

ANNUAL REPORT



2024

PROPARK - FOUNDATION FOR PROTECTED AREAS



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About Us

Propark – Foundation for Protected Areas is an organization dedicated to supporting professionals, organizations, and communities contributing to nature conservation through training, innovation, and strategic partnerships that sustain a viable network of protected areas in Romania.



Propark works to ensure that nature is protected by well-trained professionals and strong organizations, within a legislative framework that recognizes the value of protected areas for society.



Our Vision

By 2050 protected and conserved areas will be managed by passionate and competent professionals, reversing biodiversity loss in these areas, facilitating sustainable development and helping mitigate climate change for the benefit of people.



Our Mission

We provide life-long learning and training opportunities for protected area practitioners and conservationists and support them to better conserve nature for the benefit of society.



Message from Our Leader

2024 was a year of consolidation and continuity for Propark — a year in which we worked to transform our vision for nature conservation into concrete actions with visible impact in communities, institutions, and ecosystems.

Through the development of the Centre of Excellence for Nature and through international collaborations, we supported a new generation of protected area professionals, strengthened the capacity of partner organizations, and contributed to the modernization of conservation tools and practices.

We were present in the heart of communities — from festivals in the Făgăraș Mountains to consulting services for park administrations — and we built bridges between nature and people. We contributed to shaping public policies, created educational resources, and promoted the values of conservation both nationally and internationally.

We thank all those who stood by us: partners, beneficiaries, funders, and colleagues. Only together can we build a viable network of protected areas, supported by dedicated people and strong organizations.



We look ahead to 2025 with confidence, determined to carry forward our mission — to protect nature through well-prepared professionals, innovative solutions, and a united community.



Our Team

We are a team united by our passion for nature and the belief that change begins with people. Each of us contributes, with expertise and energy, to Propark's mission of protecting nature through well-prepared people, strong organizations, and genuine collaborations.



Tiberiu ChiricheșExecutive Director



Erika Vaida BelaConservation Director



Laura Florescu
Financial Department Director



Mara Bulea
PA Professionalization
Department
Coordinator



Andra Hăgătiș PA Management Approaches -Department Coordinator



Renate Cornici Fundraising & Technical Support



Alina Paraschiv
Financial
Department
Assistant



Dana
Dragomirescu
Communication
Specialist



Alexandra HulbanPA Professionalization

Department Assistant



Roxana lordăchescu

Environmental Education Department Coordinator



Adela Stanciu

Fundraiser



Ana Stamatescu

Education

Specialist



George Kudor Protected Area Specialist



Highlights for 2024

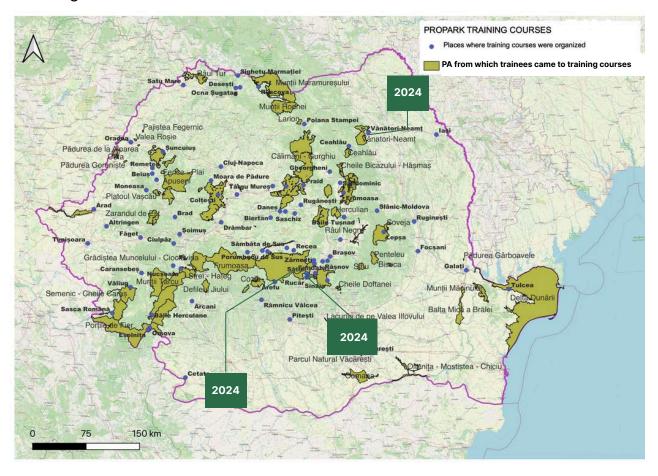
- We launched the first comprehensive blended learning program for the Protected Area Specialist occupation through the Centre of Excellence for Nature, with 18 participants.
- A total of **888 training days** were delivered through our programs and courses, reaching **172 individuals**.
- **7,000** participants attended **Făgăraș Fest**, a festival dedicated to nature and local communities, aiming to promote the uniqueness of the Făgăraș Mountains.
- Technical and financial support provided to the Vânători Neamţ
 Natural Park Administration for the implementation of its management plan.
- We began the implementation of the HORIZON NATURE-DEMO Program

 funded by the European
 Commission and carried out through an international consortium of 22 partners from 13 countries.



Where We Work

Training Events - 2008 - 2024



In 2024, representatives from 22 protected areas attended our training events.

