

Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Challenge Fund Annual Report

To be completed with reference to the “Project Reporting Information Note”:
(<https://iwt.challengefund.org.uk/resources/information-notes/>).

It is expected that this report will be a **maximum** of 20 pages in length, excluding annexes)

Submission Deadline: 30th April 2022

IWT Challenge Fund Project Information

Project reference	IWT082
Project title	Combating poaching and trafficking of Critically Endangered sturgeon
Country/ies	Georgia (Europe)
Lead partner	FFI - Fauna & Flora International
Project partner(s)	High School of Justice (HSoJ) School of Natural Sciences and Engineering, Ilia State University (ISU) Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia Ministry of Finance of Georgia, Revenue Service, Customs Department
IWTCF grant value	£307,152
Start/end dates of project	Start on 01/04/2020 and expire on 31/03/2023
Reporting period (e.g. April 2021-Mar 2022) and number (e.g. Annual Report 1, 2, 3)	1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022 Annual Report 2
Project Leader name	Fleur Scheele, Sub-Regional Manager, Caucasus
Project website/blog/social media	N/A
Report author(s) and date	Fleur Scheele, 28 th April 2022

1. Project summary

After many centuries of structural overharvesting all around the world, all 27 sturgeon species worldwide are now on the brink of extinction. A unique assembly of up to six sturgeon species still inhabit the eastern Black Sea, using one single river in Georgia as their last spawning habitat, the Rioni River. Although all species are Critically Endangered, legally protected and enlisted in CITES appendices, and local populations of all sturgeon species are alarmingly small, trafficking is still ongoing. Specimens that are captured, accidentally or by targeted fishing by commercial fishers at sea or by local anglers and poachers at the river, are usually sold to local traders, independent of size or species. The fish is then sold for consumption to local hotels and restaurants, or to private customers; for commercial breeding to local fish farms; or for entertainment of tourists to local hotels. Some sturgeon might also be sold for consumption across the Turkish border. Due to the very small population sizes, any increased mortality can bring these Georgian sturgeon to extinction. Therefore, Fauna & Flora International (FFI) is working to bring a halt to poaching and illegal trade so that the marginalised populations will get a chance to recover.

This project takes a multi-faceted approach that is delivered in partnership with local and national stakeholders and that ranges a broad spectrum from awareness raising, enhancement of local ownership, and working towards long-term sustainable income generation in fisheries, to crime prevention, law enforcement, and improvement of judicial processes. Bottom-up conservation activity by local citizens and fishers is combined with training and operational support to law enforcement bodies, prosecutors, and judges to address poaching and trafficking issues. Key Government agencies and local communities take leading roles in the project, while transboundary trafficking is addressed through international platforms.



2. Project partnerships

The project engages with a number of local and international partners to deliver the desired outcome, outputs and activities, as set out below:

High School of Justice (HSoJ), continues to be a key project partner, contributing to the joint development of a training module on environmental law with a focus on trade (output 3.1), on co-organising trainings on Conventions that apply to Georgia (output 3.2), and on coordinating with the Prosecutor's office and on the organisation of platform events (outputs 3.3 and 3.4). Throughout project years 1 and 2 a productive relationship has developed with HSoJ and the ongoing development of training materials and planning of workshops has continued positively.

The long experience of the High School in working with judges proved to be of great value, while FFI's suggestions for training themes, approach, and trainers were new for the High School.

FFI's partnership with *Iliia State University (ISU)*, is very productive and without this relationship much of the sturgeon research and other project activities taking place would not be possible. More specifically, ISU has contributed to:

- fish trade data collection and markets monitoring (output 2.4),
- organising awareness raising and educational activities at regional schools (output 1.3)
- educating the judiciary, law enforcers and prosecutors on genetic techniques (output 2.3).
- Advising on technical aspects of the project and developing training materials (output 3.1).
- Contributing to the state of knowledge related to sturgeon conservation and broader biodiversity conservation in Georgia (which is currently data deficient).

Further, FFI works closely with ISU to build capacity via internships and work with university staff, with the long term goal of developing a pipeline of local expertise and a robust evidence base on which to base sustainable and informed conservation outcomes for the Republic of Georgia.

The *Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture* continues to work with FFI in the field to stop poaching (output 2.1), as well as at a central level by engaging with FFI on the preparation and delivery of training materials (output 2.3). The Ministry and other departments also attended the platform meetings held in Year 2. As expected, a few representatives from the *Customs Department* also attended online training events.

Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, *Rioni River Council* and *Youth River Council*, it was not possible to organise debates, meetings, festivals, exchanges, or other activities with members of the (Youth) River Councils. As most members do not have reliable internet access and are located in remote locations, it was not possible to bring local people together for the grassroots, accessible events that we were hoping for. We did reach out to members via phone, replacing some Youth River Council members who had finished high school, and gave possibilities to join the YRC to new youth from the region. If the pandemic will allow us to physically bring people together again, we are hoping to do so in Project Year 3 as members from both councils are still expressing interest in continuing their engagement with FFI.

Although engagement of these local bodies remained challenging due to the pandemic, we did engage actively with a whole number of other actors, with whom we collaborated closely.

World Sturgeon Conservation Society and sturgeon scientists based in the EU and in the USA have continued supporting the project with scientific advice, and the FFI team is regularly discussing sturgeon conservation in the region with *WWF* to coordinate strategies and exchange information.

US Department of Justice of the US Embassy (USDoJ) have continued to support the project in Year 2, becoming more active throughout the year by strongly supporting the Prosecutors training in Q4. Not only did the USDoJ provide a significant in-kind contribution by bringing in a US Prosecutor as one of the programme's main speakers, two representatives of the USDoJ were physically present at the training and contributed greatly to discussions and providing international context to the training, thereby adding significant weight to the training.

The USDoJ also supported FFI in building relationships with the *Prosecutor's Office* of Georgia. Never having worked with the Prosecutor's Office before, we soon discovered there were opportunities for a larger training event than we initially planned to do when we envisioned organising an activity with prosecutors. This led to a successful, full-fledged, in-person, two-day training event for prosecutors, organised at the end of Year 2 by FFI in collaboration with the Prosecutor's Office and support from the USDoJ. This experience was so positive that we will be looking into possibilities post project to initiate more activities in collaboration with the Prosecutor's Office as well as with the USDoJ.

FFI's partnership with *European Network of Prosecutors for the Environment (ENPE)* also remains strong and in Year 2 saw ENPE experts leading training sessions at the prosecutors training (Output 2.4).

The *European Union Forum of Judges for the Environment* supported FFI's training of judges with materials and presentations at the end of project year 1, and remained available throughout year 2 for questions and advice. They will remain FFI's first point of contact for any future activities with judges that require an EU perspective.

Local *schools* in the project region reached out to FFI throughout the year, asking for sturgeon mural paintings that directors, teachers, and children had seen on a few school walls in the region. Teachers were also asking for presentations by FFI staff and for educational materials. As schools were physically closed for much of the year due to rigid COVID regulations, we could not visit classrooms or engage with children, but we did use our budget for local youth engagement to produce sturgeon mural paintings on the school walls, thus creating a network of colourful sturgeon paintings across the region, which will in the future (in Year 3 or after project end) hopefully also serve as a way of bringing school children from different parts of the region together.

Overall, the project Outputs are not possible without the robust and productive partnerships that FFI has fostered and we will continue to develop and utilise these in Year 3 of the project.

3. Project progress

3.1 Progress in carrying out project Activities

Under output 1: Local citizens protect sturgeons against poaching for illegal trade and support legal fishing activities, on the Rioni River spawning migration route.

Activity 1.1: FFI's Citizen Inspectors patrol the Rioni River to monitor poaching and IWT activities throughout the sturgeon spawning season, reporting incidents to the Environmental Supervision Department.

