

Annual Report

Protecting nature. Empowering communities.

2024

About this report

This annual report presents EcoAlbania's work, results and learnings throughout 2024, a year of commitment, advocacy, and collective action for the protection of Albania's rivers, biodiversity, and natural ecosystems.

Design & Layout by

Spontan Creative Media

Published by

EcoAlbania – Center for Protection of Natural Ecosystems in Albania
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Photography: EcoAlbania archive and project partners.

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FOREWORD

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Foreword

A message from the Executive Director on the year that was, and the work ahead.



Olsi Nika – Executive Director

A year of shared action

Dear friends, partners, communities, and supporters,

Looking back at 2024, I am reminded that every achievement in nature conservation begins with people who choose to care. Behind every milestone highlighted in this report stand local communities defending their rivers, scientists contributing knowledge, institutions willing to cooperate, partners sharing a common vision, and donors whose confidence enables us to turn ambitions into action.

For EcoAlbania, 2024 represented an important stage in a journey that started more than a decade ago. The declaration of the Vjosa Wild River National Park brought new responsibilities and a new chapter for our work. Protecting nature no longer meant only preventing harmful developments, but also ensuring that this unique landscape is managed wisely and preserved for generations to come. Throughout the year, we focused on strengthening science-based conservation, promoting ecological connectivity, restoring degraded habitats, and creating opportunities for communities to play a central role in shaping a sustainable future.

At the same time, 2024 reminded us that protecting nature is never a finished task. The pressures facing the Shushica River, the Vjosa Delta, and many other valuable ecosystems demonstrated how fragile environmental gains can be. Safeguarding these places requires determination, sound science, legal instruments, and above all, the active participation of people who understand that healthy ecosystems are essential for their own prosperity and quality of life.

What has encouraged me most this year has been the solidarity and commitment shown by communities and individuals across Albania and beyond. Villages joined forces to defend the Shushica, researchers from many countries contributed new knowledge through scientific collaborations, young people engaged with nature through educational activities, and citizens raised their voices for a development model that values natural heritage as a source of identity and opportunity. These examples give us confidence that conservation is becoming not only a cause, but a shared responsibility.

None of these accomplishments would have been possible without the support and trust of our partners and donors. Your contributions extend far beyond individual projects; they strengthen a collective effort dedicated to preserving some of Europe's most extraordinary ecosystems and to building a future where people and nature thrive together. For this, I extend my sincere gratitude.

I would also like to express my appreciation to the EcoAlbania team and to the many experts, volunteers, and collaborators who dedicated their energy and expertise throughout the year. Their perseverance and belief in our mission continue to transform challenges into opportunities and ideas into tangible results.

Much remains to be done. The years ahead will require continued commitment, stronger institutions, and broader alliances. Yet I am convinced that by working together, we can ensure that Albania's rivers continue to flow freely, its landscapes remain alive with biodiversity, and its communities benefit from development that respects the limits and values of nature.

Thank you for standing with us and for being part of this shared endeavor.

Olsi Nika

Executive Director, EcoAlbania

"Protecting nature is not only about preserving what we have inherited, but about safeguarding what we hope to leave behind."

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About EcoAlbania

Center for Protection of Natural Ecosystems
in Albania, who we are, why we do this.

ABOUT

Mission, vision & approach

The Center for Protection of Natural Ecosystems in Albania (EcoAlbania) is a non-governmental environmental organization, committed to safeguarding the country's biodiversity and natural heritage. Established in 2014 with a strong belief in the intrinsic value of nature, EcoAlbania works to preserve ecological integrity while promoting sustainable pathways for socio-economic development.

At the heart of EcoAlbania's mission lies the protection of natural ecosystems and the complex interactions that sustain them. By focusing on the conservation of wildlife and their habitats, the organization advocates for the responsible and sustainable use of natural resources, ensuring that environmental stewardship goes hand in hand with human well-being. EcoAlbania recognizes that long-term prosperity depends on maintaining the balance between nature and society.

EcoAlbania's approach is multidisciplinary and collaborative. Its work integrates scientific research, policy advocacy, community engagement, and strategic communication to advance sustainable development models. Through evidence-based initiatives and partnerships with local communities, institutions, and international stakeholders, the organization strives to influence decision-making processes and inspire collective action for environmental protection and nature conservation.

Mission

EcoAlbania works to strengthen the harmonious coexistence between people and nature in Albania.

Vision

A future where Albania's biodiversity, natural landscapes, and communities flourish together in balance and resilience.

03

2024 in Focus

Key moments, milestones, and reach, in words, numbers, and visuals.

