

Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund

Process Framework for Involuntary Restrictions

Project name: Improving the Management of Hutovo Blato Nature Park

Project ID: 62733

The project will take place in Hutovo Blato Nature Park in Bosnia-Herzegovina, located within the delta of Neretva River close to the border with Croatia. Established in 1995 the Nature Park covers a wetland area of 7.400 ha mainly composed of lakes and marshes. It represents one of the most important stop-over sites for migratory birds along the Eastern Adriatic. Due to its extraordinary conservation value and ecological importance it has become part of the Ramsar network in 2001.

Even though the Nature Park is an official hunting ban area throughout the whole year, it is being constantly exploited illegally, namely by illegal killing of birds. Awareness for the conservation value of the site and its potential to foster sustainable regional development is widely lacking amongst the local communities. At the same time, the Nature Park authorities are lacking effective management strategies to implement proper visitor guidance and to make the park an attractive destination for nature lovers and eco tourists on the national and international level.

Consequently, the project activities will be targeting three major goals:

1. Improve the overall protection of Hutovo Blato Nature Park by improving the quality of the ranger service and the overall management
2. Monitor the protection of the park by using water birds as indicators of biodiversity and human disturbance via regular monitoring activities
3. Promote the natural wealth of the park amongst the local community and stimulate the attention of decision makers towards its protection via promotion and educational activities

The project will follow the CEEP strategic direction 3, "Improve the conservation and protection status of 44 priority key biodiversity areas". This strategic direction has three themes which will all be tackled by the project: (3.1) Establish new protected areas and **promote improved management of existing protected areas** by developing and implementing sustainable management plans; (3.2) Develop financial mechanisms that support protected areas while **enhancing sustainable livelihood and promoting community management of priority key biodiversity areas**; and (3.3) **Raise awareness of the importance of priority key biodiversity areas**, including those that have irreplaceable plant and marine biodiversity.

Since the establishment of the Nature Park Hutovo Blato, the park has been highly financially dependent on unstable grants from the Cantonal government to sustain its facilities, staff and visitor management. Besides, the park is trying to generate income from entrance fees and touristic offers like boat trips etc. Even though, the park has not yet started to develop effective mechanisms to create stable income from such sources and the local civil society has not been involved into the preparation of a sustainable eco touristic concept for the wider region. At the same time, the region is relatively weak in economical ways and alternative sources of income such as from illegal hunting are occurring frequently. The establishment of the Nature Park in 1992 may be perceived as a

restriction to personal freedom by parts of the local society and this situation has obviously not changed a lot in recent years.

The project was developed with the aim to improve the protection status of the Nature Park Hutovo Blato. This means that illegal activities occurring in the park's territory, especially illegal killing of birds need to be stopped in the future. For those people who have illegally exploited the park's natural goods in recent years the project activities that will lead to stronger controls and stronger ranger service and surveillance may cause restrictions. Even if these restrictions are in compliance with the current legal situation and even though the project will not lead towards the adoption of any new regulations, the civil society must be addressed and involved into a dialogue throughout the project to avoid aggressions and aversion against the project activities and the Nature Park as a whole and to create broad social support. The positive effects that an improved management for Hutovo Blato will have for the development of the region will be reflected and discussed with stakeholders at different public events in the Nature Park. Especially the hunters associations of the closest Municipalities in Stoltac and Capljina will be intensely involved in public events and communication.

Participatory Implementation:

In the framework of an ongoing project lead by EuroNatur first workshops with local stakeholders were conducted in 2012 in order to start a dialogue between the Nature park administration and the local hunters associations. The Nature Park authorities were supported in the organization and conduction of workshops that created a platform of exchange between the hunters, the Nature Park authorities and its staff as well as scientific experts in the field of nature conservation and ornithology. At this occasion the aims and objectives of the Nature park authorities were reflected to the participants and the outstanding ecological values as well as their vulnerability towards disturbance and human interventions were communicated. These were first steps towards a multilateral dialogue. In the future, the hunters associations shall become aware of the legal situation in the region, they shall become familiar with the zonation of the Neretva delta, protected areas and hunting grounds delineation. The aim of this dialogue is the establishment a MoU between the legal hunters associations and the Nature park administration. The hunters could actively contribute to the protection of the park by observing illegal activities and by informing their members about the protection status of the park as well as on the current national hunting law.