Progress: During the sturgeon spawning season months falling in year two (April to September 2021), 90km of the Rioni River, was patrolled night and day by FFI's 12 local Citizen Inspectors. A 2021 poaching monitoring report was produced by FFI for 2021. Data have been recorded through SMART patrolling records and through written datasheets for every single patrol throughout the project year. A total distance of 4,997 kilometres were covered in 5,334 patrolling hours in year two of the project. SMART Patrolling and Cybertracker software to record and analyse incidents. In total:

- 1,498 observations of fishing in the Rioni river, of which 13 identified as illegal and reported to the Environmental Supervision Department.
- Carrying out 12 joint poaching monitoring activities with participation of 27 Supervision Department (SD) inspectors. As a result, the SD inspectors confiscated the following illegal fishing equipment:
 - 21 fyke nets; and
 - 100 large hooks attached to 3 large ropes (from 1 incident).

Activity 1.2: FFI trains 100 fishers on legal fishing techniques, raise awareness on sturgeon conservation, and invites and encourages them to actively support sturgeon conservation and research.

Progress: Between 1st April and 30th September 2021, the FFI team trained 185 fishers, 118 of whom were anglers on the Rioni River and 65 of whom were Black Sea fishers.

- The fishers learned about the use of legal fishing methods, and were taught and asked to take non-intrusive fin clips for genetic analysis as well as photographs when catching and releasing a sturgeon.

- All fishers were also educated about the endangered status of sturgeon, and were asked to always release sturgeon when caught.

In many cases, Rioni River fishers are now willing to release sturgeon (74 releases in 2021), and many have shared photographs and genetic samples of sturgeon since these trainings (69 genetic samples collected by fishers in 2021).

Activity 1.3: FFI and River Councils jointly organise 6 meetings, discussions, and awareness raising festivals and events per year, reaching 800 local villagers, teachers and schoolchildren.

Progress: Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in Year 2 of the project physical meetings were not possible and in the project region, there is very little internet access prohibiting online meetings with some stakeholders and beneficiaries. Whilst progress Activity 1.3 was slower than anticipated in 2021, actions included:

- *Youth Rioni Council:* In 2021, the Youth Rioni Council team of 20 members has been re-established.
- *Posters distribution:* 36 sturgeon posters have been distributed to local fishers, schools and local authorities.
- *Sturgeon murals on school walls:* many schools came to FFI throughout the year to ask for a sturgeon mural painting. We create 8 large paintings on outer walls that can be seen from aware, to raise local awareness and understand the importance of Rioni river and sturgeon conservation.

In response to COVID-related challenges, and in close collaboration with school directors, FFI instead created large murals on eight schools. Some 1630 pupils, plus their families, neighbours, school teachers and support staff; and 9400 Facebook visitors viewed pictures of the paintings, while the paintings continue to be clearly visible for all villagers. We therefore estimate at least 15,000 people will have seen the paintings. In addition, we posted information on social media about sturgeon, underwater biodiversity, and women working in conservation, and highlighted how we invite fishers and hunters to work with us to work towards better protection of Georgia's biodiversity. The local FFI Facebook page, which targets local communities in the project region, has over 8,000 followers in Georgia.

Schools were also asking for presentations by FFI staff, which had to be postponed as schools were closed for much of the year; however, the FFI team did start creating educational materials for teachers instead. These will be finalised and disseminated in Year 3, and if the COVID-19 restrictions will allow us, we intend to actively visit schools and engage with schoolchildren as well as with members of our (Youth) River Councils again.

Under output 2: Increased capacity of law enforcement and government agencies to enforce laws on poaching and trafficking of sturgeon in Georgia (Rioni River and Black Sea).

Activity 2.1 FFI's Citizen Inspectors provide in-situ intelligence and logistical support to Environmental Supervision Department to reach, detect, handle, and confiscate illegal fishing equipment on the water.

Progress: In all cases where FFI and/or Citizen Inspectors detected illegal fishing equipment at the Rioni River during the reporting period, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture was immediately informed through the Environmental Supervision Department's Hotline. All inspectors who subsequently arrived at the Rioni received support and on-site training on detection of fishing equipment, use of the boat, and safe confiscation of illegal equipment.

During the anti-poaching activities at the Rioni, 27 law enforcement officers worked together with FFI on the water and thereby received training and support of the FFI team.

Activity 2.2 FFI organises central-level training events for authorities on IWT, CITES, threats and international obligations two days a year, every year.

Progress: In order to reach our goal under Activity 2.2 of training >150 members of Georgia's national Environmental Supervision, Customs, and Police departments on IWT and the application of crime prevention techniques in a wildlife crime context, we developed training materials and contracted the Senior Specialist of the Biodiversity Division of the Department of Biodiversity and Forestry (of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture), as well as the Head of the Biodiversity Control Service, Environmental Supervision Department (of the same Ministry).

Throughout the year, FFI organised several online training events for law enforcement officers from strategically selected locations. In total, 109 law enforcement officers were trained, with officers from the Customs Department of the Ministry of Finance; police officers of the Ministry of Internal Affairs; and environmental inspectors from the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture.

Larger training events were prohibited due to Covid-19.

Activity 2.3 FFI and Ilia State University develop molecular techniques for species identification, provide sampling instructions to authorities, disseminate sampling kits, and provide technical support for prosecution.

Progress: In Year 2 of the project, molecular techniques for species identification were utilised to determine whether samples of sturgeon tissue were wild (illegally caught / sold) or farmed (legal to sell / buy), the gender of sturgeon in wild populations (i.e. to inform population viability) and to determine hybridisation of wild caught sturgeon (again, speaks to wild population viability). In short:

- Intensive collaboration with fishers in 2021 and previous years led to the availability of sufficient sturgeon samples of various species, with tissue samples taken by fishers in situ if/when sturgeon are accidentally caught. This allowed for the development of molecular markers to identify species and hybrids;
- The total number of sturgeons reported by fishers to FFI in 2021 until the end of September 2021 reached 74, with 69 genetic samples being collected, an increase on 2020 (55 samples were collected in 2020);
- Of the sturgeon samples, the majority (51%) were found to be Russian sturgeon (*Acipenser gueldenstaedtii*).
- Notably, one sample was confirmed to be a Ship sturgeon (*Acipenser nudiventris*), a species previously thought to be extinct in the Rioni River.

These studies are the first of their kind in Georgia and utilise novel techniques that have only emerged in recent years. As such, the FFI team has sought an agreement with the genetic laboratory of the world class Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research (Germany) for a collaboration to jointly analyse 100 sturgeon samples that were collected by FFI. The Institute is kindly offering its support to our project and has invited FFI's collaborator from the Ilia State University molecular genetics laboratory to work in the Berlin laboratory for several weeks in 2021. The support we are receiving from European sturgeon geneticists, including from the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research (IZW), is of crucial importance for the development of scientific work on Eastern Black Sea sturgeon genetics.

In autumn 2021, Springer Journal *Conservation Genetics* published an open access article, financed with the IWTCF grant, produced by the same ISU geneticist in collaboration with FFI and geneticists from the University of Padua, Italy, called *Interspecific hybridization in natural sturgeon populations of the Eastern Black Sea: the consequence of drastic population decline?* . The full article can be accessed freely online: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10592-021-01413-7>

The genetic research carried out by the ISU geneticist at the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research in autumn 2021 is expected to result in another scientific article, for which we will seek publication possibilities in Year 3.

Additionally, FFI has been working to develop the first baseline monitoring study of Rioni sturgeon to assess species composition and genetic diversity, and importantly, to determine if the sturgeons are still recruiting, which was confirmed in 2021 – a significant finding. Also, in order to safeguard spawning conditions, we have started data collection on the river. In support of this work the following activities are underway:

- FFI is training and employing two PhD students who started PhD projects on sturgeon in 2019 and continued in 2021;
- three leading European and one American sturgeon scientists regularly advising on research and conservation efforts by FFI; and
- intensive fieldwork on the Rioni in August and September to collect samples.

With regards to providing technical support for prosecution, the FFI team has been explaining to law enforcement officers and legal practitioners such as judges and prosecutors, how genetic sampling can help identify trafficked specimens, using an instruction video, as well as, targeted training sessions led by a geneticist from ISU.