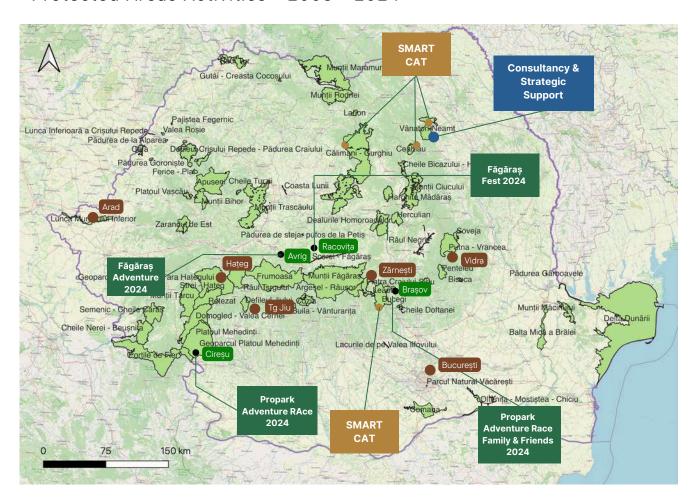
We organized training events in:

- Vânători Neamţ Natural Park (Neamţ)
- Zărnești (Brașov)
- Fundata (Brașov)
- ONLINE



Where We Work

Protected Areas Activities - 2008 - 2024



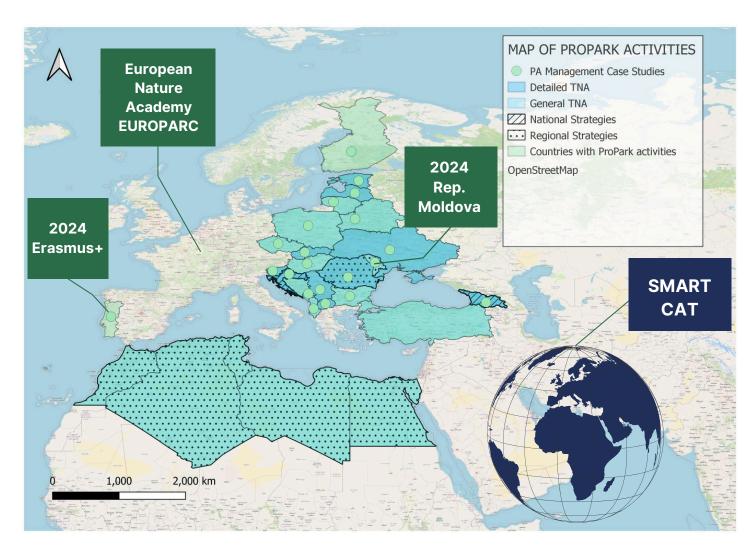
In 2024, we provided technical support for protected areas through the following management approaches:

- Outdoor events 4 events held in Racoviţa and Avrig (Sibiu County),
 Cireşu (Mehedinţi County), and Braşov;
- Tools SMART CAT implemented in 4 protected areas: Ceahlău National Park, Călimani National Park, Vânători Neamţ Natural Park, and Bucegi Natural Park;
- Consultancy & Strategic Support provided to Vânători Neamţ Natural Park;
- Nature education activities in collaboration with 6 high schools from Bucharest, Târgu Jiu, Vidra, Zărnești, Arad, and Haţeg, and 5 protected area administrations: Grădiştea Muncelului-Cioclovina National Park, Jiului Gorge National Park, Piatra Craiului National Park, Mureş Meadow Natural Park, and Putna-Vrancea Natural Park.



Where We Work

International activities - 2008 - 2024



2024

- **SMART CAT** The online tool for assessing SMART competencies (SMART = Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool) GLOBAL level
- Completion of the LIFE ENABLE project, which established the European Nature Academy, a project implemented under the coordination of the EUROPARC Federation
- Analysis of ecological restoration opportunities for forest habitats and landscapes, along with solution recommendations, in the Republic of Moldova
- Completion of the Erasmus+ project Ecotourism as a management approach in Protected Areas and a tool for generating financial benefits for communities – in collaboration with 4 organizations from 3 partner countries: Spain, Slovakia, and Austria



5 Strategic PillarsThrough Which We Drive Change

Everything we do at Propark is built on a solid foundation: the 5 strategic pillars that guide our direction, actions, and impact. They reflect how we contribute, day by day, to a stronger network of protected areas through well-trained people, resilient organizations, better policies, a clear voice in society, and a healthy organizational foundation.

