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19 Elul 5782

**General – The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel**

The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel was established in 1953 and has been operating for almost 70 years, with the goal of protecting nature, the landscape and the environment in Israel. Israel has been blessed with a natural environment which is extraordinary in its uniqueness and importance, and the efforts to protect it in a country that is about to become the densest of all Western countries is a complex challenge.

In recent years, in light of the intensity of the environmental and climatic crisis, the Society for the Protection of Nature has set itself the goal of **recreating and rehabilitating** habitats, while continuing to protect exising habitats and open spaces.

To achieve these goals, the Society for the Protection of Nature has been working in a variety of ways, of which the following are the principal ones:

* A change in policies and influence on the decision makers within the governing institutions – the government, the Knesset, the local authority, planning bodies, the courts
* Education aimed at recognizing and loving the land and fostering an affinity for the environment among children and young adults
* Increasing public awareness of the protection of nature in different populations.
* Working within the business sector to incorporate considerations of protecting biodiversity in their policies

The Society for the Protection of Nature is active in all sectors of Israeli society throughout the country by way of its professional and administrative headquarters and field units that include field schools, urban centers, activity centers in Arab society and more.

**Formulation of Policy and Influence on Decision Makers as a Tool for Achieving the Goals of the Society for the Protection of Nature**

Influence on decision makers was and has always been a principal course of action for the achievement of the goals of the organization, which was established against the background of a struggle to prevent the drying up of the Hula Valley wetlands, a first and groundbreaking struggle in the world of environmental policy change in Israel.

The ability of the Society for the Protection of Nature to influence decision makers results from its being a professional body based on know-how and knowledge together with the wide public support we enjoy.

Policy change is achieved in two main ways which complement one another:

* Initiative: the formulation of a new policy on a certain subject and steps for implementing and assimilating this policy inside the relevant authorities.
* Response: a struggle to change policies or decisions which harm nature and the environment.

**Channels of Action for Policy Change**

**The planning system** is a central arena for policy change in the activity of the organization. This arena allows us to have a **broad** dramatic impact on environmental reality **in relation to all the core areas** – open spaces, the sea and the beaches, streams, the urban space, wildlife, and coping with climate change. The planning institutions make decisions regarding the future of the open spaces, which are essential for the protection of nature – they are the place where it is determined where nature will be protected and where it will be destroyed in favor of roads, infrastructure and construction.

After several decades of intensive work in the planning institutions, we are seeing the fruits of our hard labor in the form of environmental norms which guide the work of the committees, the approval of plans for nature reserves, the assimilation of critical layers such as ecological corridors, etc.

Knesset committees and professional activity in the government offices also constitute important channels for influencing decision makers. The writing of position papers, participation in meetings of Knesset committees, the writing of bills, the submission of queries to Knesset members, etc. In this arena as well, we can take pride in amendments to legislation and government decisions initiated by the Society for the Protection of Nature or to which it was a partner. And a great deal of work still remains to be accomplished.

**Formulation and Change of Policy on Climate**

The importance of the work of changing policy is particularly critical with regard to dealing with the climate crisis and the protection and rehabilitation of natural systems – areas requiring a national effort, as well as regional and international cooperation. Therefore in this area, in addition to education, information and increasing public awareness – extensive action is required among decision makers.

Israel has been slow in implementing environmental policy in general, and climate policy in particular. What has been notably lacking in Israel is the recognition of the close link between the climate crisis and the crisis in the natural systems, the fact that the climate crisis is the result of a disruption of natural processes, and the critical place of natural systems in dealing with the climate crisis – in mitigation and adaptation.

There is no civil organization in Israel which represents and recognizes the natural systems better than the Society for the Protection of Nature and can bring both professional work and public support to the desks of the decision makers. Therefore, the function of the Society for the Protection of Nature to bring nature into the discussion of dealing with climate change is absolutely critical.

In the framework of our function, we are attempting:

* to consolidate broad, deep climatic-ecological knowledge for the State of Israel, including the need for regional cooperation. As a civil society organization, creating such collaborations is more convenient and easier than for governmental entities. For example, we recently held the first conference in the field of nature rehabilitation in the era of climate rehabilitation together with partners from Jordan and Morocco;
* to assimilate the accumulated and updated ecological knowledge among decision makers by means of professional work for people involved in the subject in government offices. For example, we are currently preparing a document on nature-based solutions to deal with climate change for the Ministry of Environmental Protection;
* to promote government decisions and examine the contents of legislation and government programs to ensure that they include ecological-climatic knowledge in the best possible way. For example, we are involved in the formulation of the national bio-diversity plan, in the strategic plan for open areas, etc.;
* to constitute a professional body responsible for examining conflicts between ecological and other interests and to offer optimal solutions. For example, the Society for the Protection of Nature is the leader in the green organizations regarding the preferring of solar panels on roofs and dual use of land, over the harming of open areas;
* to lead the professional position of the environmental organizations in Israel in the planning of the energy disposition in Israel – so that Israel may act in accordance with the international commitment to a transition toward renewable energy, not to open new fossil energy facilities and to do all this in the most efficient and correct way for the benefit of both nature and man.