OVERVIEW

Highlights of the year



Throughout 2024, EcoAlbania continued to advance its mission of strengthening the harmonious relationship between people and nature by combining science, advocacy, community engagement, and environmental education. Building on the historic achievement of the establishment of Europe’s first Wild River National Park, our work focused not only on safeguarding the ecological integrity of the Vjosa River system, but also on promoting sustainable management, restoring ecosystems, strengthening ecological connectivity, and supporting participatory governance. Across Albania and beyond, we worked alongside local communities, institutions, scientists, and international partners to ensure that conservation efforts translate into lasting benefits for both biodiversity and people.

The year was marked by important progress, including legal victories for free-flowing rivers, the advancement of the Vjosa Wild River National Park management framework, the development of ecological corridors, the expansion of transboundary cooperation with Greece, and the engagement of hundreds of young people through environmental education initiatives. At the same time, challenges posed by unsustainable development and increasing pressures on natural ecosystems highlighted the need for continued vigilance and collective action. Through strategic partnerships, evidence-based advocacy, and active public engagement, EcoAlbania strengthened its role as a leading voice for nature conservation and sustainable development in Albania and the Western Balkans.

04

Our Work

6 projects, one mission: protecting rivers,
restoring ecosystems, empowering
communities.

PORTFOLIO

Our work in 2024

In 2024, EcoAlbania implemented a portfolio of five active projects spanning river protection, ecological corridors, hydroclimatic research, species conservation, and environmental education. Each contributed to safeguarding Albania’s natural heritage in a different way.

PROJECT 01

Europe’s 1st Wild River National Park — Vjosa-Aoós

Area: Vjosa River valley

PROJECT 02

Improve Sustainability of CCAs in Albania (ISCCA)

Area: Northern Part of the Polis- Valamarë-Rungajë- Moravë-Gramoz Ecological Corridor

PROJECT 03

ESPID4Vjosa — Science-Policy Interface

Area: Vjosa River Basin

PROJECT 04

SD-WISHEES — Hydroclimatic Resilience

Area: Mediterranean Basin,Balkan Peninsula, and Africa

PROJECT 05

Watershed Environmental Education

Area: 11 schools in 4 districts across Albania

PROJECT 06

Conservation of the Albanian Water Frog

Area: Coastal Albania from Buna-Velipoja Protected Landscape to Orikum Lagoon

PROJECT

Europe's 1st Wild River National Park Vjosa-Aoós

OVERALL GOAL

Ensure effective management of the Vjosa Wild River National Park, including the expansion of its boundaries to cover key tributaries and the river delta, while promoting it as a regional model for nature conservation.

DONOR

Holdfast Foundation, Techow Foundation, Age Jensen Foundation

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

EcoAlbania, EuroNatur, Riverwatch

PROJECT AREA

Vjosa River valley

Project Key Actions

This project builds directly on the legacy of the Save the Blue Heart of Europe campaign, which laid the foundation for large-scale river protection across the Balkans. While the campaign successfully raised awareness and mobilized international support to halt destructive hydropower development, the current project represents the next phase, shifting from advocacy to long-term management, protection, and restoration. In this sense, it translates the vision of the campaign into sustained, on-the-ground action, ensuring that the achievements secured are preserved and strengthened over time.

As part of a long-term, 10-year commitment, this project continued to focus on safeguarding the ecological integrity of the Vjosa Wild River National Park (WRNP), Europe's first of its kind. In 2025, EcoAlbania advanced this objective through a combination of monitoring, policy engagement, scientific collaboration, and public outreach, ensuring that the park's protection status is not only maintained but effectively implemented in practice.

During 2025, several key actions were undertaken:

Temporary halt of construction works in Shushica

Construction for the water supply project has been paused until a proper assessment is conducted. This success stems from a multi-level campaign that included protests, scientific work, media work, lobbying, and public pressure. Key actions included random sampling at Shushica's headwaters, initiating plans for a second "Shushica Science Week," and scientific reviews of the Environmental Impact and Social Assessment (EISA) report, which criticized the feasibility study. Advocacy efforts targeted authorities like NAPA, MoTE, and the Vlora Prefecture to address ecological risks posed by the diversion project. Additionally, a water flow assessment and a report on alternative water sources were prepared, while a legal case opposing the project was initiated.

Public engagement played a vital role, marked by three protests and a summit in Kuç that united 35 villages against harmful projects. In May, the "Pipe Tour" protest symbolized local resistance, culminating in a petition delivered to the government in Tirana. Another milestone was the "Shushica Day" event in July, featuring special guests—the Women of Kruščica from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Finally, EcoAlbania, together with 54 residents, filed a lawsuit against the water supply project at the Administrative Court, and the case is ongoing.



Pressure to protect the Vjosa Delta and include it in the WRNP

Threats like urbanization, the construction of Vlora Airport, tourist resorts, and large-scale PV projects continue to endanger this pristine ecosystem. In April 2024, the second "Vjosa River Delta Science Week" brought together over 60 scientists to assess the conservation value of the delta and the potential impacts of these projects.

