

Minister urges efforts to preserve biodiversity in Jabal Moussa

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BEIRUT: The endorsement for approval of Lebanon's Jabal Moussa as a UNESCO biosphere reserve in early February recognizes the international acclaim for the area's wild and unspoiled habitats, its renowned Adonis Valley with its ancient agricultural terraces and trails, and the strong support expressed among the local communities for the nomination.

Located in the Lebanon mountain range, Jabal Moussa is situated in the Kesrouan-Jbeil area.

Speaking during a reception on Monday hosted by the Jabal Moussa Association to celebrate the nomination, Environment Minister Antoine Karam said he was proud that the mountain top will be considered a biosphere reserve, adding that his ministry will exert "all necessary efforts" to preserve the biodiversity in Jabal Moussa.

"The environment Ministry will submit a proposal to the Cabinet to consider Jabal Moussa a protected area," he added.

Pierre Doumet, head of the Jabal Moussa Association said the area will be considered a UNESCO biosphere reserve in May.

The endorsement raises the number of the Lebanese biosphere reserves to three, ranking the nation third out of 12 Arab countries with regards to their the number of such reserves.

Biosphere reserves are recognized under UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme, which innovate and demonstrate approaches to conservation and sustainable development. They are under national jurisdiction; yet share their experience and ideas nationally, regionally, and internationally.

The World Network of Biosphere Reserves provides a scientific support structure, featuring worldwide coverage of representative ecosystems and agreed-upon objectives for carrying out research and monitoring.

The program was launched in the 1970's and targets the ecological, social, and economic dimensions of biodiversity loss, with a goal of reducing that loss.

Individually, the biosphere reserves act as laboratories where biodiversity conservation and sustainable development approaches are tested and developed. As such, they are ideal places to design innovative economic models that benefit local populations and maintain environments, biodiversity, cultural heritage and associated values.

Of the thirty-five nominations for biosphere reserves from all over the world, only 17 were recommended for approval on February 9, all of which were endorsed a few days later.

According to UNESCO's report on the Jabal Moussa reserve, Jabal Moussa is particularly special because, "The variation between forest types and agricultural crops surrounding small villages forms an infinite mosaic in the landscape.

"The reserve is a green island amidst wide extensions of bare lands represented by the semi-arid Bekaa valley to the East and the relatively dry plains to the South."

The report continues, "The vision for the coming years for the ... biosphere reserve is that it will be widely regarded in the Middle East and Mediterranean regions as an outstanding example of reserves because of its success in sustainable conservation and development.

"Such a reputation can only be achieved with wise management consistent with the management, visitor, community relations, environment education, business and fundraising plans," it adds.

Lebanon's own website for the Jabal Moussa reminds its readers of the value of the site. "The uniqueness of Lebanon lies in its endowment with the wealthy biodiversity of those protected areas," it says. "This inherent asset attracts nature-lovers around the world, thereby promoting the flourishing of a new form of tourism in the country - ecotourism."

According to "The Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves," found on UNESCO's website, biosphere reserves are created "to promote and demonstrate a balanced relationship between humans and the biosphere."

Therefore, accordingly, registered UNESCO biosphere reserves must "encompass a mosaic of ecological systems," and thus consist of combinations of terrestrial, coastal, or marine ecosystems. - ***The Daily Star***