Activity 2.4 FFI supports and encourages Environmental Supervision Department to inspect markets for illegal sturgeon sales and use genetic sampling techniques to distinguish wild meat from farmed.

Progress: Throughout Year 2, FFI has again been communicating regularly with central authorities as well as Environmental Supervision Department regional leads and local inspectors, to emphasise the need for market inspections and to explain the possibilities of genetic identification. This has not visibly led to increased monitoring of markets by law enforcement bodies but lobbying efforts by FFI continue in the hope that the situation may improve in the future.

Within the framework of the fish trade & market monitoring, 183 visits were conducted by FFI:

- 87 visits to fish markets;
- 69 visits to restaurants;
- 11 visits to hotels; and
- 16 visits to supermarkets.

Of the visited 69 restaurants, two confirmed that they could provide the wild sturgeon meat based on customer requests. Out of the visited 87 fish markets, one market confirmed that they would provide the wild sturgeon meat on demand. Market surveys will be continued in Year 3.

Under output 3: Increased capacity of prosecutors and judiciary to interpret wildlife laws and effect increased successful prosecution and sentencing of wildlife crime cases

Activity 3.1 FFI and High School of Justice develop environmental law and IWT training module for judges and the module taught annually in HSoJ's regular teaching curriculum.

Progress: In close collaboration with the High School of Justice and with judges who were selected to become future trainers, a training module was developed. The content was developed in collaboration with a law professor, an environmental expert, the European Network of Prosecutors for the Environment, and the European Union Forum of Judges for the Environment. A group of 5 judges were upskilled via a Training-of-Trainers (ToT) workshop in Q4, Year 1. Leveraging this in Year 2, these judges led subsequent training sessions with a further 15 judges. The Year 2 training workshop focused on supporting judges to make better informed decisions when considering and sentencing wildlife crime cases (Output 3.1) paired with sessions on international conventions and EU Directives (Output 3.2).

The training was highly successful, with 15 judges trained and showing great interest in all topics. The programme was shaped by FFI, the High School of Justice, technical experts, as well as, a number of judges who had become trainers under our previous ToT workshop (Year 1). The

training was opened by the British Ambassador to Georgia via an online connection with the British Embassy in Tbilisi.

Due to the success of the training, the great interest of judges in future trainings, and the fruitful, friendly, and highly professional collaboration with the High School of Justice, we will seek to repeat and expand this work in Year 3 of the project.

Activity 3.2 FFI and High School of Justice facilitate learning visit of selected Georgian judges to European institution for training on EU Directives and Bern/Bonn Conventions.

Progress: As set out in Activity 3.1 (above).

Activity 3.3 FFI and High School of Justice develop training materials and train 20 prosecutors in best practice protocols for collecting evidence and presenting it in court.

Progress: The first contacts with the prosecutor's office were established in Year 1, with support from the US Department of Justice of the US Embassy (USDoJ) in Tbilisi. Following this, a two day training event for prosecutors was held in Q4, Year 2. Eighteen prosecutors attended the training event, which focused on building their skills and knowledge base to bring and prosecute IWT cases. Presenters at the workshop included:

- Anne Brosnan - Chief Prosecutor, Environment Agency, England (United Kingdom); ENPE - European Network of Prosecutors for the Environment;
- Ashley Petchey and Sally Robinson - The Crown Prosecution Service, England and Wales;
- Mark Williams - Assistant United States Attorney (Federal Prosecutor), Chief, Environmental and Community Safety Crimes Section, Los Angeles, California, USA
- Kakha Artsivadze - Programme coordinator, Board Member, Center for Biodiversity Conservation & Research (NACRES);
- Paata Turava - Professor of Administrative Law, Faculty of Law, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University;
- Kristina Koroshinadze - Senior Specialist of the Biodiversity Division of the Biodiversity and Forestry Department, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia; Member of CITES Standing Committee from Georgia;
- Maia Chkhobadze - Head of the Biodiversity Control Service of the Department of Environmental Supervision, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia; and
- Tamar Beridze - PhD student, Geneticist, Faculty of Natural sciences and Medicine, Ilia State University.

Pre- and post- knowledge tests illustrated that knowledge increased as a result of the training and feedback forms highlighted that learners appreciated the trainers' engaging approach, the diversity of training, and learning about the value and importance of biodiversity to Georgia. Subsequent training workshops were requested, including to cover the Criminal Code of Georgia in more detail, add a longer session on expert witnesses and forensic and to provide more practical examples of Georgian criminal cases.

Activity 3.4 FFI and High School of Justice establish a wildlife crime platform and organise 2 platform meetings every year to stimulate exchange enforcers-prosecutors-judges.

Progress: Two platform meetings were held on Year 2, targeted at Georgian practitioners and experts working to combat IWT in Georgia, with the goal of building understanding and fostering collaboration to reduce wildlife crime and protect Georgia's biodiversity.

The first platform meeting included a presentation by wildlife trafficking expert Timothy Wittig and focused on Global Wildlife Trafficking: Best Practice in Sharing Information and Coordinating Action. The second platform meeting included presentations on Restorative Justice by Jacob Phelps & Maribel Rodriguez, and Environmental Liability Reform in Georgia by Ucha Dzimistarishvili. Invitees included representatives from Prosecutor's Office of Georgia; The High

School of Justice, Administrative and criminal law judges and assistants of Judges; Department of Justice, U.S. Embassy in Georgia; British Embassy in Georgia; The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia: Biodiversity Services; Supervision Department; Agency of Protected Areas of Georgia; Ministry of Internal Affairs: Legislative Division, Border Police; Revenue Service of Georgia, and the Customs Department.

Under output 4: Increased coordination and action by key actors within Black Sea range states to address IWT

Activity 4.1: FFI initiates 8 exchanges with high-level national decision-makers in Georgia and organises one large multi-stakeholder meeting per year to lobby and advocate for sturgeon.

Progress: Meetings with high-level national decision-makers took place on multiple occasions in 2021, including:

- FFI engaged with the World Sturgeon Conservation Society to raise the question of sturgeon conservation in the Rioni River with the Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture. The WSCS communicated with the Minister and Deputy Minister via mail, to which the Deputy Minister responded in writing.
- To address sturgeon conservation concerns, share insights from the field and findings from our scientific research, and offer support on shaping a national sturgeon conservation strategy, FFI met with both Minister and the Deputy Minister in September 2021; spoke with the head of the Biodiversity and Forestry Department on multiple occasions and gave two presentations about sturgeon conservation to the Ministry, and participated in a multi stakeholder meeting about sturgeon that was organised by WWF in summer. To avoid duplication of this event, we redirected our funds for a sturgeon multistakeholder event towards the organisation of an in-person wildlife crime training for prosecutors instead.
- In addition, FFI engaged with the European Energy Community to raise concerns over the impacts of planned hydropower construction on the Rioni River.
- FFI engaged with sturgeon experts in US and EU to plan for a national-level sturgeon conference in Year 3, to be organised by FFI in Georgia; and started searching for funds to co-fund the expenses of this large-scale event.

Activity 4.2: FFI meets several times a year with Turkish agencies and research institutions and collaborates on data collection and knowledge exchange regarding transboundary sturgeon trade.

Progress: travel restrictions prevented the FFI team from travelling to Turkey to build the relations that are needed to start sharing data and knowledge. We did engage with sturgeon experts and conservationists in Turkey, Romania, and Central Europe and are hoping to visit Turkey and create new partnerships in Turkey in Year 3.

Activity 4.3: FFI stimulates prioritisation of sturgeon conservation in regional planning and decision making regarding fisheries, bycatch, and IWT in 4 regional and international Black Sea fora.

Progress: With a lack of international and regional events being organised and FFI not being in the position to organise any larger-scale events, we unfortunately did not have the opportunity to act on this. We will work more actively with our colleagues in Romania and Turkey in Year 3 to deliver more fully on this activity.

