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Press release

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## Western Balkan municipalities show that biodiversity-led planning can deliver true sustainable development

14 October 2011, Budva, Montenegro

**Friday 14 October 2011 saw the successful closing of the two-day international conference 'Biodiversity goes local', held in Budva, Montenegro. The aim of the conference was to further enhance local biodiversity actions in Southeastern Europe, with a focus on the Western Balkan region.**

The conference brought together almost 100 participants from local communities of countries in the Dinaric Arc region, governments, international governmental and non-governmental organizations, and various experts, who engaged in lively discussions and exchange of views, experience and expertise.

The conference recognized the increasing importance of local biodiversity action for delivering international, national and local targets for sustainable development and biodiversity. The participants strongly welcomed and applauded the leading role played by the ten municipalities (Bajina Basta, Cajetina, Dragash, Gorazde, Gostivar, Mavrovo-Rostuse, Peshkopi, Pljevlja, Srebrenica and Zabljak). The conference acknowledged that biodiversity-led planning can deliver profound economic and social benefits and thus true sustainable development.

It was decided to establish a Balkan regional learning network for local biodiversity in order to stimulate the exchange of expertise in Southeastern Europe, including the Dinaric Arc region. The learning network may become part of the UN-ECNC European Learning Network on Regions and Biodiversity.

The conference was organized in the framework of the project 'Local Biodiversity Action Plans in Southeastern Europe' (SEE-BAP) funded by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The SEE-BAP project resulted in strongly increased awareness about biodiversity and sustainable development at a local level. The ten municipalities in six Western Balkan countries each developed a local biodiversity action plan, and shared information on the development and implementation process.

ECNC-European Centre for Nature Conservation together with REC-Regional Environment Center organized the conference, with financial support from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland.

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For more information please contact: Ms Aysegul Cil, ECNC, via [cil@ecnc.org](mailto:cil@ecnc.org) or +31614157847; or Sasa Solujic, REC, via [ASolujic@rec.org](mailto:ASolujic@rec.org).

Background information and the publication *Local Biodiversity Action Planning for Southeastern Europe: A showcase* can be found here:

<http://www.ecnc.org/programmes/nature-and-society-ongoing-projects/biodiversity-goes-local>.