

Process Framework for Involuntary Restrictions

Date

CEPF Grant 110222

Grantee

Association for ecology and tourism ECOTOURISM-2016, Ohrid

Project Title

Preserving Belchishta Wetland, North Macedonia, through Engagement with Municipality and Local Stakeholders

Project Location

Belchishta Wetland, Municipality of Debrca, North Macedonia

Grant Summary

1. Grantee organization.

Association for ecology and tourism ECOTOURISM-2016, Ohrid

2. Grant title

Preserving Belchishta Wetland, North Macedonia, through Engagement with Municipality and Local Stakeholders

3. Grant number

MKD-110222

4. Grant amount (US dollars). 111,479.40

5. Proposed dates of grant.

06/01/2020 - 05/31/2022

6. Countries or territories where project will be undertaken

North Macedonia, Municipality of Debrca

7. Date of preparation of this document.

04/01/2020

A. Project background

The project focuses on the Belchishta Wetland, part of the Catchment Management Zone - Lake Ohrid catchment. (KBA: MKD10). Belchishta Wetland is one of the largest surviving water habitats of this kind in Macedonia, covering a surface of approximately 137 hectares with flooding forests and humid habitats. It is located in the Municipality of Debarca between the villages Novo Selo and Belchista, about 18,5 km north of Lake Ohrid.

Management of the Belchishta Wetland is still very sectoral and does not recognise the multiple functions of wetland. Furthermore, existing experiences on sustainable wetland management in the Municipality of Debarca are not generally available or used by key stakeholders. There is only 1 official in the Municipality dealing with local tourism and economy and there is no sector for environmental issues. Planning for land and resource use in this wetland is limited and furthermore plans are seldom put into practise.

The main objective of the project is to contribute to the sustainable management and wise use of Belchishta Wetland by strengthening management preparedness in local authorities and communities and flora and fauna populations that need urgent in situ conservation measures within the wider Lake Ohrid region. More specifically, the objective of this project is to lay the foundation for effective future management of the Belchishta Wetland region by promoting and implementing the concept of integrated watershed management thus halting the loss of the biodiversity as well. This project seeks to place the need for a participatory approach to agricultural water use management at the forefront of Macedonian water policy.

Therefore, the efforts in this project proposal will support the long-term protection, enhancement and management of the wetland regarding implementation of the National legislation (Law on Nature protection) and EU Birds and Habitats Directive. These efforts will include producing essential conservation, scientific, and public outreach information required for conservation planning, monitoring of important species and development of ecotourism in the wetland area supported by construction of some wooden facilities (bird observation towers, gazebos).

B. Participatory implementation

Wetland use planning will be define the village boundaries of the villages adjacent to the area proposed for protection, thus most villages will agree and delineate the boundaries of their village land. The decision of the fate of the general land (outside of village area) lying within the wetland watershed, will be made by the experts, Ministerial authorities, land owners, hunters, fisherman, tourist guides and locally elected representatives.

Implementation of a new protected area will be in fully partnership with local authorities from the Municipality of Debrca and the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning.

Strengthening village agricultural and forest management around the wetland will be implemented fully in partnership with the officially elected representatives of each respective village community and authorities from Public Enterprise “Macedonian Forests” and private forest owners. The experts engaged in the project together with local communities will designate the areas of village forest protection and define the management and restrictions to be enforced in the area of the wetland.

Participation in the project activities will be encouraged and enabled through the following actions:

- The project kick-off meeting, which will be used as point to spark the interest in participation;
- Regular meetings with the key stakeholders;
- Educational trainings for the project key beneficiaries, in order to build their capacities and provide knowledge on the subject matter;
- Close involvement of the stakeholders, during implementation of project activities and
- Organization of public hearings on the main project deliverables to enable participation and a possibility to influence the decision-making process by the participating members and the wider community.

This in turn, should in the long run provide sustainable and stable access to natural resources for the local community. At “Ecotourism 2016”, we believe that local communities should not be disadvantaged on behalf of biodiversity conservation; but rather contrary, that local communities should gain increased benefits and improve their socio-economic status from such conservation activities.

We will adhere to our principles throughout the complete project and in the co-operation with all project partners and stakeholders i.e. the Municipality of Debrca, the business sector, the local community and CSOs from the wider region.