These pillars represent the strategic structure of our activities, translated into projects, partnerships, resources, and tangible results. Together, they define how we drive change in nature conservation in Romania.



INDIVIDUAL CAPACITY BUILDING

Building the capacity of protected area practitioners and staff of key stakeholders



ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING FOR CONSERVATION

Building the capacity of conservation entities



SECTORAL CAPACITY BUILDING

Enable decision makers



COMMUNICATION & AWARENESS

Enabling society to better understand our organization's mission and protected areas



PROPARK ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Building Propark's capacity to achieve mission





In 2024, we continued to invest in nature conservation and protected area professionals — providing them with access to training, mentorship, and modern learning tools to make their fieldwork more effective and better recognized.











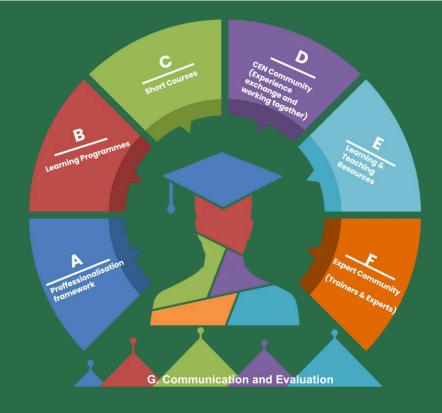
Centre of Excelence for Nature - CEN

- CEN is one of Propark's most important initiatives in support of our mission: strengthening the capacity of those working in protected areas and in nature conservation in Romania. CEN was launched in 2023 as a platform dedicated to continuous learning, professional development, and the exchange of experience among practitioners, administrators, and decision-makers in the field.
- In 2024, CEN became fully operational with blended learning programs

 — a combination of online sessions, practical workshops, and
 personalized mentorship. We ran the first comprehensive Protected
 Area Specialist program (February June 2024), which prepared a new
 generation of professionals capable of understanding and managing
 the complexity of conservation in an integrated and effective way.

CEN is a space of excellence, collaboration, and innovation, where people become a strategic resource for nature.









In 2024, we continued to provide relevant training programs for both protected area practitioners and key stakeholders from related fields, integrating new approaches and current topics relevant to protected and conservation areas.

- Leadership Course for Protected Areas
- Responsible Tourism in Forested Areas
- Guides and Tour Operators Course Visiting Opportunities in Vânători Neamţ Natural Park
- Training of Trainers ONLINE course on distance training techniques (in English)
- Ecological Restoration Course Exploring and implementing opportunities for the ecological restoration of forest habitats and landscapes (in the Republic of Moldova)
- Accredited Training Session Environmental Officer
- Study Trip to Hohen Tauern National Park Austria
- Experience Exchange in Ciugud Commune A success story in environmental policy implementation

1

Protected Area
Specialist Program

18
participants

540 person-days of

training

5

face-to-face & online courses

86

participants

207

person-days of training

6

training events for stakeholders

68

participants

141

person-days of training







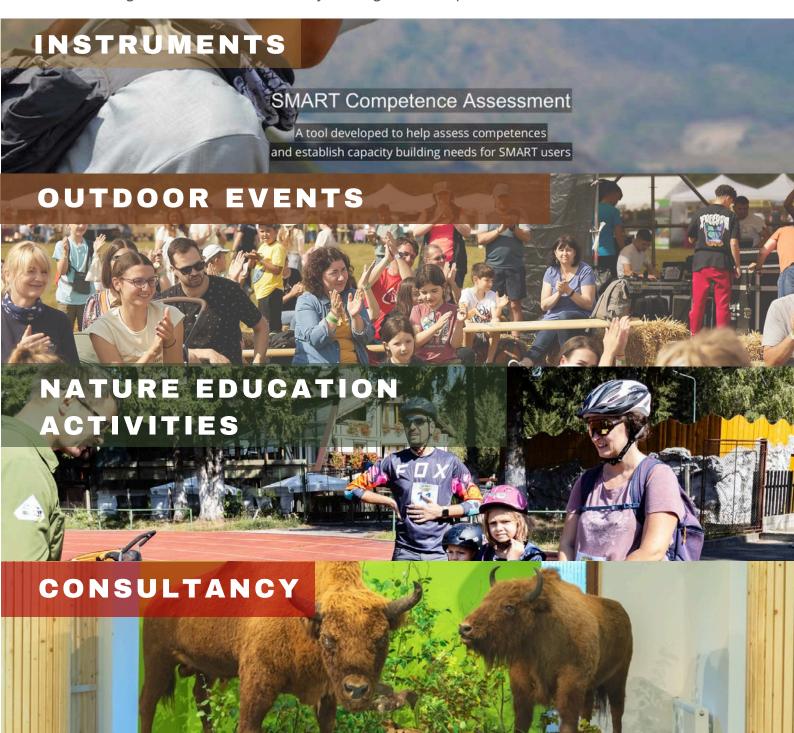






Organizational Capacity for Conservation

In 2024, we continued to support management teams and organizations in the conservation field through direct initiatives and by testing tools adapted to the local context.







