

ULUABAT LAKE MANAGEMENT PLAN

WWF-TURKEY

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ULUABAT LAKE INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT PROJECT

General Information about Uluabat Lake

Uluabat Lake

Uluabat Lake is a large, shallow freshwater lake on the south side of the Sea of Marmara, 25 km west of the city of Bursa, in the Bursa Province. The lake covers an area of about 135 km². Human settlement around the lake dates from ancient times. Local people earn their livings from fishing, agriculture and associated industries, and animal husbandry.

Biodiversity

In terms of wintering waterfowl, Uluabat Lake is one of the most important wetlands not only in Turkey, but also in the Middle East and in Europe. In 1996, a record amount of waterfowl was counted (429.423), representing the highest count at any Turkish site since 1970. The lake is a staging site to globally threatened and legally protected species such as Pygmy Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax pygmeus*), the Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*) and the Otter (*Lutra lutra*). During the first full survey of breeding birds at Uluabat Lake in 1998 by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), Uluabat Lake was found to be the most important site in Turkey for Pygmy Cormorant and Whiskered Tern (*Chlidonias hybridus*). It was also found to be the second most important site for the globally threatened Ferruginous Duck (*Aythya nyroca*). Accordingly, Uluabat Lake is an incredibly important site. Besides, Uluabat Lake has the largest white water lily beds in Turkey.

In April 1998, Uluabat Lake was granted Ramsar Site status by the Turkish Ministry of Environment.

Threats to Uluabat Lake

Despite the importance of the lake's health, both to sustain local livelihood and biodiversity, the ecology of the lake is severely threatened by:

- *Industrial and domestic waste discharges and agricultural chemicals;*
- *Over-fishing and over-hunting;*
- *Filling of the lake due to mining activities and increased erosion;*
- *Land reclamation on shoreline developments (2,000 ha during the last 25 years, especially on the delta);*
- *Human interference in the lake hydrology in the form of water withdrawal, dikes, regulation of water level, the planned construction of four hydroelectric plants in the region, etc;*
- *Rapid expansion of industrial activities around the lake.*

Integrated Management Project

In 1998, Turkish Ministry of Environment and DHKD have initiated a project in order to prepare an Integrated Management Plan for Uluabat Lake to ensure the management of

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the site according to the wise use principles and based on Ramsar Methodology. As a result of the establishment of this partnership, DHKD started to carry out its activities at the lake under the title "Uluabat Lake Integrated Management Project", with the sponsorship of Unilever. Later, the lead of the project is taken over by WWF-Turkey.

The ultimate aim of the project is that pollution is controlled and that the lake is conserved, whilst its resources are sustainably used. The project therefore aims to reverse the threats to Uluabat Lake, through the development and implementation of an integrated management plan. Key to the success of this plan is multi-stakeholder involvement and subsequent ownership. Accordingly, studies have been made over the last three years of lake's ecology, hydrology, biodiversity and of the key stakeholders and socio-economic structure of the lake region. Within the period of socio-economy study, close relationships were established with the local groups at the area. WWF Turkey staff stayed in the villages, in fishermen's and farmer's houses and shared every information and development regarding the project. Their prejudice of conservationists as an enemy were transformed into them being people who work for the long-term use of their wetland for their benefit.

Information gained through the surveys has been shared and discussed with the stakeholder groups via several stakeholder meetings, which the participation of all stakeholders (state authorities, NGOs, universities, local people-fishermen, farmer, trader, municipalities, etc) was provided.

In addition to this, WWF Turkey organized a "Management Planning Training Course for Wetlands" in Bursa, in co-operation with the Ministry of Environment.

Uluabat Lake Management Plan

When we started ?

There were no joint efforts by any parties focused on the conservation of Uluabat Lake Ramsar site except Agenda 21 "Uluabat Lake Working Group" in Bursa. But unfortunately, Uluabat Lake Working Group could not initiate organized activities and was in a need of guidance.

There were not enough knowledge on the ecological values and potential of the lake. The problems at the site were more or less defined but there were no concrete solutions for them.

Management Plan is being prepared

The last meetings for the preparation of the Management Plan took place in Bursa on 16-18 April 2002, coordinated by the Ministry of Environment. A number of 98 stakeholders participated as representatives of central government institutions, local administrations, provincial directorates, NGOs, student groups, universities, unions and chambers, etc.. The Uluabat Lake Management Plan was finalized during these meetings, taking into account information gathered about the lake, and the views of stakeholders.

