

## Caucasus Protected Areas Fund (CPAF)-Special Fire-fighting Grant in Georgia

February 12, 2009

Today the CPAF announced that it has made its first grant. CPAF funds will finance a Euro 60,000 acquisition for the Georgian Agency of Protected Areas of 2 fire-fighting trucks for Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park (BKNP).

Severe forest fires broke out in the Borjomi region after the Russian bombing of the area during the war in August. Over 950 hectares burned, including areas within the park's borders. BKNP rangers worked hard and valiantly to put out the fires in and around the park. However, they were severely hindered in their efforts by the lack of modern fire-fighting equipment.

Following a study and recommendation by the Global Fire Monitoring Center issued as part of the OSCE's post-war environmental assessment mission to Georgia, the CPAF agreed to finance the purchase of the trucks, which will be the key asset in BKNP's fire-fighting kit going forward. Because the fire-fighting tanks, hoses and related equipment are so-called "slip-on" units to standard 4X4 pick-up trucks, the vehicles themselves will also be able to serve in normal park operations.

The APA is separately arranging with other international organizations for training in the use of the equipment and in fire-fighting techniques generally, at BKNP and other protected areas in Georgia.

David Morrison, the CPAF's executive director, commented that:

"This was not the way we expected to begin the CPAF's grant-making activity, but we believe that scale of the damage to the forests in and around BKNP--and the courage of the rangers and others who battled the fires--cried out for a response. We are pleased to be able to provide equipment that will address the immediate fire-fighting needs in the park, as well as to have been something of a catalyst for targeted training programs in the region.

We continue to expect that we will begin with our pilot grants for ordinary PA operating cost financing on schedule in 2010, and hope to be announcing the first grants later this year."

### *Contact Information*

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*Photo Courtesy of Ministry of Environment and Nature Protection of Georgia*

*Background on the Caucasus Protected Areas Fund:*

*The CPAF commenced operations in 2008 with initial sponsorship from the German government (through BMZ and KfW), WWF Germany, Conservation International and Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund. The Caucasus is recognized by the WWF and Conservation International as the most biologically diverse region in a temperate zone in the world. The CPAF focuses on the core Caucasus countries of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, each of which obtained independence from the former Soviet Union in the early 1990s. In all three countries there is an abundance of pristine nature, and a developing system of national parks and reserves, but a severe shortage of funds for the day-to-day work of preserving it. Our mission is to meet this critical but unaddressed need: the funding of operating and maintenance costs for protected areas, such as salaries for rangers, park scientists and information officers, and costs for equipment, supplies and training.*

*In a region where political strife continues, this initiative represents a rare display of cooperation and dialogue among the three focus countries. In endorsing the establishment of the CPAF, each has agreed to submit proposals to increase funding for the preservation of their natural treasures. Critically, they have also agreed to provide at least 50% of the funding—assuring local “ownership”-- of the programs. The CPAF will supply on an ongoing basis the balance. As a by-product, we hope to promote this nascent regional dialogue. Indeed the German government's contribution to the CPAF was made in the context of its Caucasus Initiative which encourages cross-border cooperation and contributes to conflict prevention.*

*The CPAF is actively seeking to broaden its donor base to enable to fulfill its promise in this vital region.*

*For more, visit our web-site at: [www.caucasus-naturefund.org](http://www.caucasus-naturefund.org)*