Management Approaches - INSTRUMENTS

We supported management teams and conservation organizations through direct initiatives and by testing tools tailored to the local context.

The SMART Competence Assessment Tool – Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool – is an assessment tool for practitioners using the SMART system, which is internationally applied in protected area management for:

- · collecting field data (e.g. species observations, patrols, incidents),
- · efficiently analyzing and reporting this information,
- · supporting evidence-based management decisions.

1 SMART

Competences Assesment Tool

competence assessment tool for protected area practitioners
SPATIAL MONITORING AND REPORTING TOOL
(SMART) COMPETENCE ASSESSMENT TOOL (CAT)

4

protected areas where it was tested: Ceahlău National Park, Călimani National Park, Vânători Neamț Natural Park, Bucegi Natural Park

In our vision, protected areas should serve as models of sustainable development, promoting innovative solutions that support both biodiversity conservation and community well-being. Nature-based solutions (NbS) are actions that use ecosystem processes and services to address societal challenges.

NATURE-DEMO (NbS)

Through the HORIZON NATURE-DEMO project (launched in 2024), we are providing protected area specialists with a catalog of nature-based solutions (NbS), tailored for the planning and management of critical infrastructure; testing and validating these solutions in 10 urban green spaces; and offering practical examples for integrating NbS into green infrastructure management.





Management Approaches - OUTDOOR EVENTS

Organizations managing protected areas need not only resources but also innovative approaches to adapt, cooperate, and remain resilient in the face of today's challenges. Through Pillar B, we support these organizations in strengthening their long-term capacity to protect nature.

In 2024, we focused on building organizational capacity through practical outdoor experiences, conducted in and for protected areas. Events such as **Propark Adventure Race**, **Propark Adventure Family & Friends**, **Făgăraș Adventure**, and **Făgăraș Fest** were not just community or sporting activities — they became spaces for learning, collaboration, and the promotion of natural and cultural values.

The goal of these approaches: to connect protected area administrations, conservation institutions, and communities in a genuine process of organizational development based on engagement, leadership, and the exchange of experience.







Management Approaches - OUTDOOR EVENTS

Făgăraș Fest



Community event (Racoviță commune, Sibiu County) to strengthen community support for the designation of protected areas

participants

Propark Adventure

Race 6



Sporting event organized in partnership with Mehedinţi Plateau Geopark Administration.

participants

protected area

Propark Adventure Race Family & Friends

Sporting event organized in Braşov



participants

protected areas represented

Făgăraș Adventure

Sporting event organized in Avrig, Sibiu County

participants

local stakeholders for promoting the natural and cultural values of the Făgăraș Mountains





Management Approaches - OUTDOOR EVENTS







Management Approaches – NATURE EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

At Propark, we believe that nature education is not just an awareness activity, but a strategic investment in the capacity of organizations to work with people — whether we're talking about communities, students, volunteers, or partners. Through tailored educational programs and direct collaboration with protected area administrations, NGOs, and other stakeholders, we contribute to the development of tools, partnerships, and methods that increase the efficiency and impact of these organizations.

In 2024, our activities focused on:

- supporting protected area administration teams and stakeholders in initiating and implementing educational programs for nature and youth;
- collaboratively creating resources: infographics, teaching materials, lesson plans — a complete package of nature education programs;
- organizing camps, youth gatherings, and outdoor events with both educational and community-building purposes.







