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AJARIAN MOUNTAIN FORESTS ECOLOGICAL MONITORING**

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Autonomous Republic of Adjara is located in the southwestern part of Georgia on the Black Sea coast. Its southern boundary coincides with the Turkish-Georgian State border and followed by Shavsheti' ridge; from the north is bordered the Meskheta ridge, from the east is bordered Arsiani ridge, to the west is bordered the Black Sea. The area of Ajara is 2,9 thousand sq.m., that is 4,2% of the territory of Georgia. Adjara is mostly mountainous, with the wide variety of climatic conditions. 66% of the territory is covered by forests. The percentage of the forest is higher in Adjara than in any other region of Georgia.

The forest cover of Ajara consists almost completely of natural forest coppices. In conservation and reasonable use of Georgia's unique biodiversity, in the preserving environmental ecological balance plays an important role the different categories of protected areas, reserves, restricted territories and national parks in Ajara. In addition to protecting ecological significance and unique biodiversity, the protected areas of the Ajara region has the great importance for the development of tourism, the protected Areas of Kintrishi, Ispani, protected territories of Machakhela gorge, Mtirala National Park.

Apart from the Ajara climate, proliferation of certain flora in the region is determined by the soil type redistribution. Among 11 types of soils the most area is occupied by Alluvial and Redsoil (on the Seacoast), thorny (in the mountains) and mountain meadow (in the Alpine zone) soils. During the past decades, due to the increased rainfall and intensive utilization of the agricultural land, water erosion has become quite frequent in Ajara region. As of now, it occupies 30-35% of the land. Out of the total area of the region, only 25% is an agricultural land, majority of which is located on more than 100° inclination slopes. The variety of the Ajara forests is diverse and consist of up to 400 species of trees and bushes, among them beech, chestnut, spruce and soap being the most widespread in the area.

Ajara is the shelter for many kind of flora and fauna. The flora of Ajara consists about 1900 kind from the 138 families, among them are 13 narrow local endemic kinds. The Ajara fauna combines more than 1800 kinds, among them the 20 kinds are included in the Georgian Red List. The forests are the habitat (Living environment) of the significant part of these kinds.

Ajarian forest ecosystems perform many functions and are the source of various important products, among them is mentioning: wood, non-forest products, drinking water, tourism and recreation, hunting and fishing, beekeeping, the regulation of natural danger such as flood and landslides, as well as global climate regulation by carbon absorption. Therefore, forests play an important role in maintaining and improving the well-being of the local population.

Unfortunately, Ajara is facing the number of environmental threats. First of all it is soil degradation and natural disasters. The importance of the forests is increasing more in this context. However, unfortunately, the importance of the forest protection and the regulatory functions is often underestimated, that causes the degradation of the forests (for example, because of unstable cuts and excessive grazing). Their full appraisal is the necessary precondition for maintaining and improving of the healthy cover and significant functions of the forest.

The forest sustainable use and recovery plan is based on the implementation of the strategic plan of the Ajara Forestry Agency (that was developed and approved in 2015). In particular, the population will not acquire the forest, firewood and Ajara Forestry Agency will prepare and supply to the population with wood. Accordingly, the mentioned works is fulfilled considerable with higher quality and ecological norms keeping. To the 2035, the forest cover will increase by 16% of the villages surrounding territory, by means of the forest restoration and natural renewal.