Legal victory against hydropower projects



The three-year fight against four hydropower projects in the Shushica concluded successfully, marking another victory for river protection. Additionally, the Appeals Administrative Court of Tirana upheld the 2017 victory against the Poçëm hydropower project, which had been appealed by the government.

Progress in WRNP management

The Integrated Management Plan for the Vjosa WRNP was adopted in autumn 2024, marking a critical step from Albanian institutions toward its implementation. Concurrently, the Ministry of Tourism and Environment advanced plans to designate the Vjosa Valley as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. EcoAlbania actively participated in consultations for both initiatives.



Establishment of the Vjosa WRNP Administration Office

This decision followed the adoption of the management plan and was strongly advocated by Patagonia, Blue Heart partners (EcoAlbania, RiverWatch, and Euronatur), and international experts involved in drafting the plan. However, progress remains mostly on paper, with no concrete on-the-ground changes such as signage, management activities, or territorial safeguarding.

Bern Convention case file remains open

The case file for the Vjosa River, including issues related to the Shushica and delta, remains active. The Bern Convention Standing Committee urged the Albanian government to halt construction of the Vlora International Airport near the Narta Lagoon and Vjosa Delta, citing violations of international agreements. The committee also criticized Albania's new protected areas law, which facilitates mega-projects like airports and luxury resorts in ecologically sensitive areas.

Efforts to restore Vjosa's forests

A tree nursery was established in Tepelena and inaugurated on World Forest Day (March 21st). The nursery, with an annual capacity of 16,000 seedlings, will support reforestation at ten pre-selected sites, with initial planting sessions started at the end of 2024 and plans to continue into 2025.

"Let's Make Vjosa Go Solar" initiative

EcoAlbania is advocating solar energy as an alternative to hydropower projects. Preliminary assessments identified two schools, Qesarat in Memaliaj and Sevaster in Selenicë, as suitable sites for photovoltaic (PV) installations. The panels have been installed, though connection to the grid is still pending.

PROJECT

Improve Sustainability of South-Eastern CCAs in Albania- ISCCA

OVERALL GOAL

Maintain and improve the ecological connectivity of Polis-Valamarë-Rungajë-Moravë-Gramoz CCA through a sustainable and participatory governance approach.

DONOR

Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust (PONT)

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

EcoAlbania

PROJECT AREA

The northern section of the Polis-Valamarë-Rungajë-Moravë-Gramoz CCA

Project Key Actions

In 2024, the ISCCA project advanced the development and integration of ecological corridors as a key approach to biodiversity conservation and sustainable land use. Through strengthened stakeholder engagement, participatory planning processes, environmental education, and cross-border cooperation, the project contributed to the continued development of the Action Plan for the Polis-Valamarë-Rungajë-Moravë-Gramoz ecological corridor. It supported the integration of ecological connectivity into territorial planning and decision-making processes. By combining inclusive consultation processes, field-based experiential learning, and regional exchange, ISCCA strengthened the foundations for long-term, coordinated, and science-based ecological corridor management.

Continuation of the Workshops for the Development of the Action Plan

The participatory process for developing the Action Plan for the Polis-Valamarë-Rungajë-Moravë-Gramoz ecological corridor continued in 2024 through a series of structured workshops at the local and regional levels. Three workshops were organized in Gramsh, Pogradec, and Skrapar, bringing together municipal representatives and local stakeholders to identify key environmental pressures, discuss priorities, and contribute to a shared vision for the corridor.



The process was finalized with a multi-stakeholder workshop involving representatives from six municipalities (Librazhd, Gramsh, Prrerjas, Maliq, Pogradec, and Skrapar), three prefectures (Elbasan, Korçë, Berat), Regional Administration of Protected Areas (RAPAs), NGOs, and the tourism sector. The meeting served to validate the jointly agreed vision, objectives, and actions for the ecological corridor and emphasized the importance of ecological connectivity, inter-institutional cooperation, and sustainable land-use planning.



Environmental Education in Schools



Environmental education is a core pillar of EcoAlbania's work and a key component of the ISCCA Project, aimed at strengthening youth awareness on biodiversity conservation and ecological connectivity. In 2024, a series of field-based learning activities were organized with schools across the ecological corridor, combining experiential education with practical conservation actions.

In the framework of the World Day of Environmental Education, students from "Shefqet Dosku" school, together with EcoAlbania and RAPA Elbasan, participated in reforestation activities in Shebenik-Jabllanicë National Park, including planting fir seedlings and hiking. The activity provided hands-on learning on native species restoration, ecosystem conditions in mountain environments, and the role of ecological corridors in maintaining habitat connectivity and biodiversity.



