

Terms of Reference

Sturgeon Monitoring in the Black Sea and the Rioni River

Commence Date	20 June, 2024
Completion Date	31 August, 2024
Location / Work Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Black Sea coast of Georgia• A free-flowing section of the Rioni River (\approx100 km. upstream from the river mouth) and its estuary <p><i>Particular target sites/areas to be defined as part of the methodology by the selected party/candidate(s)</i></p>
Language Required	Georgian, English
Reporting to	WWF Caucasus Programme Office (WWF Caucasus)

I. Introduction

The status of sturgeon species has become highly critical without showing signs of recovery. The conservation of sturgeon species needs a coherent and integrated approach and mobilization of all key stakeholders - the relevant governmental institutions, non-governmental organizations, scientific and business sectors, and local communities including fishermen. The threats/factors adversely affecting sturgeon populations include changes in rivers' natural hydrological regime and blocking migration routes, destruction and loss of key habitats, illegal fishing, low water quality, and hybridization.

Six species of sturgeon used to be widespread in Georgia: Colchic sturgeon (*Acipenser persicus colchicus*), Russian sturgeon (*A. gueldenstaedtii*), Ship sturgeon (*A. nudiiventris*), Stellate sturgeon (*A. stellatus*), European/Atlantic sturgeon (*A. sturio*), and Beluga (*Huso huso*). All species of sturgeon native to Georgia are listed as Critically Endangered globally by the IUCN Red List and they are also part of the National Red List of Georgia. The Rioni is the last remaining sturgeon spawning river in Georgia and on the eastern side of the Black Sea which makes the Rioni River a global hotspot of critical importance for the survival and conservation of sturgeon.

The sturgeon populations have been dramatically reduced in Georgia and they are under continuing pressure from illegal fishing in the Black Sea and Rioni River, and from the impacts of hydropower plants (HPP) and sand and gravel extraction on the Rioni. At the same time, the conservation status of sturgeon species is poorly understood. Consistent and well-designed research and long-term monitoring activities are crucially important for proper conservation planning, improving protection measures and reducing the severity of impact factors.

The project on *Strengthening Sturgeon Conservation in Georgia* is being implemented by WWF Caucasus in close cooperation with the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia and through the financial support of WWF Switzerland. The development and contribution to the implementation of the Sturgeon Monitoring Programme in Georgia is one of the five priority areas of the project.

In the frame of the project on *Strengthening Sturgeon Conservation in Georgia*, the Sturgeon Monitoring Programme was developed with the involvement of international and national experts, which was further followed by theoretical and practical/field training. Practical training involved testing and application of the relevant monitoring methods on the Rioni River and the Black Sea.

II. The main task and responsibilities

The main task is to conduct fieldwork for sturgeon monitoring in the following two locations: (1) Black Sea and (2) the free-flowing section of the Rioni River (≈ 100 km. upstream from the river mouth) and its estuary.

Consultants, to be hired under the monitoring component of the project on *Strengthening Sturgeon Conservation in Georgia*, are expected to prepare a proposal for the given task of sturgeon monitoring in the Black Sea and the free-flowing section of the Rioni River and its estuary in June-August 2024. The key elements of the monitoring proposal will be integrated into the final/extended Terms of Reference to be part of the Consultancy Agreement. The monitoring proposal should adhere to the following structure and cover all key information to have an overall comprehensive design and understanding of the monitoring field activities:

1. Rationale;
2. The main goal of the sturgeon monitoring/fieldwork and expected outcomes;
3. Geography of the study area with highlights on the prioritized sites for the fieldwork;
4. Detailed methodological approaches by prioritized sites and particular targets for the monitoring;
5. Timeline/work plan;
6. Budget;
7. Team composition and roles;
8. CVs of involved consultants.

The consultants are liable for the planning, coordination and implementation of all field activities required for conducting the monitoring. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Logistical arrangements including transportation and accommodation for all personnel involved in the fieldwork.
- Ensuring the safety and compliance of all personnel.
- Procurement of required services, supplies and equipment including the nets and boats.

The consultants shall work in close cooperation and coordination with WWF Caucasus, which includes update meetings to discuss the planning and implementation process and/or address any issues.

III. Deliverables

- The first draft report on sturgeon monitoring results (the report structure to be further defined and agreed upon with the selected consultants).
- Video and photo materials of the fieldwork.
- Genetic samples of sturgeon species.
- The final report.