The Management Plan is developed according to the Ramsar principles, which emphasizes sustainable use of the lake's natural resources whilst ensuring the active participation. A variety of stakeholders such as local and central government institutions,

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farmers, fishermen, industrialists, hunters, universities, unions, chambers and NGOs have joined forces and together developed an Integrated Management Plan for Uluabat Lake. It outlines activities and responsibilities in the framework of 4 ideal objectives:

<p>Objective I: To control pollution in Uluabat Lake Objective II: To ensure sustainable fishery at Uluabat Lake Objective III: To ensure wise use of the lake's natural resources Objective IV: To enrich the wildlife of Uluabat Lake</p>

One of the ultimate aims is for the Plan, and thus the management of Uluabat Lake, to serve as a demonstration project for the other Ramsar sites in Turkey.

The Uluabat Lake Management Plan is approved. Next step is "Implementation"!

The Uluabat Lake Management Plan is approved by the National Wetlands Committee on December in 27th 2002. The implementation of 28 of the total of 52 activities were already set in motion by various stakeholders. WWF Turkey agreed to carry out 12 activities as part of the Uluabat Lake Management Plan.

Uluabat Lake Management Plan and its activities are going to be discussed annually in "Management Plan Revision Meetings" with the participation of stakeholders. First Revision Meeting will be held in Winter 2004, by the organisation of The Ministry of Environment and Forestry, WWF-Turkey and the Steering Committee with the participation of the whole stakeholders.

Steering Committee in action!

For the better implementation of Uluabat Lake Management Plan, the participators suggested to establish a local steering committee in the management plan preparation meetings. The main aim of the steering committee is;

- To monitor the management plan activities
- To share the knowledge and progress in the management plan with all stakeholder groups;
- To find solutions if any parties have difficulties in their activities;
- To disseminate the outputs of the plan via bulletins or press releases;
- To monitor field and take immediate action when necessary;
- To provide information to the annual "Revision Meetings" of the Management Plan.

A meeting for to establish a local "Steering Committee" was held on 5th of November 2003 in Bursa. A number of 50 participators from the stakeholder groups listed above, discussed and agreed on the aims and mission of the steering committee and selected its members. Beginning with the first meeting, Steering Committee gathers every month for the monitoring, implementation and development of the Management Plan.

It is obvious that WWF Turkey played a major role in the active participation and successful preparation of Uluabat Lake Management Plan.

INFOBOX

The handful outputs of the project can be summarized as:

Awareness among stakeholders and the general public was raised on the sustainable use of the lake's resources. This led to the public pressure put on governmental institutions for the lake's conservation and as a result Uluabat Lake is maintained to be at the top in their agenda.

The local bird watching group "ULUKUS" was established by the support of WWF Turkey. WWF Turkey carried training activities for the birdwatching group, which is responsible for the wildlife monitoring activities in the management plan, became a strong NGO in the area.

Schoolchildren were educated on environmental issues regarding the lake and ULUKUS have new young birdwatchers, now.

It is observed and approved by the locals that there is a trend in increase of lake vegetation and the lake is becoming clearer due to the increase in the control on the discharges of industries after the plan.

The Ministry of Environment and Forestry has defined the resources of sedimentation (which is one of the major threats) and declared the measures to prevent sedimentation to the related and responsible institutions.

Meetings with the fishermen resulted with the better understanding of negative effects of over fishing activities to the lake's ecosystem. Today, they extend the fishing prohibition period themselves.

With the implementation of "Stork Friend Villages" Project by ULUKUS, no more stork are dead because of crashing to the electrical cables while flying or nesting.

Implementation of a constructed wetland for the treatment of the domestic waste, in a pilot village, is in action with the participation of universities, public institutions and NGOs, which is the "first" sample having participatory processes...

And so on...

Uluabat Lake Management Plan has an implementation rate of 54% after two years, with the special efforts of the local NGOs and other "Uluabat Lake Management Plan Steering Committee" member public institutions, municipalities and universities, which make the plan most successful among the other wetland management plans of Turkiye. Thanks to all...

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Photo: A young stork in the nest platform, set up by ULUKUS (2004)



Photo: Youngest birdwatcher in Gölyazi (2003)



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