

Albanian residents and a non-governmental organization have filed a lawsuit against the government for giving a permit to build a hydropower station in a protected valley.

Toka (Earth), a local organization founded in 2016 to conserve the Albanian Alps, and about 1,000 residents of four villages in the Valbona Valley want the court to “declare the absolute invalidity of the concession contract.”

The 8,000-hectare (20,000 acre) valley is in the Albanian Alps, a scenic area attractive to tourists about 260 kilometers (160 miles) north of the capital, Tirana.

Toka president Catherine Bohne said the project would cause “serious and irreparable damage to both the natural environment as well as the community’s social well-being.”

The case was taken to the Administrative Court in Tirana after failed attempts to convince the Energy Ministry to stop the project. Bohne said the project’s opponents encountered either unresponsive ears or were given the runaround.

Energy Ministry spokesman Dardan Malaj said the ministry inherited hundreds of concessions for small hydropower stations from the previous government.

“As they have gone to the court, let’s wait for its verdict,” Malaj said.

Toka was founded a year ago to protect the environment. The group says there already are 14 hydropower projects in Valbona Valley National Park, approved or in the early stages of planning, that it calls “among the most egregious and ill-thought-out examples of unsustainable hydropower development in Albania.”

Bohne said area residents were worried when they saw the first developer start building a few years ago a 2 megawatt power plant that could change the flow of river water with a new canal. A single project would seriously impact and potentially destroy the ecosystems of the national park, she said.

Bohne said they are now focused on stopping the construction work while the case makes its way through the legal system.

In a separate development, four environmental NGOs are protesting a proposal for a resort center at the Divjake-Karavasta National Park, located 100 kilometers (62 miles) south of Tirana on the Adriatic Sea shore. The groups fear the center would destroy the park’s flora and fauna.

They called on the government Monday not to allow the project to go forward.

“Mass tourism is not Albania’s strongest point,” the groups said. “To be compatible with the neighbors, Albania should go toward ecotourism.”

Source: pennenergy