Before the concept for the CEPF project application was developed, intense consultation of the Nature Park administration was undertaken in order to define the needs that the authorities have. It was evident that the dramatic financial situation of the park is one main burden that keeps the park from undertaking necessary steps towards a more effective management strategy. Besides, the park authorities are lacking experience in effective visitor guidance and need support in further developing their touristic offer. The Nature Park rangers have not been paid for several months and are lacking the necessary equipment to properly warden the territory of the park. They will be equipped and trained to be able to better fulfill their surveillance tasks as well as their contributions to the visitor management. As the Nature Park rangers live in the communities in the close surroundings of the park, there is a great chance that a more positive position towards the protection of the park on their side will have a wider effect among the local communities.

In order to raise more awareness for the Nature park's conservation value, public events will be held addressed to the local communities in particular. During "open-day" celebrations, the public will have the opportunity to start a dialogue with the Nature Park administration and to get an insight into the park's ecological functions and current and future benefits for the region. The communities shall become familiar with the vision of a well-managed and protected Nature Park in a well-managed wider region that shall become an attractive destination for national and international

nature tourism guaranteeing sustainable regional development options. An anonymous suggestion box shall be placed in the park where foreign visitors and local stakeholders can express their needs, wishes and concerns related to the park and its effects on the society and the regional development.

With the aim to paint a very clear picture of the benefits that proper PA management can bring – not only to park authorities, but also to a whole region – selected stakeholders will be invited to join an excursion to Nature Park Lonjsko Polje in Croatia. This way, relevant decision makers, as well as the park rangers, shall get the chance to inform themselves directly about pros and cons of well-developed nature tourism and the effects for regional development. The acceptance of our project approach among local stakeholders will be very much improved by such positive firsthand experiences.

Starting a dialogue to sensitize the younger generation for nature conservation we will also address the children of the region. Within the project “out-door lectures” will provide an education platform for school children from the region. Communication between children, NGO representatives, the park staff and teachers will lead towards a more profound understanding and a deeper emotional connection between the children and their environment. Children are generally very open for the beauty of nature and respect it naturally when getting in touch personally. This way we will also trigger awareness arising in private households which will contribute to more ecological awareness on a bigger scale.

Criteria's for eligibility of affected persons

As no legal rights of any groups or individuals will be restricted by the project activities, no criteria for the eligibility of such groups or persons are defined. Yet, the project will further improve the communication between the Nature Park authorities, hunters associations and the broader public in order to reflect the potential positive effects for all stakeholders when the conservation of natural resources of the park is taken seriously and controls are intensified in the future. Via project activities, ideas and visions for the establishment of sustainable regional economic structures related to nature tourism and the production of natural regional products shall be enhanced. A MoU between the Nature Park authority and the national NGO Nase ptice for good cooperation throughout the project has already been signed and we are planning to achieve a MoU between the local hunters associations of the Nature Park.

Measures to assist affected persons

Affected persons may be illegal hunters and/ or poachers that used to exploit the Nature Park in the past. These people shall be informed more intensely about the currently valid zonation of the BiH part of the Neretva Delta as well as about the national hunting law (hunting seasons, species listed under the hunting law etc.). The project may assist to channel activities that are currently undertaken illegally in the PA in official hunting areas and under legal conditions.

Potential conflicts between affected communities

Conflicts with local communities are not expected as the project activities will not impact local communities in any negative way. Some persons might be affected as stated above and these will be involved into the project as described. To further increase the acceptance of the PA and foster awareness for its uniqueness and high conservation value various platforms to promote the Nature Park and to provide informative exchange are planned. The project will involve different local payers like the NGO Ljepa nasa, which will guarantee and ensure constant exchange with local communities. Visitors of the park and local stakeholders will be encouraged to report their concerns to the park administration via a special suggestion box.

Implementation arrangement

EuroNatur, the national NGO Nase ptice and the Nature Park Hutovo Blato are the main actors in the project, which will be supported by the local NGO Ljepa nasa. In its role as the project applicant EuroNatur is formally responsible for the successful conduction of the project and for the implementation of the project activities. The NGOs Nase ptice and Ljepa nasa will play a key role in bird conservation measures and communication with local communities as well as the Nature Park authorities as well. The Cantonal Government will play a role in terms of political support for the improved management of the site. EuroNatur will monitor and evaluate the project progress regularly according to CEPF guidelines. All project partners will report about their project activities, achievements and difficulties in regular terms to EuroNatur.

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