

Focus on what you still have

Q&A with David Morrison of CNF

By Salome Kobalava

Development or conservation? This is the ongoing dilemma. David Morrison, the Director of the Caucasus Nature Fund (CNF) thinks he has the answer to this perplexing quandary when he suggests: "if you do intelligent conservation, you can reconcile the two: intelligent development and intelligent conservation."

Morrison spent most of his life in Europe working in the financial sector as a corporate business lawyer. After

close to thirty-years in this field, he decided that his mission was accomplished in the corporate world and he began looking for a new challenge. He discovered the German government (one of his long-time clients) and its development bank were involved in a project with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) one of the leading organizations in wildlife conservation, and Conservation International, a large US charity in the Caucasus.

"I've always been a friend of nature in my mind and [a] lover of nature in

terms of loving to be outdoors and so forth. But I never really had a chance to do anything about it," Morrison explained. He volunteered his services to the German government, offering to support and run the organization. Morrison has no real background in nature, but lots of experience in management within the financial sector. "[They needed] somebody who knew something about finance, investing, management and making an operation run and grow, not somebody who was focused on the skills of nature conservation."

The CNF has been working in partnership with the governments in the South Caucasus: Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia since 2008, providing grants to protected areas to supplement their operating expenses in order to prevent illegal activities, monitor ecosystem health, educate the public and to promote tourism and sustainable development. CNF currently supports the Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park and the Lagodekhi Protected Areas in Georgia. However, the organization plans to add more to its portfolio in the upcoming years.

David Morrison evaluates the work at CNF in Georgia as "successful". In the blitz interview with *Georgia Today* he talks about the social and economic aspects of protected areas and the peculiarity of the Caucasus' biodiversity hotspot.

Q: How would you describe the condition of natural ecosystems in the Southern Caucasus and Georgia in particular? What steps must be taken to sustain its balance?

A: Nature here is beautiful; it still looks great in many places and is untouched. The issue is keeping what you have and making sure that in the places where there's danger to it - because there is danger - you take the necessary steps to halt declines in process and to perhaps even reverse some of them. It's easy to criticize and say, oh, the



David Morrison, the Director of the Caucasus Nature Fund

we expect that 8 of these would be in Georgia. This would include the first trans-boundary National Park in the South Caucasus, Javakheti National Park in Georgia and Lake Arpi National Park in northwestern Armenia

Q: What social and economic role can a protected area play apart from an ecological role and in what terms can it help Georgia specifically?

A: Protected areas can play a key role in the development of the tourism industry in Georgia and have the potential to be a significant contributor to Georgia's balance of payments. Ecotourism will provide opportunities in some of Georgia's poorest communities.

Q: Is there any distinctive quality that sets Georgia apart from other Southern Caucasian countries in the field of biodiversity conservation or maybe, endeavors to succeed. Is it promising?

A: The Caucasus is an eco-region and its biodiversity must be conserved as a whole; it does not do any good to reintroduce Bezoar goats to Georgia if the population suffers in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Red deer cannot thrive in only two isolated regions within Georgia at present. In terms of regional comparisons that can be made, Georgia's plans to expand its protected area network are impressive and will be a huge benefit if they can be brought about. In addition, the Agency of Protected Areas, as the one-stop-shop for questions related to protected areas, has been an important source of efficiency in the Georgian government's management of its protected area system.

Batumi Oil Terminal is selling its non-profile assets

With the purpose of production optimization the management of Batumi Oil Terminal (BOT) made decision to sell its non-profile assets. For this purpose BOT is announcing a tender for selling the following objects:

1. Makhinjauri House (Sale or Lease)

Zone: Khelvachauri 22, sector Makhinjauri 01; block 01; section 001;
Address: Village Makhinjauri, Khelvachauri district.
Plot area: 1800 sq.m.
Floor area: 428.4 sq.m.
Useful area: 1608 sq.m.

2. Sports Center (Sale or Lease)

Zone: 05, sector 09; block 31; section 004;
Address: 59/65 1/2, Mayakovsky str., Batumi.
Plot area: 1600 sq.m.
Floor area: 1328,25 sq.m.
Useful area: 1782,35 sq.m.

3. Kindergarten (Sale)

Condition: Shall be functioning till the end of academic year.
Zone: 05, sector 09; block 012;
Address: 55, Mayakovsky str., Batumi, Georgia.
Plot area: 4100 sq.m.
Floor area: 776,4 sq.m.
Useful area: 1113,92 sq.m.

Deadline for submission of offers is 15.12.2011.

For further information, familiarization with assets and submission of tender offers please address to: 20, Gogebashvili str., Batumi, Georgia. Secretary to Tender Committee – Natalya Abashidze or by phone (995.422) 27 60 06.

Morrison: "I've always been a friend of nature in my mind and [a] lover of nature in terms of loving to be outdoors and so forth. But I never really had a chance to do anything about it"

Caucasus has lost 10% or 20% of its fantastic forests over the last 20 years, but it's more important to focus on what you still have and you still have quite a lot.

In fact compared to the rest of the world, particularly the developed world, even in some cases North America, it's still fabulously preserved. There's wonderful wilderness that still exists here that puts to shame what we still have in Western Europe. So the job is not to cry over what's been lost but to work to save what you still have and that's a lot. The prospects are quite good.

Q: Recently, amendments were drafted within Georgian law regarding protected areas, the Red Book and the Red List, attempting to legalize the hunting of rare and endangered species inhabiting the national parks. How could these legal changes influence the ecosystems in Georgia if enacted?

A: Hunting, if done sustainably, can be a friend of conservation. The problem is unsustainable hunting and the numbers of certain key species for the Caucasus, such as the red deer and the Bezoar goat and leopard have dwindled to such an extent that they are no longer sustainable. The ban on hunting must continue until the numbers recover. Af-

terwards, my belief is that locals should be involved in hunting regulation and given a voice and a stake in the safety of the populations.

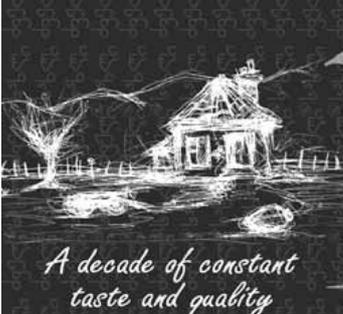
Q: What are the shortcomings in Georgia's national parks/protected area management you have encountered throughout your tenure?

A: The key weaknesses are the underfunding of basic needs, from uniforms and equipment to salaries; a shortage of funding for maintenance and infrastructure maintenance and development; a lack of capacity to handle and develop the tourism potential of the protected areas; a need for the concretization of plans and financing for the planned protected areas currently under consideration, as well as new corridors to connect protected areas.

Q: Apart from Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park and the protected areas of Lagodekhi that your organization supports, are there any new national parks on your agenda and if so, which?

A: In 2012, we will be supporting four parks, adding Tusheti and Vashlovani to our portfolio. We are also looking to add Murala at the latest by 2013. Our aim is to support "15 Parks by 2015" in Georgia and Armenia, and

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