Under output 5: Evidence-based behaviour change strategy developed to tackle demand post project.

Activity 5.1: FFI produces a supply and demand study report and develops a behaviour change strategy.

Progress: As planned, in Year 2, Activity 5.1 progressed with the research methodology being designed and consultants hired to carry out data collection of the project. To gather the qualitative data we need to build consumer profiles, consultants were trained to employ an in-depth questioning technique. Activities started in Q4 of Year 2 and are continuing into Year 3.

3.2 Progress towards project Outputs

Output 1: Local citizens protect sturgeons against poaching for illegal trade and support legal fishing activities, on the Rioni River spawning migration route. Without the support of the IWTCF for FFI's project, no patrols would be taking place at all; local fishers would not feel supported when they speak out against poaching; and poaching would return as fishers would feel the sturgeon is a lost cause.

In Year 2, support for sturgeon conservation in the project region continues to grow. Engagement of fishers, and communities of the Rioni River region more broadly, have increased the participation of community members in natural resource management and decision making. Evidence suggests that this is changing attitudes and behaviours towards sturgeon and their conservation, as evidenced by increasing reports by fishers, uptake of social media posts, increased genetic sampling by fishers & other community members and anecdotal reports from the field. Now, the FFI team in the field encounters on a daily basis fishers who openly support sturgeon conservation. From April 2021 to September 2021, 74 fishers reported, photographed and released sturgeons following FFI's awareness raising activities. Further, despite far greater patrolling effort in Year 2 (more patrolling hours and total distance) a proportionally far smaller number of poaching incidents have been detected suggesting poaching may have decreased in the patrolled sites. Additionally, genetic sampling by fishers took place 69 times in 2021, an increase on the number collected in 2020. Both of these results indicate a positive shift in attitudes towards sturgeon protection by Rioni River fishers.

Output 2: Increased capacity of law enforcement and government agencies to enforce laws on poaching and trafficking of sturgeon in Georgia (Rioni River and Black Sea). FFI's activities again made significant steps towards this output. Throughout Year 2, the FFI team has been building the capacity of law enforcement officers and government agencies through online trainings and in total, 109 law enforcement officers were trained. Not only did these officers learn about regulations, detection and prevention, but they also learned practical lessons, for example on how species can be identified.

All illegal fishing gear found in the Rioni by FFI's team was reported to the authorities, and in all cases, authorities arrived on site. In each incident, FFI's Citizen Inspectors provided support on the ground by showing law enforcement officers how to detect illegal gear, how to access the river, how to collect the equipment, and how to record the offence.

The FFI team thus not only provided authorities with the theoretical knowledge but also with practical skills to enforce laws that protect sturgeon in Georgia.

Output 3: Increased capacity of prosecutors and judiciary to interpret wildlife laws and effect increased successful prosecution and sentencing of wildlife crime cases. Without FFI's intervention, no prosecutors or judges would be trained on wildlife crime, international environmental legislation, or on domestic laws protecting biodiversity. The first successful steps to engage judges and prosecutors were made in year one, laying the foundation for high-impact trainings in years two and three for judges and prosecutors.

The trainings that FFI offered to judges in Q1 and to prosecutors in Q4 of Year 2 were unique events, no such trainings had ever been organised before in this country. Both events were highly successful, organised in close collaboration with international and national institutions, government agencies, and NGOs.

Output 4: Increased coordination and action by key actors within Black Sea range states to address IWT. Due to lack of travel opportunities and conference opportunities, this year has not shown progress towards this output. As the COVID situation seemed to shift during the last weeks of the Project Year, we ended the year in the good hope that travel to Turkey and in-person meetings with multiple actors will become a possibility in Year 3.

Output 5: Evidence-based behaviour change strategy developed to tackle demand post project. Steps were taken in Year 2 to prepare for data collection on demand for sturgeon meat in Year 3 of the project. Further, market surveys conducted in Year 2 provided crucial information on the supply and demand for sturgeon meat in Georgia.

3.3 Progress towards the project Outcome

Outcome: Sturgeon are protected by local and national actors; with illegal activity monitored, and demand-driven threats identified, thereby effectively mitigating the current and future threat of IWT in Georgian territorial waters.

0.1 90km of spawning route patrolled for IWT and illegal fishing activity by FFI and government inspectors, which leads to confiscation of poaching equipment on over 20 occasions per season. (Baseline: no confiscations currently taking place at all.). In year 2, all 90km of spawning route were patrolled, with 5,334 patrolling hours and a total distance of 4,997 km patrolled between March – September 2021. In total, 13 cases of illegal fishing were found, including 21 fyke nets and 100 large hooks attached to 3 large ropes by the FFI team and Citizen Inspectors, all of which were confiscated by the authorities.

0.2 By year 3, in 80% of cases where a sturgeon IWT offender is identified, the offender is prosecuted. (Baseline: no sturgeon criminal IWT cases prosecuted at all.). In Year 2, 27 Environmental Supervision Department inspectors have received instructions from the FFI team in the field, and have immediately applied this new knowledge in 13 illegal fishing cases. Judges' training has progressed well and while it is too soon for cases have passed through the judicial system to reach prosecution, we consider the project to be making good progress against this indicator. Further, training on IWT targeted at prosecutors was conducted in Year 2 to build capacity of prosecutor to bring and successfully prosecute IWT cases. Through our work with prosecutors we have come to understand that IWT cases are very rarely prosecuted, and that IWT is not a priority for the Prosecutor's Office. Prosecutors are not picking up or prioritising IWT cases, and law enforcement officers do not often follow through and collect the right evidence. We are hoping that in the long term, our training of all parties in the chain enforcement-prosecution- court sentencing will lead to actual prosecutions and convictions; however, during Year 2 of this project, we have not seen any IWT cases being prosecuted.

0.3 By year 3, 20 cases of illegal sturgeon sales have been detected and prosecuted by authorities. (Baseline: zero effort and zero detections.). Fish trade and market surveys were conducted in Year 2, and of the 183 visits conducted, 2 restaurants confirmed that they could provide the wild sturgeon meat based on the demand in advance. Of the fish markets, one market confirmed that they would provide the wild sturgeon meat if requested by customers, but no wild sturgeon was actually found. We have attempted to engage the authorities to organise joint visits to markets and stimulate officers to identify illegal sales at markets; however, we have not received information about actual patrols by law enforcement agencies at fish markets. We are hoping to learn more and see more action in Year 3.

In partnership with ISU, genetic identification techniques are being used to analyse samples of sturgeon taken from markets to determine if any samples – sold as legal, farmed sturgeon – are actually illegal, wild sturgeon. The results of this study are being finalised and are anticipated to be published in Year 3 of the project.

0.4 By year 3, the sturgeon and its conservation are an established theme at relevant official Black Sea Country regional meetings and especially meetings on environmental, fisheries, biodiversity and marine/coastal resource management. (Baseline: sturgeon is not mentioned at

all.) No progress was made on this point but FFI is actively seeking for opportunities in this direction, which will be a priority in Year 3.

0.5 By year 3, an evidenced based behaviour change strategy to shift traders, vendors and consumers away from sturgeon meat has been developed. (Baseline: No existing research on traders, vendors and consumers and no behaviour change strategy available). Work has commenced to collect that data to inform the behaviour change strategy, which is on track to be completed as schedule in Year 3 of the project.

3.4 Monitoring of assumptions

Under the general project outcome: Sturgeon are protected by local and national actors; with illegal activity monitored, and demand-driven threats identified, thereby effectively mitigating the current and future threat of IWT in Georgian territorial waters, we identified the following assumptions:

0.1.1 Poaching equipment is detectable: this statement holds true for Year 2 of the project as no new poaching techniques have been introduced; based on frequent exchange with authorities, fishers; and observations in the field.

0.1.2 It is understood that Enforcement success from a zero baseline results in an increase in the number of seizures: this still holds true for Year 2 of the project.