Additional education visits were conducted at Sotira Waterfall in Gramsh and the Osum Canyons in Berat, with students from "Shefqet Guzi" and "Zylyftar Veleshnja" schools, in cooperation with the respective RAPAs. These activities combined nature exploration, awareness discussions, and clean-up activities. The sessions introduced students to protected areas and the concept of ecological corridors while strengthening their understanding of biodiversity conservation and encouraging active environmental responsibility.



Transboundary Study Visit in Konitsa, Greece

A two-day study visit in Konitsa, Greece, strengthened cross-border cooperation on ecological connectivity within the wider corridor landscape. The exchange brought together Albanian and Greek stakeholders, including municipalities, conservation experts, NGOs, and private sector representatives. The programme included presentations on ongoing conservation initiatives in both countries, including the ISCCA project, the Ri-Connect project in the Aoós basin, and broader connectivity conservation efforts in the Pindos-Prespa region, highlighting shared challenges such as hydropower pressures, illegal hunting, and differing conservation frameworks across borders.



Field visits to key natural and cultural sites, including Profitis Ilias Mountain, Konitsa Bridge, and Northern Pindos National Park, highlighted the ecological importance of transboundary landscapes and reinforced the need for coordinated regional approaches to biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

PROJECT

ESPID4Vjosa- Enhancing a Science-Policy Interface Development for the Vjosa

OVERALL GOAL

Building on previous efforts to highlight the importance of the Vjosa River’s values, EuroNatur and EcoAlbania are implementing the “ESPID4Vjosa” project, which aims to strengthen the link between science, decision-making institutions, and society by enhancing science-based support for governance processes and fostering dialogue among key stakeholders.

DONOR

Austrian Development Agency (ADA)

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

EuroNatur & EcoAlbania

PROJECT AREA

Vjosa River Basin

Project Key Actions

The ESPID4Vjosa project, with an implementation period from December 2021 to May 2025, aims to strengthen the science-policy-civil society interface for the sustainable management of water resources in the Vjosa/Aoós River Basin, while also promoting transboundary cooperation between Albania and Greece. Building on previous achievements, the 2024–2025 phase focused on consolidating institutional cooperation, enhancing scientific knowledge, strengthening civil society engagement, and advancing participatory and integrated river basin governance.

Stakeholder Engagement

A major component of the project was the consolidation of the Vjosa Civil Society Network (VCSN). Through capacity-building activities, workshops, and exchange visits, the project strengthened the role of civil society organizations in environmental governance and public participation. In 2024, particular emphasis was placed on the development of the VCSN Strategy, marking an important step toward establishing a sustainable and self-organized civil society structure in the basin. A study visit for VCSN members in Greece further supported regional exchange and cooperation, while long-term efforts continued toward the formal recognition of the network within the Vjosa River Basin Council.

The project also maintained close cooperation with national and local institutions, including AMBU, NAPA, and municipalities along the Vjosa River. Workshops organized in Vlora, Memaliaj, Këlcyra, and Dropull provided important platforms for dialogue on water governance, nature conservation, and sustainable territorial development, while strengthening institutional coordination and local ownership.



The project also ensured strong governance and coordination through regular Steering Committee meetings, including the third Kick-off and Steering Committee Meeting in February 2024 and the fourth Steering Committee Meeting in February 2025, which supported strategic planning and implementation review. In addition, awareness-raising activities targeting women, marginalized groups, and key water users in the Vjosa Valley promoted inclusiveness and emphasized the importance of participatory water governance.

Despite significant progress, the project also faced challenges related to multi-stakeholder coordination, the complexity of transboundary processes, and the need for stronger institutional capacities at local and regional levels. Nevertheless, it demonstrated that sustained dialogue, cooperation, and participatory approaches are essential for effective river basin management.





Achievements

A key achievement during this period was the further development and expansion of the “Science Week” concept as a participatory platform for research, data collection, and dialogue between scientists, institutions, and policymakers. In 2024, this initiative was expanded beyond Albania through the joint organization of the Sarantaporos Science Week with the Greek partner organization MedINA, generating new scientific data and strengthening cross-border scientific cooperation within the Vjosa/Aoós catchment. The Vjosa Science Week held in April–May 2025 further contributed to improving the scientific knowledge base and supporting evidence-based decision-making for the river basin.

Transboundary cooperation between Albania and Greece represented a core achievement of this phase. The third bilateral exchange visit in June 2024 further strengthened institutional dialogue on integrated river basin management. A major milestone was the preparation and presentation of a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) among municipalities from both countries. Between 14–17 October 2024, a series of meetings held in Albania and Greece promoted the MoU, with around twelve municipalities expressing support for the initiative. Although the final signing was postponed to 2025 due to procedural requirements, the process marked a significant step toward formalized cross-border cooperation. In parallel, a Transboundary Action Plan was developed in 2024, providing a strategic framework for future coordinated management of the Vjosa/Aoós Basin.