Management Approaches – NATURE EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

1 Nature Education Camp

15 stu

students

Continuation of the educational program Discover the Treasure of the Făgăraș Mountains — part of the LIFE project: "Creating a Wilderness Area in the Southern Carpathians, Romania" — the largest LIFE project in Romania, running from 2019 to 2025.

days

**LIFE is the European Commission's funding program dedicated to environmental and climate policy projects.

1 National Environmental Education Program – for Youth – Future Leaders for Nature

120

students involved

In 2024 — the final year of implementation — the project achieved significant milestones:

- high schools from
 Bucharest, Târgu Jiu,
 Vidra, Zărnești, Arad &
 Hațeg
- Youth participation in the advisory councils of protected areas, offering them a real opportunity to be involved in environmental decision-making.
- Study trip to Brussels 12 young people had the chance to understand how nature conservation decisions are made at the European level.
- National dissemination of the program to encourage youth involvement in nature conservation, with the support of a partner vlogger who documented the activities and conducted interviews with the young participants, both in schools and in nature.
- protected area administrations, in partnership: Grădiștea Muncelului-Cioclovina National Park, Jiului Gorge National Park, Piatra Craiului National Park, Mureș Meadow Natural Park, Putna-Vrancea National Park.





Management Approaches – NATURE EDUCATION ACTIVITIES









Management Approaches – CONSULTANCY

We provide technical support and consultancy to protected area administrations and conservation institutions, with the mission of strengthening organizational capacity through the adaptation of successful models, the development of tools, and the facilitation of participatory processes.

1 STRATEGIC Support

Continued technical and financial support for organizational capacity development and management plan implementation (through the Green for the Future Program – EUR 800,000)

protected area

the team of the Vânători Neamț Natural Park Administration

* PLANNING AND TESTING of RESPONSIBLE GREEN SPACES

assessments

2 designs

sqm completed





Sectoral Capacity & International Activities

Supporting the integration of protected areas into public policies in Romania and engaging in capacity development programs for protected area management at the European level.

We contributed to the advocacy activities of the Natura 2000 Coalition: drafting proposals for an improved legal framework for the management and governance of protected areas.

Consultancy services – at the protected area system level – in the Republic of Moldova.

International Representation.

Participation in the IUCN Regional

Forum for Europe – Bruges 2024

Erika Vaida Bela, IUCN WCPA Regional

Vice Chair.

Continuation and conclusion of the strategic partnership with EUROPARC, within the 4-year LIFE ENABLE project.

Through active involvement in public consultations and the formulation of strategic positions, Propark supported the development of a more favorable framework for nature conservation in 2024, both in terms of policies and institutional mechanisms.



Sectoral Capacity & International Activities

Competence Registry for Protected Area Practitioners in the Republic of Moldova

At the system level, for the protected area authorities in the Republic of Moldova.

workshop

Guidelines for Climate-Smart Protected Area Management Planning

for the protected area authorities in the Republic of Moldova.

workshop

days

EUROPARC

partnership closing

Online competence assessment tool for practitioners in Natura 2000 sites, promoted within the European Nature Academy

event workshop

parti<u>cipants</u>

Group Competence Assessment For Natura2000 Managers

As part of the partnership with EUROPARC, we contributed to the development of the ENA, an innovative training and capacity-building platform for the Natura 2000 network.



PROPARK

Sectoral Capacity & International Activities

Through active involvement in public consultations and the formulation of strategic positions, Propark supported the improvement of the framework for nature conservation in 2024, both at the policy level and in institutional mechanisms.









Communication & Awareness

Through communication and awareness efforts, we carried forward the message about the importance of protected areas; by participating in key national and international events and strengthening our digital channels, we contributed to increasing the recognition of Propark's mission and the professionals dedicated to protecting nature.

Communication and awareness tools for conservation professionals.

ESCAPE TENT – The Planet Rescue Adventure

A mobile educational tool based on the ESCAPE Game concept, used at 3 regional events (in Brașov and Sibiu counties). Approximately 200 children explored conservation topics in a unique and interactive way.



BIOSFERIS – the publication of the conservation community – an online magazine created by and for professionals in the field of protected areas.

In 2024, we published a new editorial issue and expanded our subscriber base.