0.1.3 Organised crime does not become engaged in sturgeon IWT in Georgia: this still holds true. To date, including Year 2 of the project, we have not found any strong indications for organised crime despite have conducted market surveys to investigate the supply of sturgeon products in the Republic of Georgia.

0.2 Prosecutors and judges agree and are enabled, through appropriate laws and processes, to deal with IWT cases: this still holds true in Year 2 of the project, and there are currently no reasons for concern.

0.2 + 0.3 The Environmental Supervision Department discloses numbers and information on IWT cases to FFI: we are not receiving much information about cases. This is partially due to the fact that physical meetings were again postponed throughout Year 2 due to COVID, and exchanges about slightly confidential information that is not normally published were not happening.

0.3 Legal basis for action by enforcement personnel is present: this still holds true for Year 2 of the project, however, there are concerns over a current lack of political will to enforce environmental legislation and limited channels for FFI to influence the government.

0.4 The political situation between Georgia and Turkey and Turkey's other Black Sea neighbours do not deteriorate to the point of the ending of diplomatic relations: this still holds true, and there are currently no tensions that are expected to culminate in this feared outcome.

0.5 The wild sturgeon supply chain in Georgia is transparent enough to apply regular social research methods rather than apply police-style criminal investigation methods as used by state intelligence agencies: this appears to remain true for Year 2 of the project and does not seem to have hindered data collection including supply and demand studies.

Under Output 1: Local citizens protect sturgeons against poaching for illegal trade and support legal fishing activities, on the Rioni River spawning migration route, we formulated three assumptions:

1.1 Local support for FFI is sufficient to allow safe patrolling: this remains accurate for Year 2 of the project and we continue to observe that the project is widely supported and none of our team members are experiencing any safety issues in the field.

1.2 FFI retains positive image in the region and continues to maintain trust amongst fishers and

local communities throughout project duration: this remains true and relations with local stakeholders are excellent. There are no reasons for concern identified by FFI.

1.3 River Council members remain motivated to play an active role: FFI succeeds in maintaining a trustworthy reputation in the region and parents and schoolchildren trust their children to participate in FFI activities: this remains true in Year of the project though COVID-19 caused similar challenges with the River Council in Year 2 as experienced in Year 1 of the project. We believe however that the sturgeon paintings and Facebook posts continue to foster awareness of the project in the region.

Under Output 2: Increased capacity of law enforcement and government agencies to enforce laws on poaching and trafficking of sturgeon in Georgia (Rioni River and Black Sea), we formulated the following assumptions:

2.1 Staff turnover or reassignments at the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture do not hinder capacity, and Ministry continues to invest time in sturgeon anti-poaching: this still holds true in Year 2 of the project. We have not observed any important staff changes or lack of commitment for Environmental Supervision Department staff to come to the river when called.

2.2 Officers are appropriately authorised and resourced to be able to attend trainings as well as respond to incidences: In Year 2 of the project law enforcement staff participated in trainings and/or responded to cases. As key Ministry staff are collaborating on organising and presenting, we have not observed any lack of possibilities for enforcement officers to attend training events.

2.3 Sufficient sturgeon samples are available of various species, to allow for development of molecular markers to identify species and hybrids: This holds true and in Year 2 a sufficient supply of samples continued.

2.4 The Environmental Supervision Department agrees to disclose information on cases: this still holds true. We are not currently receiving numbers but we do hear some details about some cases.

2.5 Officers are appropriately authorised and resourced to be able to undertake illegal trade monitoring: This still holds true in Year 2 of the project.

Under Output 3: Increased capacity of prosecutors and judiciary to interpret wildlife laws and effect increased successful prosecution and sentencing of wildlife crime cases, we identified the following assumptions:

3.1 No change to the law to the detriment of wildlife protection: this still holds true and no change to the law has occurred in Year 2.

3.2 Language barriers do not prevent uptake of knowledge of the crucial texts: This holds true and FFI is working with translators to translate key documents.

3.3 Law enforcement officers enabled to apply learning by their superiors and have access to the sharing Platform (Activity 3.4), which assists prosecutors in gathering evidence that is admissible in court: This hold true for Year 2 of the project.

3.4 All stakeholders recognise the need for participation: This still holds and uptake of materials and activities has been positive in Year 2.

For Output 4, Increased coordination and action by key actors within Black Sea range states to address IWT, we formulated the following assumptions:

4.1 Government capacity is not diverted to other, as yet unknown, issues on the political agenda, and there is some continuity in staff at the relevant Ministries: this remains relevant. Political challenges and the costs of addressing the COVID-19 pandemic in Georgia continuing in Year 2 of the project, in particular, have diverted political capacity to other issues. Additionally, at the end of Year 2 (on February 24th 2022) war broke out when Russia invaded the Ukraine. This has added additional pressure to the government, further stretching their capacity.

4.2 Relevant Turkish institutions show interest and ability to exchange knowledge on IWT, sturgeon, fisheries and Black Sea management with Georgian and international NGO counterparts: this remains true as an assumption, however the practice of knowledge exchange has been hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic as seen in Year 1.

4.3 EU and FAO continue to promote sustainable fisheries and reducing bycatch and IWT in the Black Sea: this still holds true for year 2 of the project.

For output 5: Evidence-based behaviour change strategy developed to tackle demand post project, the following assumptions still hold true.

5.1 *Competent researchers will be available and will be able to identify profiles of consumer audiences to target:* This remains somewhat of a challenge with activities under output 5 commencing in Year 2 of the project, however, FFI has strong capacity internally and consultants have been identified to collect the data needed to support this output.

3.5 Impact: achievement of positive impact on illegal wildlife trade and poverty reduction

As set out in the project design & Year 1 report, our proposed impact is the recovery of six native sturgeon species in Georgia due to the removal of threats posed by illegal bycatch, poaching and trafficking. Even though the project's focus species is sturgeon, the project significantly contributes to:

- addressing IWT issues more widely through increasing national capacity of law enforcement; and,
- setting up systems that can be used as models for other illegally traded species or products.

It does so in a number of ways, including:

- increasing capacity of prosecutors and judiciary to interpret wildlife laws and effect increased successful prosecution and sentencing of wildlife crime cases (see 2);
- training high court judges, including on Conventions (CITES, Bonn, Bern) and EU Directives (see 3.2);
- establishing a platform for judges, prosecutors, and law enforcers to share relevant information to streamline the process of prosecuting traffickers (see 3.4); and by developing national environmental law and IWT training module for judges to be taught annually (see 3.1).

This project will benefit:

- the 71,000 residents of 31 villages along the Rioni River;
- some 200 riverine and coastal fishers along the Georgian Black Sea coast; and
- 70 local fish traders at six local fish markets, as the project will create the conditions to support sturgeon population recovery and eventually enable sustainable fishing.

By working towards a more sustainable management of sturgeon populations in Georgia, the project will directly contribute to the health and viability of multiple other fish species and support secure livelihoods for local communities and artisanal fishers. Local governance will be enhanced through community consultations, which will include fish traders, businesses, and consumers, enabling an environment for negotiating sustainable and legal business methods.

Another beneficiary of the project is the academic partner, ISU, whose capacity will be built by developing and applying tools for molecular diagnostics and taxonomy. Importantly, ISU can continue to develop into the first, and only, academic institution in Georgia that has expertise in, and ambitions for, scientific research on eastern Black Sea sturgeon. This will build research and analytical skills of staff, and provides career opportunities and internships for current young scientists, and jobs at a larger scale within the university.

4. Thematic focus

The project directly works towards strengthening law enforcement and the criminal justice system in Georgia, IWT Challenge Fund's 2nd key objective. It ensures that by Year 3, data and learning from regional and international fora is being used to guide decision-making relating to management of Black Sea fisheries, bycatch use and IWT, supporting IWT Challenge Fund's 3rd

key objective. It addresses the IWTCF's 4th theme through the development of an evidence-based behaviour change strategy developed to tackle demand post project.