Overall, during 2024–2025, ESPID4Vjosa significantly strengthened scientific cooperation, institutional coordination, civil society engagement, and cross-border collaboration. The mechanisms and partnerships established through the project provide a strong foundation for the continued protection and sustainable management of the Vjosa/Aoós River Basin, one of Europe’s most important and valuable freshwater ecosystems.

PROJECT

Supporting and Developing Widening Strategies to Tackle Hydroclimatic Extreme Events (SD – WISHEES)

OVERALL GOAL

SD-WISHEES project aims to enable strategic coordination and cross-sector collaboration between national (R&I) funding members, researchers, innovators and a wide variety of stakeholders to address together the protection of cultural heritage in Europe and beyond in response to more and more frequent and severe hydroclimatic extreme events such as droughts and floods.

DONOR

HORIZON – EU

PROJECT AREA

Mediterranean Basin, Balkan Peninsula, and Africa

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

Consiglio Nazionale Delle Ricerche (CNR) | The African Academy Of Sciences (AAS) | Institut Royal Meteorologique De Belgique (IRM/ KMI) | World Experience For Georgia (WEG) | Maltese Energy And Water Agency (EWA) | Fondazione Centro Euro-Mediterraneo Sui Cambiamenti Climatici (CMCC) | Istituto Superiore Per La Protezione E La Ricerca Ambientale (ISPRA) | Unitatea Executiva Pentru Finantarea Invatamantului Superior A Cercetarii Dezvoltarii Si Inovarii (UEFISCDI) | GSES Management B.V. (GSES) | Agence Nationale De La Recherche (ANR) | Ministero dell’università e della ricerca (MUR) | Universidade De Evora (UEVORA) | Fondacion Prima (PRIMA) | Qendra Per Mbrojtjen E Ekosistemeve Natyrore Ne Shqiperi (EcoAlbania) | Service Public Federal De Programmation Politique Scientifique (BELSPO) | Project Aid LTD

Project Key Actions

In 2024, the SD-WISHEES project continued its implementation within the Horizon Europe framework, focusing on strengthening research and innovation collaboration to address hydroclimatic extreme events and their impacts on water systems and cultural heritage. The project supported coordination among consortium partners and contributed to knowledge exchange and inclusive participation, particularly for widening countries, within European research and innovation networks.

Stakeholder Engagement

The project is built on a multi-actor approach involving research institutions, funding bodies, private sector actors, and civil society organizations, promoting dialogue and cooperation between science, policy, and practice. Within this framework, EcoAlbania contributed as part of Work Package 6 by supporting stakeholder outreach and the identification and engagement of relevant local and regional contacts in Albania, ensuring the inclusion of key actors from the target area in the project's wider knowledge and cooperation processes.

A key focus in 2024 was strengthening the engagement of widening countries in European research and innovation processes, supporting their participation in joint initiatives and collaborative frameworks. Efforts under WP6 contributed to facilitating connections with relevant stakeholders and improving the project's understanding of local contexts related to water management, climate risks, and cultural heritage.

Achievements

Through its activities, SD-WISHEES in 2024 supported the consolidation of partnerships and the exchange of expertise aimed at improving capacities for addressing climate change impacts. By fostering collaboration and dialogue across sectors and countries, the project contributed to strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity in water-related systems and heritage contexts.

PROJECT

Watershed Environmental Education

OVERALL GOAL

To enhance environmental awareness through education of youngsters in Albania.

DONOR

US Forest Services International Programs

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

EcoAlbania

PROJECT AREA

Mediterranean Basin, Balkan Peninsula and Africa

Project Key Actions

Throughout 2024, the environmental education project continued to expand its impact across Albania through a series of awareness-raising activities, practical sessions, and collaborations with schools and local institutions. Between April and June, environmental education sessions were organized in several primary and secondary schools, including in Kukës, Has, Tirana, Gramsh, Lezhë, and Vlora, combining theoretical presentations, practical experiments, and outdoor activities to engage students on topics related to biodiversity conservation and environmental protection.

Notable activities included clean-up actions in Kune-Vain-Talë and the construction of insect hotels in Gjorm, promoting hands-on learning and sustainable environmental practices. The project also continued distributing FiKiBio books to teachers, aiming to strengthen environmental education in schools through interactive learning methods and long-term educational engagement.

Stakeholder Engagement



Collaboration with the RAPA in Lezhë and Fier remained an important component of the project’s implementation. During the second half of the year, activities continued in schools across Fier, Tropojë, Durrës, Divjakë, and Tirana, focusing on environmental conservation through presentations, outdoor activities, and planting actions. The planting initiatives in Divjakë-Karavasta National Park and Tirana represented some of the most impactful moments of the project, directly involving pupils in ecosystem restoration efforts and environmental stewardship.