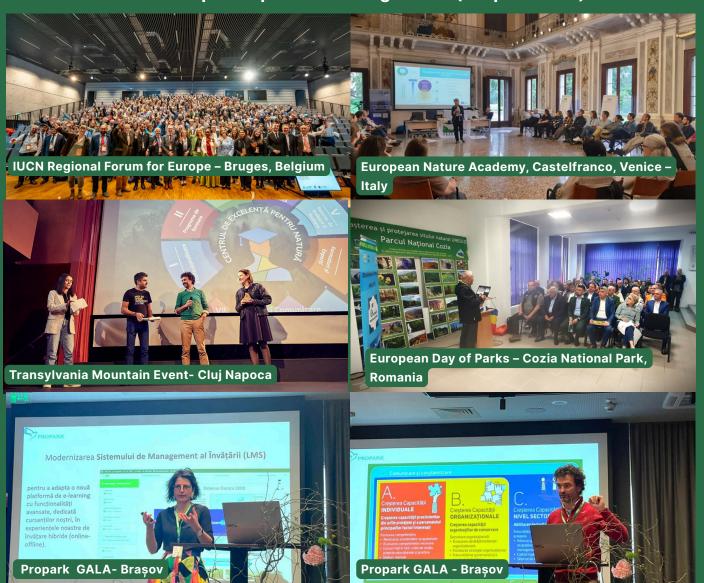




Communication & Awareness

In 2024, through communication, we not only informed but also created a genuine bridge between protected areas and the general public, between professionals in the field and communities, between nature and people. We transformed stories, data, and field experiences into interactive campaigns, educational tools, and moments of visibility for the entire conservation network.

Communication and awareness events for conservation professionals – which we participated in or organized (Propark Gala)







Propark Organizational Development

In 2024, Propark invested in strengthening internal capacity by developing the team, diversifying funding sources, expanding collaboration networks, and improving infrastructure. These efforts reinforce the organizational foundation to support and amplify our impact in nature conservation.

13 members of Propark team

>60 collaborators

specialized in delivering Propark courses and programs

of which

22 trainers

involved in 2024 in delivering Propark courses and programs





PROPARK

Propark Organizational Development









Propark Organizational Development

The Propark Board of Directors is a professional team actively involved in the organization's strategic decisions; committed members who consistently contribute to identifying solutions and relevant approaches to achieve Propark's objectives.



Roger Laird De Freitas

President



Paul Hotham
Member



Tobias Garstecki
Member



Bogdan Micu Member

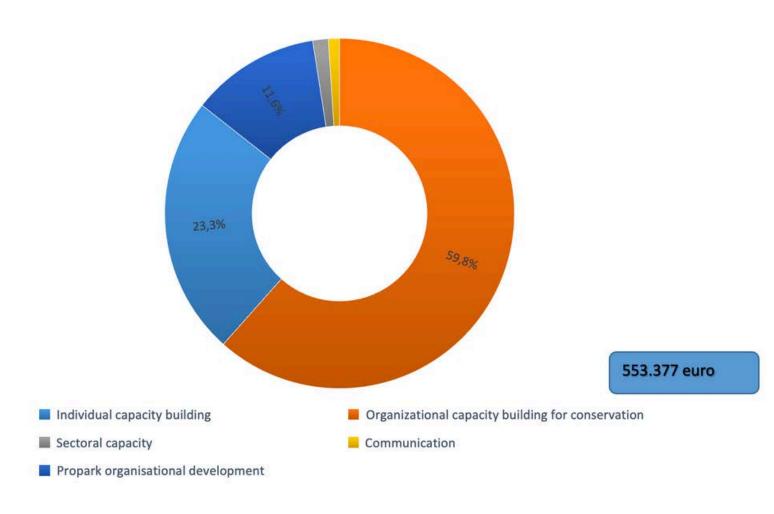


Laura Popeea

Member



FINANCIAL OVERVIEW – Expenditures by Strategic Pillars in 2024

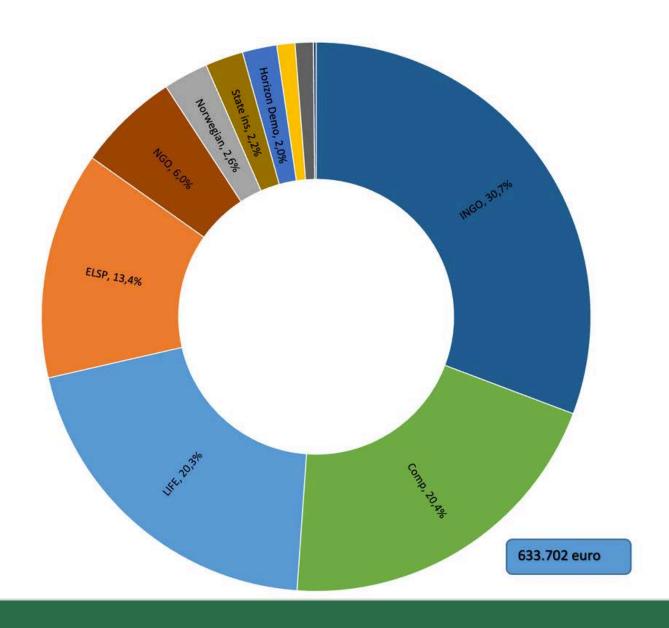


- Organizational capacity building 59.8%
- Individual capacity building 23.3%
- Propark organizational development 11.6%
- Sectoral capacity 1.4%
- Communication 1%

