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## **ALBANIA MARKS WORLD WETLANDS DAY WETLAND TOURISM - A GREAT EXPERIENCE**

The Albanian Ministry of the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Water Administration and UNDP marked the World Wetlands Day. The event brought together Representatives from civil society, academia, environmental specialists and many more.

The event was a successful cooperation of the UNDP Project “Improving coverage and management effectiveness of marine and coastal protected areas” and the Ministry of Environment to promote values of our local wetlands and seas and to encourage the responsible and sustainable tourism.

The theme for this year is ‘wetland and tourism’ aiming to promote responsible tourism that supports wetlands and people. In the Albanian context the tourism in wetlands and coastal areas will continue to grow and there are many examples of sustainable tourism in wetlands and ample evidence that income from tourism can bring substantial benefits for wetlands, local communities, and local and national governments. At the same time, there are also examples of how uncontrolled, unsustainable tourism can negatively impact upon wetlands, their wildlife, and the ecosystem services wetlands provide for human populations, and this needs to be addressed.

The Deputy Minister of Environment, Forestry and Water Administration, present at the event amongst others highlighted the values of the Albanian wetland and efforts done to improve their ecosystem management and conservation. He also brought forth other biodiversity conservation issues and their pertinence into the WWD 2012. He also informed participants that several activities and celebrations, starting with this one today and being finalized on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February, will be organized to commemorate this special day in Albania.

Mr. Freddy Austly, UNDP Deputy Country Director amongst others pointed out: “Tourism should promote and support wetland biodiversity



by reducing pollution from tourism activities, supporting biodiversity conservation, ensuring that no threatened or endangered species are put at risk from tourism. World Wetlands Day 2012 offers some great opportunities to raise awareness about how people can be 'responsible tourists'. In Albania, there are many examples of sustainable tourism in wetlands and coastal areas evidencing that income from tourism can bring substantial benefits for wetlands and local communities, like in Prespa, Divjaka, Narta, Orikumi, Kune Vaini, Butrinti", etc.

Mrs. Elvana Ramaj from the Ministry of Environment focused on the specific environmental values of the Albanian wetland, priority habitats and species they host. She also informed about the latest improvement of the biodiversity legal and regulatory frame as well as on the institutional improvement in respect to better site management and administrations.

A film was also displayed which focused on the Albanian coastline and marine area: "**Where the Ionian sea begins**". This film showed the outstanding habitats and rare species living in the Albanian waters, very professional shooting of the Albanian wetlands, coastline as well as the submarine life.

Several photo stands showing photos taken from all over Albanian wetlands and nearby communities were also displayed thus strongly echoing the relationship established between these ecosystems and people.

The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration and UNDP are working to conserve and manage the ecosystems and improve the legal and institutional tools which allow better administration of the nature resources and contribute to sustainable development.