Achievements

Overall, the project contributed to the planting of more than 1,100 seedlings and olive trees, supporting biodiversity preservation and ecosystem recovery. Although activities slowed during the summer due to school holidays and the finalization phase of the project, planning continued for future implementation and expansion of environmental education activities in additional schools throughout Albania. The project closed the year with a strong focus on continuing environmental awareness efforts, teacher trainings on the FiKiBio methodology, and preparations for future summer schools and practical conservation activities.



PROJECT

Conservation of the Albanian Waterfrog

OVERALL GOAL

The project comes as a follow-up action to assess the population status of the species properly and holistically in its entire areal in Albania and to upgrade the Species Action Plan (SAP) prepared in the previous phase. During the first phase of the project, the species’ distribution and a preliminary assessment of the state of the population were observed only in the bay of Vlora. Based on these data, a SAP has been drafted which can only be considered for the Vlora Bay area.

DONOR

EcoAlbania Core funding

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

EcoAlbania

PROJECT AREA

Coastal Albania from Buna-Velipoja Protected Landscape to Orikum Lagoon

Project Key Actions

The project represents a continuation and expansion of previous conservation efforts aimed at improving the understanding and long-term protection of the target species across its entire distribution range in Albania. Building on the results and lessons learned from the first phase of implementation, the current phase focuses on conducting a comprehensive assessment of the species’ population status, habitat conditions, and associated threats, while simultaneously updating and strengthening the Species Action Plan (SAP) to ensure a more effective and nationwide conservation approach.

The project is currently implementing the final monitoring session, which will complete the data collection process and provide the final scientific evidence required for the preparation of the updated SAP. The finalisation and publication of the revised Species Action Plan is expected in Autumn 2026.

Scientific Efforts

During the initial phase of the project, field observations and preliminary assessments of the species' distribution and population status were carried out primarily within the Bay of Vlora. Based on the data collected during that period, a first draft of the SAP was developed. However, due to the limited geographical scope of the study, the SAP was applicable mainly to the Vlora Bay area and could not fully address the conservation needs of the species throughout Albania.

To address these gaps, the current phase significantly expands both the geographical scope and the scientific depth of the assessment. The project aims to evaluate the species' distribution across all its potential habitats and home-range within Albania, while undertaking a more detailed analysis of population dynamics, habitat quality, pressures, and threats affecting the species. This broader approach is intended to provide a solid scientific basis for the development of a comprehensive and updated Species Action Plan covering the entire Albanian range of the species.



The methodology applied during this phase follows the same scientific and participatory approach used in the first phase of the project, ensuring consistency and comparability of results. However, this phase introduces a substantially enlarged study area and a more in-depth analytical framework, allowing for a comprehensive assessment of the species' conservation status at national level. Special emphasis is being placed on identifying key pressures and threats, evaluating their impacts on both the species and its habitats, and proposing targeted mitigation and conservation measures that can contribute to the long-term preservation of the species in Albania.

Stakeholder Engagement

In addition to field research and technical assessments, the project also integrates awareness-raising and advocacy components. Public outreach and communication activities are being implemented to increase awareness among local communities and stakeholders regarding the ecological importance of the species and the need for its protection. At the same time, the project continues to strengthen cooperation and dialogue with decision-making institutions to ensure that conservation measures and policy recommendations are effectively integrated into national environmental and biodiversity frameworks.

Compared to the first phase, where engagement focused primarily on regional and local authorities, the current phase places stronger emphasis on collaboration with national-level institutions. In particular, the project aims to enhance cooperation and advocacy efforts with central decision-making bodies, including the National Agency of Protected Areas and the Ministry of Tourism and Environment. This broader institutional engagement is expected to strengthen the sustainability and long-term impact of the project outcomes, while contributing to improved national policies and practices for species conservation and habitat management in Albania.



Achievements

Since the start of this implementation phase, several key activities have been successfully carried out. The project team completed the identification and selection of monitoring sites across the species' potential distribution range in Albania. In parallel, two seasonal monitoring campaigns have already been conducted, focusing on assessing the species' presence, habitat conditions, and the state of conservation of the ecosystems where the species occurs. These monitoring efforts have also included the identification and evaluation of existing and emerging threats affecting the species and its habitats, as well as observations on the species' behavioural responses to such pressures.