Approximately **60%** of the 2024 funds were primarily allocated to **Pillar B – Organizational Capacity Development for Protected Area Management**, and were used for activities such as: sporting and community events, nature education activities, technical and financial support for Vânători Neamţ Natural Park, and the planning and testing of responsible green spaces.



FINANCIAL OVERVIEW – Funding Sources in 2024

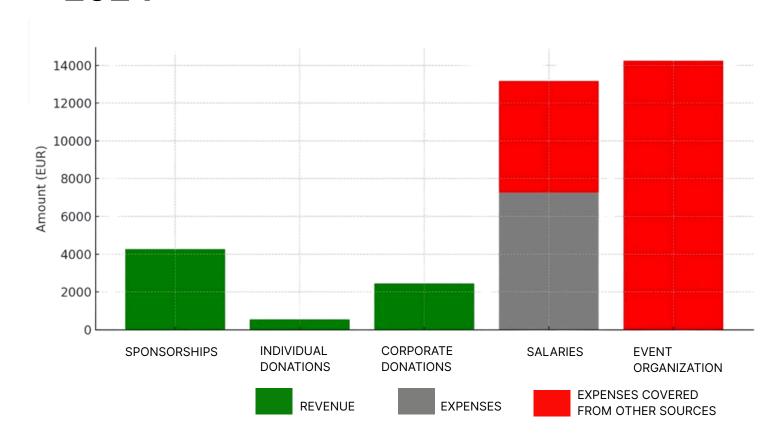


- International NGOs 30.7%
- Companies 20.4%
- LIFE Program 20.3%
- ELSP Program 13.4%

- National NGOs 6%
- Norwegian Funds 2.6%
- Romanian Government 2.2%
- HORIZON NATURE DEMO 2%
- ERASMUS+ Program 1.1%
- Individual Donors 1.1%
- Interest 0.2%



FINANCIAL OVERVIEW – Fundraising in 2024



In 2024, the actual income generated from fundraising activities (approximately EUR 7,300, coming from sponsorships, individual donations, and corporate donations) was significantly lower than the total expenses (approximately EUR 27,400).

Of this amount, EUR 13,100 was allocated to team salaries and EUR 14,300 to event organization. The resulting difference — a deficit of approximately EUR 20,100 — reflects a natural stage in the development of fundraising capacity, typical of the early years of implementation, and represents a strategic investment aimed at generating sustainable income in the medium and long term.



Propark Beneficiaries

In 2024, Propark's activity focused on providing concrete support to those who play an essential role in nature conservation in Romania. We worked directly with people and institutions, tailoring our actions to their real needs in order to strengthen their capacity to protect biodiversity and sustainably manage natural resources.

The main beneficiaries of our work in 2024 were:

- Management entities of national and natural parks, to whom we provided training, consultancy, and innovative tools for planning and community engagement;
- Environmental NGOs, supported through events, training, and collaboration in national and international projects;
- Schools and universities, with whom we implemented nature education programs and promoted active learning in protected areas;
- Natural resource management entities, involved in participatory management initiatives and responsible green space development;
- Private companies, which supported our initiatives through sponsorships, know-how, and involvement in nature-focused actions;
- Regional and local public authorities, essential partners in projects aimed at protecting natural heritage and connecting communities with protected areas.

Propark continues to build bridges between diverse conservation actors, thus contributing to a national network for nature, education, and responsibility.



Propark Collaborators

Collaboration is essential to what we build at Propark. In 2024, we worked alongside a diverse network of partners from Romania and across Europe — institutions, organizations, international networks, and local actors — who helped us amplify our impact, develop training programs, and strengthen best practices in the field of conservation.