The project's approaches also support multiple commitments under the London Declarations (2014, 2018) and the Kasane Statement (2015), including: Kasane Actions 2, 3, 7, 9, 10, and 12; London 2014 Actions A15 (I, VI), B16 (X, XI), C17 (XIII, XV, XVI), and D18 (XVIII, XIX, XX); and London 2018 Statements 9 and 13–20).

Notable achievements during the second year of the project are:

- One article sharing novel, ground breaking sturgeon research conducted in Georgia, using citizen science in a country where citizen science was never used;
- Increased effort but proportionally far fewer incidents of illegal fishing in the Rioni River suggesting a decline in illegal fishing at the project sites;
- Ongoing positive and productive engagement of fishers and fishing communities, most notably in collection of tissue samples needed for molecular studies and reporting of illegal fishing;

5. Impact on species in focus

In the short term, as wild sturgeon poaching and trade at the Rioni River will be brought to a historic low, mature individuals of spawning age will no longer be removed from the population before they can reproduce. This means that a higher number of sexually mature sturgeon will participate in the annual spawning run, leading not only to a higher number of births as well as a reduction in inbreeding and hybridisation, which are threatening the genetic fitness and health of the populations. In the medium and long term, this will allow sturgeon populations to recover in the eastern Black Sea.

However, the sturgeon's longevity and infrequent spawning cycles, combined with the reduced genetic diversity, will not allow for quick recovery. Therefore, the project does not only support immediate, direct protection measures, but also introduces systemic measures that protect the sturgeon and allow the populations to grow over the next decades. By the end of year one, we do not yet have evidence that systemic measures have already been leading directly to positive conservation outcomes.

Indicator 1.1: *The full freshwater spawning route, 90 km of the Rioni River, is patrolled night and day by FFI's 6 local Citizen Inspectors who monitor illegal activities, during the entire spawning season in every year of the project (compared to no patrolling at all without this project).*

Progress: Achieved, that is, in Year 2 the full freshwater spawning route, 90 km of the Rioni River, is patrolled night and day by FFI's 12 local Citizen Inspectors monitored, detected and reported illegal activities during the entire spawning season. This will continue in Year 3.

With regards to indicator 1.2.1: *At the Rioni River, 100 riverine fishers are trained and competent to use legal fishing methods that do not harm the sturgeon, effectively ensuring that the all riverine fishers are trained by end of year 2 (100% of fishers population). Baseline: 50 riverine fishers already trained by FFI before the project starts (amounting to 1/3 of the total river fishers population) while 2/3 (100 fishers) are not trained at all.*

Progress: Exceeded, that is, between 1st April and 30th September 2021, the FFI team trained 185 fishers, 118 of whom were anglers on the Rioni River and 65 of whom were Black Sea fishers. The fishers learned about the conservation status of sturgeon and the use of legal fishing methods, as well as genetic sampling techniques to support data collected needed for Activity 2.3 of the project. This also supported Indicator 1.2.2, that is, *By end of year 2, awareness is raised in all 150 riverine fishers and 20% of fishers agree to report illegal activities as well as sturgeon sightings to the local FFI team. (Baseline: fishers do not report to FFI at their own initiative at all.)* This is evidenced by the total number of sturgeons reported by fishers to FFI in

2021 which equalled 74, with 69 genetic samples being collected and dozens of fishers voluntarily releasing sturgeon back into the water.

6. Project support to poverty reduction

As touched upon in Section 3.5 above, this project is indirectly benefitting the 71,000 residents of 31 villages along the Rioni River; some 200 riverine and coastal fishers along the Georgian Black Sea coast, and 70 local fish traders at six local fish markets, as the project will create the conditions to support sturgeon population recovery and eventually enable sustainable fishing. Currently, local villagers who once relied on sturgeon fishing for their livelihoods no longer do so because of the scarcity of the species. Black Sea commercial fishers have voiced concerns that all fish stocks have become very small, and incomes are dropping. Anglers at the Rioni have witnessed all fish populations drop sharply in the last decades, and have advised that the river is 'nearly empty'. Local fishers, their families, and communities will hence benefit from improved fisheries management and conservation of fish that allows growth of local fish populations.

There are also links between law enforcement & poverty alleviation, with improved law enforcement – an output for this project - contributing to poverty reduction as losses to crime may account for up to 14% of GDP in the developed world with the losses disproportionately affecting poor people (DFID, 2000).

The project also focuses on the capacity of ISU, which will be built by developing and applying tools for molecular diagnostics and taxonomy. Importantly, by being involved in the project, ISU can continue to develop into the first, and only, academic institution in Georgia that has expertise in, and ambitions for, scientific research on eastern Black Sea sturgeon. This provides career opportunities for current young scientists, and jobs at a larger scale within the university (laboratory technicians, administration, etc.).

By training and employing our Citizen Inspectors, a number of whom come from lower socio-economic status communities, we are also not only offering direct benefits through providing an income source, we are also teaching them skills, knowledge and values that they will in the future be able to use for new career steps.

More broadly, by working towards more sustainable management of fish populations in Georgia, with less bycatch, poaching and illegal trade of fish, the project will directly contribute to the health and viability of multiple fish species and enable the sustainable utilisation and support secure livelihoods for local communities and artisanal fishers. Through our activities, all of the above benefits were supported throughout Year 2 and will continue in Year 3.

7. Consideration of gender equality issues

Since year one on of the project efforts have been ongoing to hire 50% female Citizen Inspectors (CI) for the spawning season starting in March 2020 to support gender balance on the CI team. Due to the local perceptions and social and cultural norms that policing, enforcement and fishing tasks typically 'men's roles', it has proved challenging to recruit females for these positions and in Year 2 only 2 of 12 CIs were female. Despite ongoing efforts to hire female CIs in 2021, these efforts proved fruitless with job advertisements attracting negative feedback from male community members and men stating that they would not let their female family members participate in such a role (i.e. acting as citizen inspector). These challenges have been leveraged to promote discussions of gender equity among the FFI team and we continue to adapt our approach with the hopes of attracting female CIs in Year 3 of the project.

We have increased visibility of female scientists, consultants and FFI team members by sending them into the project region to role model and highlight their work to fishers and local communities.

8. Monitoring and evaluation

FFI's UK-based Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning (MEL) team have continued to work closely with FFI's project leader and conservation officers in Georgia to develop internal systems to monitor and evaluate the project in Year 2 of the project and robust MEL systems are now in place, measuring impacts before and after every conservation activity and including a recent review of the project Theory of Change and further development of the Evaluation Framework to provide greater insight on project evaluation year-on-year.

The MEL team continue to provide ongoing support through facilitating regular reflection meetings, during which we refer back to the Monitoring & Evaluation tracker and discuss any adjustments needed in the M&E (particularly in response to COVID-19) and how progress is being made against each element of the project. Indicators of achievements include records of patrols, test results from pre-and post- training knowledge tests, and many more. All data are collected before, during, and after activities such as training of fishers, poaching monitoring, and attending events. As the Monitoring and Evaluation is deeply engrained in the project, it allows us to follow adaptive management practices to ensure our assumptions and activities are evidence-based.

9. Lessons learnt

Global Pandemic: Due to ongoing COVID restrictions in year 2 of the project, we have had to continue to modify many activities and limit our ambitions for international activities as well as many field activities. Whilst COVID remains a threat globally, during the last weeks of Year 2, restrictions have eased in Georgia and elsewhere, and FFI is optimistic that the project can revisit and/or strengthen some activities that had to be altered due to the pandemic in Years 1 and 2.

Gender parity challenges for CI team: Equitable engagement of women as CIs has proved to be an ongoing challenge for the FFI team as set out in Section 7 (above). In Year 3 we will start with creating a strategy with the team to shift our approach in response to lessons learnt in Years 1 and 2 of the project.