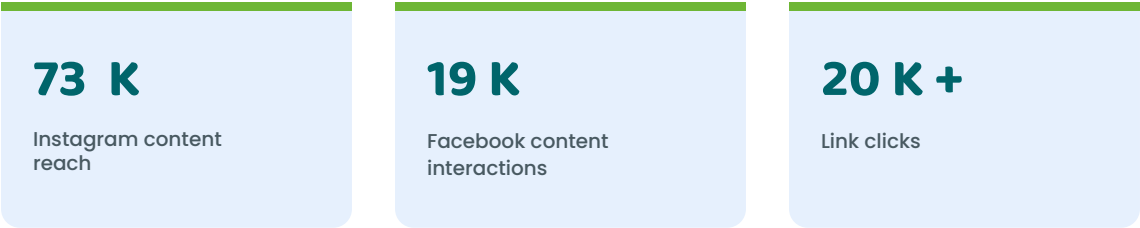
05

Communication

How we informed, engaged, and mobilized in 2024.

VOICE & VISIBILITY

Communication & outreach



Communications and media outreach remained a central pillar of EcoAlbania’s work throughout 2024, playing a crucial role in raising awareness about the threats facing the Vjosa River basin and mobilizing public support for river protection. Through a combination of press trips, media engagement, storytelling, and digital campaigns, EcoAlbania helped bring national and international attention to two major environmental issues: the planned water abstraction from the Shushica River and large-scale development projects in the Vjosa Delta.

The year was marked by extensive media coverage across both Albanian and international outlets. National press trips and field visits enabled journalists to report directly from affected areas, resulting in coverage by major Albanian media such as BIRN/Reporter.al, MCN TV, and Scan TV. Public actions organized throughout the year—including protests, the “Pipe Tour,” Shushica Day, and community meetings—received broad media attention and helped maintain public pressure on decision-makers. Internationally, the campaign reached audiences through reports and articles by AFP, Deutsche Welle, La Repubblica, Die Zeit, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Frankfurter Rundschau, and The Washington Post, among others. Several international television productions also featured the Vjosa and Shushica, including ARD/WDR’s documentary “Critical Travel: Albania – Wild Beauty and Concrete,” which explored the environmental costs of Albania’s tourism boom, and an ORF Science Vision documentary examining the history of the Vjosa conservation campaign and the challenges facing the newly established national park.

Science-based communication continued to strengthen EcoAlbania’s advocacy efforts. The annual Science Weeks generated media interest both in Albania and abroad, highlighting ongoing research in the Vjosa basin and the need to protect the river system as a whole. Reporting from these activities helped connect scientific findings with public debate and policy discussions.

A major communication milestone of the year was the launch of the “Vjosa Story” podcast series, which documented the history, achievements, and ongoing challenges of the campaign to protect the Vjosa. Across ten episodes featuring 28 guests, including scientists, community representatives, artists, journalists, and campaign partners. The podcast offered an in-depth account of one of Europe’s most significant river conservation efforts. Published on YouTube and Spotify in both Albanian and English, the series expanded the campaign’s reach and created a lasting archive of voices and experiences connected to the Vjosa.



The year also brought recognition for EcoAlbania’s storytelling efforts. The documentary “Saving the Vjosa River – The Story Behind,” produced by EcoAlbania received the Best Albanian Film Award at the Travel Fest Albania Film Festival and continued its successful international festival journey.

Across digital platforms, EcoAlbania’s communications generated significant public engagement. Instagram content reached more than 73,000 people, while Facebook recorded nearly 19,000 content interactions and over 20,000 link clicks. The organization’s website remained an important source of information and advocacy, publishing 58 articles and 3 press releases throughout the year. Together, these efforts strengthened public awareness, amplified local voices, and ensured that the protection of the Vjosa, Shushica, and the Vjosa Delta remained visible in national and international discussions.

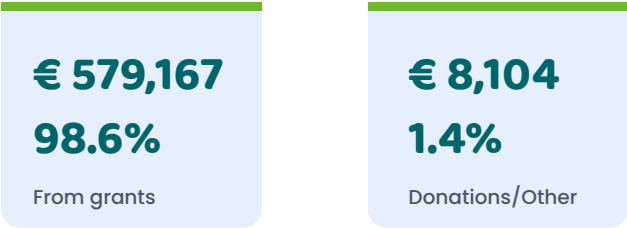
06

Financials

How the organization was funded and how every euro was put to work.

FINANCIAL

Financial overview



Revenue

EcoAlbania’s revenues are generated primarily from grants, which constitute the main source of funding for its activities. A smaller share, less that 2% comes from donations and other sources. This funding structure suggests a stable and predictable financial base, enabling EcoAlbania to plan and implement its programs effectively.

Expenditures

Human Resources		€ 175,758.00	(48%)
<i>Staff salaries</i>		€ 126,147.00	(34%)
<i>Expert fees</i>		€ 49,611.00	(14%)
Activities		€ 170,310.00	(46%)
Administrative costs		€ 19,970.00	(5%)
Assets		€ 234.00	(1%)
Total revenues expenditures		€ 587,271	

07

Reflections & Outlook

What we learned in 2024, and where we are headed next.