Strategic partners in international thematic projects:

- WWF partner in online courses within the ForestConnect program
- EUROPARC European-level professionalization
- Flora & Fauna International organizational development and fundraising
- IUCN development of the Competence Assessment Tool

European networks and institutions involved in developing the European Nature Academy:

EUROPARC Federation, TESAF UNIPD (Italy), E-C-O Institute of Ecology (Austria), Alfred Toepfer Akademie für Naturschutz (Germany), MedPAN (France), Suomen Kansallispuistot (Finland), Fundación Bernáldez (Spain) ➤ as part of the LIFE ENABLE project, concluded in 2024.

Partners in nature education and outdoor sports,

with whom we developed nationally impactful events: sports associations, environmental NGOs, universities, and protected area administrations. ERASMUS partners from across Europe,

with whom we implemented educational and experience-exchange projects: CESEFOR and Fundación Monte Mediterraneo (Spain), Hochschule für Agrar (Austria), Lišov Museum (Slovakia) ➤ partnership concluded in 2024, with notable results in training and cross-border cooperation.

New collaborators from the Republic of Moldova:

Biotica and EcoContact – for strengthening individual and sectoral professional capacity of protected area practitioners in the Republic of Moldova.

And from Romania:

The Mehedinți Plateau Geopark Administration, actively involved in organizing Propark Adventure event.



Propark Funders

We thank all the funders who supported us in 2024, helping us develop impactful projects for protected areas, professionals, and communities. With their support, we expanded professional training, fostered innovation in environmental education, and strengthened the capacity of conservation institutions.

Together, we are contributing to a network of professionals prepared for the future of nature in Romania and across Europe.





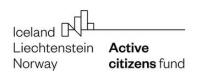




























Next Stepts for 2025

Centre of Excellence for Nature // CEN //



• Comprehensive blended learning program – Ranger – authorized by the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Education – a 5-month blended-learning program for conservation specialists (January – May 2025).



 Revision of the Ranger Occupational Standard and reauthorization, recognized by the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Education, to carry out this professional training program.



• Development and strengthening of the CEN Community, along with programs and courses dedicated to protected area managers and stakeholders.



 Drafting of recommendations regarding the competencies required for protected area management in the Republic of Moldova.



• National adoption of the SMART management tool and its adaptation to the specific needs of each natural and national park.



ADVOCACY

We will continue to be active members of the Natura2000 Coalition, with the goal of strengthening policies related to protected areas and initiating the process of professionalizing protected area management.

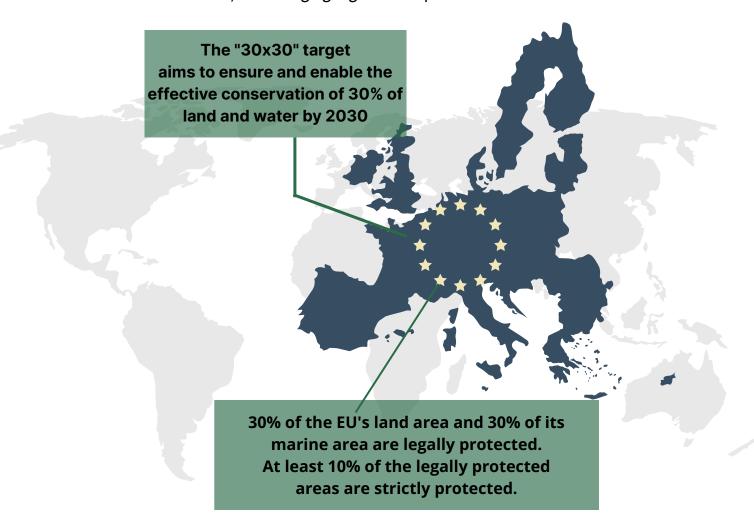


TECHNICAL SUPPORT FOR PROTECTED AREAS

We will continue to support the team of Vânători Neamț Natural Park in implementing its management plan and will begin a similar collaboration with Putna Vrancea Natural Park.

We are contributing to the global architecture of conservation

Propark actively contributes to the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 through: training protected area professionals, developing guidelines for nature-based solutions, and engaging in European initiatives.



Equality and full participation of communities

Nature-based solutions for climate adaptation

E Competence-based training

😚 International engagement and regional approach



How You Can Support Us

We believe in collaboration, in building bridges between people and organizations that share the same vision: protected, well-managed, and respected nature.

We are always looking for partners, collaborators, experts, volunteers, or supporters who want to contribute to the professional development of those working for nature and to strengthening conservation capacity in Romania and beyond.

If you resonate with our values and want to be part of the effort for a greener future, let's connect!



<u>Facebook</u> <u>Instagram</u> LinkedIN



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