War in Ukraine: On February 24th 2022 Russia invaded Ukraine. With conflict and invasion by Russia part of the recent history of the Republic of Georgia, the acts of aggression led by Russia in Ukraine was strongly felt locally and the project has not been immune to the impacts of the Ukraine conflict. Whilst the future impacts of the conflict in the Ukraine cannot be known, FFI did take the opportunity to establish a safety & security plan for the Caucasus programme, including to ensure crucial records and data are protected should conflict occur in Georgia. Lessons were also learnt from conversations with conservation NGOs working in the Ukraine who have suffered considerable losses due the ongoing conflict.

10. Actions taken in response to previous reviews (if applicable)

Last year's review (received by FFI on 27/07/21) provided suggestions on attracting women for our citizen inspectors team: *'The report mainly focuses on number of women engaged as citizen inspectors – they have a target of 50% which they have not achieved. It would be useful in this section to discuss more about the structural changes you have made to be inclusive of women – are women not applying for these roles? If not, why not? Have you considered changes to the way in which the role is delivered that would make it more accessible e.g. hours offered, make up of teams in which they work, flexibility of arrangements etc.? Gender is not just about counting women – it is about making it possible for women to join in.'*

We have considered these questions and suggestions in multiple different ways: by having female team members fully lead on all steps of the recruitment process, providing full flexibility to potential recruits on work hours, work methods and work locations; by offering to recruit women along with other female community/family members they trust and let them work together if preferred; by discussing potential safety concerns in female-only groups, and even

by involving a husband in our activities to convince him to allow his wife to work on our team. A challenge is that women in the region are usually avoiding being at the river, associating it with male domination, danger, and dirt. The women who are interested in a role that promotes nature conservation and therefore in this employment are coming from other regions, while we want this team to be a local team to stimulate local employment and interest. Also, many women in the region are already occupied with household and subsistence farming duties and may not feel they have the time to take on additional tasks.

We will in Year 3 reach out to female ranger teams in other countries and ask these rangers for any lessons that they can share.

11. Other comments on progress not covered elsewhere

There are no further comments on progress.

12. Sustainability and legacy

The design of this project focuses on developing the capacities of local organizations, stakeholders and beneficiaries to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability of conservation actions. Specific examples of capacity building as a mechanism for sustainability & local leadership in Year 2 of the project are:

Training of judges: Working in partnership with the High School of Justice (HSoJ), a training-of-trainers event was organised in Year 1 of the project, seeing 5 judges trained to deliver subsequent workshops. The use of training-of-trainers (ToT) approaches was selected to engender ownership of community-focused project activities, and increase post-project sustainability. In Year 2 of the project, a training workshop was organised with two of the ToT trained judges leading sessions with 20 attendees. In Year 3, FFI plans to continue these outputs in partnership with HSoJ to expand upon successes from Year 1 and 2 of the project.

Training of law enforcement actors: Government agencies will be provided with species and conservation knowledge, practical skills and analytical tools that can be used without FFI's continued involvement.

Prosecutor trainings: Working with local partners and international experts, FFI has delivered training to Georgian prosecutors to enable them to be more effective in the prosecution of wildlife crimes cases regardless of FFI's involvement.

Fisher trainings: Working with fishers to uptake legal fishing techniques and understand the importance of protecting the Rioni River and reducing illegal fishing FFI is establishing a legacy of sustainable fishing that will hopefully last well beyond the life of this project.

Fostering academic excellence to build local conservation leaders and inform local action: Through partnership with ISU, FFI is working to build local technical expertise, foster young scientists and build an research and evidence base from which to support robust conservation outcomes that exist independent of the specific outputs of this project.

Further, the new sturgeon research group initiated by FFI will be attracting funds and identifying research opportunities independently from FFI. Another forensic science research group is also being established at ISU with support from FFI, which aims to enable evidence collection in order to successfully try wildlife crimes cases in Georgia.

Community outreach & education to build local awareness: FFI's community outreach and education outputs are targeted at raising awareness of conservation issues to foster environmental values among those communities most dependant on healthy ecosystems, that is the people who live closest to them. Active involvement of communities in conservation efforts is essential, and through awareness raising FFI hopes to build the values that see people acting to protect the Rioni River and its sturgeon.

13. IWT Challenge Fund identity

The project has not yet been creating international communications to publish about project successes and progress and therefore the support from the IWT Challenge Fund has so far only been communicated during meetings and events, such as during the wildlife crime trainings for judges and prosecutors and the wildlife crime platform meetings. During such meetings, we explain to participants the identity and goals of the Fund. Whenever relevant, we also invite the British Embassy to our events as well and offer the Embassy the opportunity to speak on behalf of the British Government. This happened for example during the March 2021 wildlife platform meeting.

14. Impact of COVID-19 on project delivery

As in year 1 of the project, COVID-19 continued to impact outputs. International travel between UK, EU, and domestically in Georgia was limited or impossible, which impeded a number of activities, including:

Transboundary engagement: With travel and gathering prohibited Output 4 was slow to progress. Several international fora/conferences were cancelled and we could not travel across the border to Turkey, which reduced our opportunities for networking and lobbying in the region (outputs 4.2 and 4.3). A few events were attended by FFI staff online and to compensate for the lost opportunities we have started exchanging information in online meetings with WWF Caucasus, Turkey, and Central and Eastern Europe, to make sure we are aligning strategies and identify intervention opportunities together.

Education and outreach: COVID related restriction meant the (Youth) River Council activities were not possible in Year 2 (output 1.3), especially as members usually have no internet access preventing online meetings. We are hoping to resume group activities in Year 3 of the project.

Training: At a national level, it became clear that it was not desirable to bring people together for in person training sessions, so we focussed only on one on one communication with certain stakeholders and/or beneficiaries and where possible we hosted meetings online. It is noted, however that it was reiterated on numerous occasions that trainees and trainers prefer in person meetings as they are more engaging.

15. Safeguarding

Please tick this box if any safeguarding or human rights violations have occurred during this financial year.

If you have answered yes, please ensure these are reported to ODA.safeguarding@defra.gov.uk as indicated in the T&Cs.

Fauna & Flora International (FFI) prioritises safeguarding and complies with DEFRA requirements to:

- have a safeguarding policy, which includes a statement of your commitment to safeguarding and a zero-tolerance statement on bullying, harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse;
- keep a detailed register of safeguarding issues raised and how they were dealt with
- have clear investigation and disciplinary procedures to use when allegations and complaints are made, and have clear processes in place for when a disclosure is made
- share your safeguarding policy with downstream partners;
- have a whistle-blowing policy which protects whistle blowers from reprisals and includes clear processes for dealing with concerns raised.

The exception is that FFI is still currently developing a Code of Conduct for staff and volunteers that sets out clear expectations of behaviours - inside and outside the work place - and make clear what will happen in the event of non-compliance or breach of these standards.

FFI's Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk Policy & Procedure was developed in December 2014 and last updated in March 2018. The policy applies to Members of Council and its sub-committees, FFI employees, temporary staff provided through agencies, volunteers and interns, contractors, consultants, service providers and any third parties who carry out work on behalf of FFI, in partnership with FFI or in conjunction with FFI. The policy demonstrates the organisation's commitment to safeguarding children and adults at risk and to complying with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; confirms the arrangements and procedures in place to safeguard children and adults at risk, including FFI's code of conduct; and provides clear guidance on how to raise, and how FFI responds to, concerns and allegations regarding the maltreatment of children and adults at risk. The policy expressly states that FFI does not tolerate sexual exploitation and abuse of any kind. It is noted that FFI's safeguarding policy is currently under review and the new policy, including updated reporting mechanisms, is due to be launched in Year 3 of the project. The implementation of the new policy & reporting mechanism will be enabled by two in-country Safeguarding Focal Points within FFI's project team in Georgia who have undergone training in Year 2 of the project. This new policy applies to FFI staff, volunteers, interns and partners.

Additional documents relevant to safeguarding include:

- FFI's Anti-bullying and Anti-harassment Policy;
- FFI's Whistleblowing Policy;
- FFI's partner due diligence procedures; and
- FFI's position papers on –
 - Livelihoods and Governance;
 - Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC);
 - Gender in Conservation;
 - Displacement and Restrictions on Access to Resources and Conservation; and
 - Rangers and Human Rights.

