist flow in the PL area and its impact, and communication with local community about opportunities for tourism activities (e.g., guest houses).

Requirements: University degree in tourism, economy, or similar topic, knowledge of English as a condition.

- **Urban Planning and Development Specialist / Architect**

ToR of an Urban Planning and Development Specialist/Architect: Responsible for developing Traditional Architecture Rules and supporting their use in the field. He/she regularly monitors activities in settlements and communicates with locals appropriate ways on how to maintain or reconstruct houses in a traditional way (or not harmful to the landscape characteristics). He/she in a cooperation with respective state authorities (Dusheti Municipality) coordinates development and regular update of specific spatial plan for the PL area.

Requirements: University degree in architecture or urbanism, knowledge of English as an advantage.

- **Historical and Cultural Heritage Specialist**

ToR of Historical and Cultural Heritage Specialist: Responsible for protection of cultural sites and monuments, working in close cooperation with state authorities and local representatives of cultural and spiritual life on maintenance and renovation of historical sites.

Requirements: University degree in ethnography, history or cultural studies, knowledge of English as an advantage.

- **Eco-Education and Public Relation Specialist**

ToR of an Eco-Education and Public Relation Specialist: Responsible for development, coordination/implementation of the Communication Strategy incl. international relations (e.g., partnership with a particular PA abroad). Besides that, he/she prepares eco-education activities for local schools or groups of tourists visiting the area. When needed he/she serves as a guide in the PL.

Requirements: University degree in communication or environment, knowledge of English as a condition, knowledge of Russian as an advantage.

3.5 Recommendations for the operation of the Aragvi PLA

Once the PLA is staffed, it is important to plan sufficient time and budget allocation for adequate equipment and capacity building of the employees.

3.5.1 Capacity building

It is necessary to continuously improve expert capacity and skills of the staff to ensure adequate management and administration of the PL.

The exact needs for further trainings shall be identified based on an analysis of actual skills and level of knowledge of the hired staff, taking into account specific position requirements.

Generally, competences should be developed mainly in these areas:

- a) Technical skills, including work with computer programs (such as MS Word, Excel, Access, Power point, GIS, and work with specialized databases, etc.), and a use of field equipment;
- b) Specific knowledge related to protected areas management, including training on biodiversity protection, biodiversity monitoring, management planning, legal issues and law enforcement;
- c) Personal skills like communication and negotiation skills, interpretation of natural and cultural values of the APL for visitors, foreign language skills;

The capacity building can take both traditional form (trainings, courses, study tours to other protected areas) and modern format (e-learning).

Close cooperation with the APA and the adjacent Pshav-Khevsuerti NP Administration shall be established and developed (for example joint trainings for rangers).

3.5.2 Equipment and offices

Offices

Considering geographic extent of the PL, it is important to provide the PLA with:

- a) A seat of the headquarters of the PLA (a building in or near Dusheti)
- b) Two field/detached offices of the PLA (in Piraketa Khevsureti and in the Gudamakari valley)

Official regular opening hours need to be given for the offices – permanent for the headquarters and seasonal (March-November) for the detached offices. During official opening hours at least one staff representative will be available there for public consultations.

Equipment

It is necessary to acquire and maintain appropriate equipment for the PLA and its staff. Computers with adequate software, internet access, mobile phones, 4WD cars are a prerequisite for a functional PLA. For rangers and the Natural Resources Management Unit staff further specialized equipment is essential, such as uniforms, outdoor clothing and equipment (both summer and winter), binoculars and scopes, cameras (incl. camera traps), etc. Providing a detailed list of equipment is not aim of this document. However, sufficient budget allocation is needed especially in the beginning phase of the PLA.