REFLECTIONS

Challenges & lessons learned

The year 2024 reaffirmed that conservation is a continuous process that requires patience, adaptability, and long-term commitment. While important progress was achieved across EcoAlbania's areas of work, the experiences gained throughout the year highlighted both the complexity of environmental challenges and the importance of collaboration in overcoming them. They reinforced our belief that lasting conservation outcomes are built not only through scientific evidence and advocacy, but also through trust, participation, and strong partnerships.

One of the key challenges remained the growing pressure from infrastructure and development projects affecting ecologically sensitive areas. The ongoing threats to the Shushica River and the Vjosa Delta demonstrated the difficulties of balancing economic ambitions with the protection of irreplaceable natural values. These experiences confirmed the importance of maintaining a science-based approach, using legal mechanisms effectively, and ensuring that local communities are actively involved in decision-making processes. They also showed that conservation victories require constant vigilance and that legal protection alone does not guarantee long-term safeguarding.

The first full year following the declaration of the Vjosa Wild River National Park brought a different set of challenges. While important milestones were achieved with the adoption of the Integrated Management Plan and the establishment of the Park Administration Office, translating these commitments into concrete management actions proved to be a gradual process. This transition from advocacy to implementation highlighted the need for stronger institutional capacities, enhanced coordination among stakeholders, and sustained investments in restoration, monitoring, and management. It reinforced an important lesson: conservation does not end with designation—it begins with effective stewardship.

Experiences from the ISCCA project further emphasized the importance of cooperation and inclusive governance. Advancing the ecological corridor approach within the Polis-Valamarë-Rungajë-Moravë-Gramoz landscape required bringing together municipalities, protected area administrations, local communities, and other stakeholders around a common vision. While the participatory development of the Action Plan represented a significant achievement, the process also revealed the challenges of coordinating actors with different priorities and capacities. These experiences demonstrated that ecological connectivity is not only an ecological concept but also a governance challenge that requires continuous dialogue, trust-building, and long-term commitment. They reaffirmed that conserving biodiversity cannot rely solely on isolated protected areas, but depends on maintaining functional landscapes and strengthening cooperation across administrative boundaries.

Similarly, efforts to strengthen transboundary cooperation within the Vjosa/Aoös basin highlighted both opportunities and challenges. Building collaboration among institutions, municipalities, civil society organizations, and scientific communities from Albania and Greece required time and sustained engagement. However, these efforts also demonstrated that shared ecosystems require shared solutions and that meaningful cooperation across borders can provide a strong foundation for integrated river basin management.

Climate change and increasing environmental pressures further emphasized the need to adopt more holistic and resilient approaches to conservation. Experiences gained through restoration activities, ecological connectivity initiatives, and participation in international research networks highlighted the importance of viewing ecosystems as interconnected systems rather than isolated components. They also reinforced the value of linking science, policy, and practice to address emerging challenges and support informed decision-making.

Environmental education activities carried out throughout the year offered another important lesson: long-term change begins with awareness and engagement. Working with schools and young people across Albania revealed a growing interest in environmental issues and demonstrated the power of experiential learning in fostering a sense of responsibility toward nature. At the same time, these experiences highlighted the need for stronger and more systematic integration of environmental education into formal learning processes.

Above all, 2024 confirmed that people remain at the heart of successful conservation. Communities defending their rivers, municipalities participating in ecological corridor planning, scientists contributing knowledge, teachers inspiring younger generations, and partners supporting innovative initiatives all demonstrated that lasting change can only be achieved through collective action. These experiences strengthened EcoAlbania's conviction that conservation is not merely about protecting species or landscapes, but about building a shared responsibility for the future.

The lessons learned throughout the year will continue to guide our work in the years ahead. They remind us that conservation is a long-term endeavor that requires perseverance, collaboration, and the willingness to adapt to new realities. More importantly, they reaffirm that meaningful change is achieved not through isolated efforts, but through strong partnerships and a common commitment to safeguarding Albania's natural heritage for generations to come.

PRIORITIES

Looking ahead to 2025

Looking ahead, EcoAlbania will continue to strengthen the work of the Vjosa Wild River National Park, supporting effective administration, monitoring, and protection of its ecological integrity.

1 WRNP Administration

Support effective administration of the Vjosa Wild River National Park.

2 Shushica & Delta

Continue advocacy, legal, and grassroots defense of the Vjosa’s tributaries.

3 Corridor Implementation

Translate the ISCCA Action Plan into measurable conservation outcomes.

4 Transboundary Cooperation

Deepen Albania–Greece dialogue on Vjosa/Aoós governance.

5 Education & Reforestation

Scale school activities and tree-planting across more districts.

6 Climate Resilience

Mainstream climate adaptation and nature-based solutions.

Stay connected

Join us in protecting Albania's natural heritage.

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