In Year 2 of the project, there have been no safeguarding incidents. Our approach is bottom-up and is based on promoting local people's interests and agency with the goal of fostering ownership of the project's outcome by local stakeholders and beneficiaries, not only for safeguarding purposes but also to support sustainability. For example, poaching monitoring activities are based on a community engagement model with Citizen Inspectors being recruited from villages adjacent to the Rioni River. Engagement and education of fishers continues to be a priority and non-punitive measures to reduce illegal fishing, such as targeted capacity building, are a crucial component of the project's design.

16. Project expenditure

The annual budgeted amount for Project Year 2 of GBP ██████ was fully used, with no over- or underspending.

Please note that the stated annual amount of GBP ██████ differs from the original planned budget shown in the 2021 Grant Offer Letter, as a change was agreed between FFI and the

donor in December 2021: an amount of GBP [REDACTED] was moved from Project Year 1 (2020-2021) to Project Year 2 (2021-2022), as confirmed in the December 2020 Change Request and subsequently in the Grant Acceptance Slip signed by FFI on 9th March 2021.

During Project Year 2, one budget change was proposed to, and accepted by, the donor through a Change Request that was submitted in December 2021. This concerned an amount of GBP [REDACTED] that was transferred from budget category 'Other' to budget category 'Consultancies'.

The figures in the column '2021-22 Grant (£)' below are reflecting the above-described changes that were agreed between donor and FFI. These numbers therefore differ from the original numbers found in the original grant application: the numbers for Year 2 from the original grant application have become obsolete.

Table 1: Project expenditure during the reporting period (April 2021-March 2022)

Project spend (indicative) since last Annual Report	2021/22 Grant (£)	2021/22 Total actual IWT Costs (£)	Variance %	Comments (please explain significant variances)
Staff costs (see below)	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	
Consultancy costs	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	
Overhead Costs	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	
Travel and subsistence	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	
Operating Costs	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	
Capital items (see below)	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	
Others (see below)	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	
TOTAL	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	

While **Staff costs** ([REDACTED] spent against a budget of [REDACTED]) and **Overheads** ([REDACTED] spent against a budget of [REDACTED]) were incurred as planned, staying close to the agreed budget with [REDACTED] variance, during the year we increased our budget for **Consultancies** with [REDACTED] from [REDACTED] to [REDACTED]

This change in the **Consultancies** category was explained to the donor as follows in a December 2021 Change Request that was approved by IWTCF:

'Due to the very positive response we have received from judges and prosecutors on our wildlife crime activities, in particular to our trainings and judiciary platform meetings in 2021, we would like to re-allocate a bit of our budget from local awareness raising activities (Output 1: Local citizens protect sturgeons against poaching for illegal trade and support legal fishing activities, on the Rioni River spawning migration route) to training for prosecutors/judges and wildlife crime platform meetings for the judiciary that will be organised in Q4 (Output 3: Increased capacity of prosecutors and judiciary to interpret wildlife laws and effect increased successful prosecution and sentencing of wildlife crime cases).'

Through our continued presence in all villages in the project region throughout the year, we feel that that we are delivering very well on Output 1 during this project year, and we can achieve our goals for this year even on a slightly smaller budget.

We have also observed a great interest from judges and prosecutors in our wildlife crime trainings and platform meetings, and we learned during the past year that judges and prosecutors in

Georgia have very little knowledge on wildlife crime. Judges and prosecutors clearly indicate there is a need for more training on the prosecution and sentencing of wildlife trafficking, and have asked FFI for more trainings and wildlife crime platform meetings. We therefore believe we should invest more heavily in organising such training events and platform meetings.

Some of our so far unused funds for national travel and accommodation will therefore be used for travel and accommodation for prosecutors to a training event (no Change Request needed for this), and some of our remaining funds for local awareness raising activities we would like to transfer from budget category 'Other' to budget category 'Consultancy'. As the latter implies a transfer of some funds between two budget categories, we are submitting a Change Request.'

Incurring our last expenditures for **Consultancies** during our March 2022 wildlife crime training for prosecutors, we ultimately spent ██████████, equalling the budget we planned to use, with ██████ variance.

The use of our **Travel and Subsistence** budget (██████████) was adjusted as international travel restrictions due to COVID-19 remained an issue throughout Year 2. This led our travel plans to be adjusted to this new reality, and resulted in a slight underspending of ██████████, representing ██████ of the budget for this category.

Budget from Activity 3.2, where selected judges were planning to travel to a European institution for training on EU Directives was not used for international travel, but instead, for a conference room, hotel costs and subsistence for a two day in-person training for judges in Georgia, which was a great success and proved to be good use of the travel budget.

We hoped until the end of the year that some international travel in the region would become feasible again. Unfortunately, during the last quarter of the Project Year, COVID cases in Georgia peaked to their highest levels and for this reason we decided to postpone regional travel to Turkey to summer 2022, in Year 3. Other international travel was not realistically feasible either. This, combined with the success of the judges training and requests from the Prosecutor's Office, led us once again to re-allocate budget for international travel to a conference venue, hotel rooms, and subsistence for an in-person training in Eastern Georgia, this time for prosecutors, which we had not originally planned to organise in this form. Again, the training was successful and the use of travel budget for this purpose proved to be a good decision.

Operating costs, originally budgeted at ██████████, exceeded the budget slightly, with a variance percentage of ██████ and expenditures worth of ██████████, reflecting some increased costs for car maintenance as well as for the judges training that was organised in a different form than originally planned.

No **capital equipment** was purchased throughout the year, as planned.

Other costs exceeded the budget for this category, with ██████ variance. The total costs incurred at ██████████ (versus a budget of ██████████) reflect a higher investment in our citizen inspectors, with the procurement of several smartphones to monitor poaching activity, and some slightly higher costs of our genetics work; both valuable investments in our projects.

Overall we feel that the annual budget of ██████████ has allowed us to conduct a myriad of activities, leading to real results on the ground.

It may be noted also that the flexibility of this grant and the budget categories is very helpful in letting our team take adequate decisions throughout the full duration of the project, and ensuring we can adjust our project activities to the reality on the ground in a timely manner. It is exactly this flexibility and cooperative attitude of the donor with regards to allowing changes that supports us to achieve the best conservation results with this grant.

17. OPTIONAL: Outstanding achievements of your project during the reporting period (300-400 words maximum). This section may be used for publicity purposes

I agree for the IWTCF Secretariat to publish the content of this section (please leave this line in to indicate your agreement to use any material you provide here).

In Year 2, outstanding achievements include:

- Engagement with fishers and Rioni River communities continues to be very productive. Despite a considerable increase in patrolling effort (monitoring hours and distance) there have been proportionally far fewer incidents of illegal fishing found. Further, fisher reports of illegal incidents, release of accidental sturgeon catches and data collection by fishers continues to grow each year, illustrating productive and positive engagement with the project.

Checklist for submission

	Check
Different reporting templates have different questions, and it is important you use the correct one. Have you checked you have used the correct template (checking fund, type of report (i.e. Annual or Final), and year) and deleted the blue guidance text before submission?	Yes
Is the report less than 10MB? If so, please email to IWT-Fund@ltsi.co.uk putting the project number in the subject line.	YES
Is your report more than 10MB? If so, please discuss with IWT-Fund@ltsi.co.uk about the best way to deliver the report, putting the project number in the subject line.	NO
Have you included means of verification? You should not submit every project document, but the main outputs and a selection of the others would strengthen the report.	YES
Do you have hard copies of material you need to submit with the report? If so, please make this clear in the covering email and ensure all material is marked with the project number. However, we would expect that most material will now be electronic.	NO

Have you involved your partners in preparation of the report and named the main contributors	YES
Have you completed the Project Expenditure table fully?	YES
Do not include claim forms or other communications with this report.	