C. Criteria for eligibility of affected persons

Affected persons will include those who reside and have a legitimate claim to land falling within the new proposed protected area. This is clearly defined in Macedonian national laws due to its natural values. The law stipulates that activities that negatively impact the ecosystem values of the nature, including wetlands, are prohibited. The project will largely affect those individuals/private entities that currently engage in illegal activities that undermine the natural status and ecology of the wetland, which are however forbidden by the law. The project aims to better control and manage this future protected ecosystem, while providing alternatives to those stakeholders that in some extent depend on the natural resources the wetland provides.

Affected persons include the local community members who currently use natural resources and land in the Belchista wetland area, namely local fishermen, farmers, and hunters.

As regards fishermen, they do not rely on fishing to meet the basic needs of their families. Most of them are motivated by a desire to preserve a sense of identity or tradition. Therefore, the foreseen restrictions would not affect them greatly. The management of the fish will be an interplay between the state and the local population, i.e. fishermen. Perhaps they could have right to fish, but some practices only (illegal ones for instance) will be more closely monitored/enforced.

Regarding hunters, most of them are “leisure” hunters, hunting water birds. It is expected that the management plan will impose some spatial and temporal regulation of hunting activities: such as hunting only for leisure, sticking to legal hunting period and no hunting of protected species and these restrictions won't affect the livelihood of local communities.

As regards farmers, the project will not impose new practices, and that in any case, changes in practices is not expected to have negative economic impact on farmers, but on the contrary is expected to support their livelihoods (for example, branded products, compensation payments etc). Moreover, they will be taught and advised how to save money and labour by using resources to have the greatest nutrient reduction impacts and use water in an efficient manner.

D. Measures to assist the affected persons

The project objective is to provide long-term stable and sustainable access to natural resources to the local community, by developing a Management Plan with an Action Plan for Belchishta Wetland and deploying a conservation action plans for particular species.

Preparation of the management plan for this future protected area might result in definition of new regulations or enforcement of existing ones, which might require from fisherman, farmers or other stakeholders to change their practices of usage of the natural resources. Although the proposed regulations/measures will provide long-term social and economic benefits to the affected people, to minimize the short-term impact and enable smooth transition all affected people will have the opportunity to participate and get involved in the process of the development and implementation of the proposed activities. The affected persons as well as the wider public will have the opportunity to raise their concerns about the project activities during the public hearings and consultations over the duration of the project. All concerns will be duly noted, discussed and taken into consideration in the finalization of the proposed project activities.

Communities will be trained in best farming practices, so that all individuals have the opportunity to make better livelihoods, without undertaking illegal activities. Moreover, we seek to ensure long term monitoring, apart of expert's involvement, with involvement of interested volunteers and laymen (so-called “School for monitoring of plant and animal species”). They will have the opportunity to perform monitoring based on sufficient trainings and in close cooperation with the management of the wetland.

E. Conflict resolution and complaint mechanism.

After the initial project phase (which is focused on desk and field research) we plan to start with a series of consultations for the new protected area). During the first round of meetings we will start with a presentation of the project and distribute all required information in a form of a printed flyer, as well as post it on our website. Local CSOs in North Macedonia will further distribute the information among wider local community. Educational and promotional activities envisaged in years 2 and 3 will also be used to spread the information and all required contact details (flyers and web site).

This grievance mechanism will be described in details on our website. Reference to the web page will be indicated on the flyers and notified to participants to the meetings. The grievance mechanism will include:

- Email and telephone contact information of Mr Gjoko Zoroski: zoroski@gmail.com / ekoturizamoh@gmail.com, Project officer from “Ecotourism 2016”
- Indication that if claimant is not satisfied by the response provided by “Ecotourism 2016”, they should contact the CEPF Regional Implementation Team (Borut Rubinič borut.rubinic@dopps.si) and the CEPF Grant Director (Pierre Carret, pcarret@cepf.net)
- And then that if no solution is found, claimant could contact the CEPF Executive Director at the following address: cepfexecutive@conservation.org or by land mail at:

CEPF Executive Director,
Conservation International
2011 Crystal Drive – Suite 600 –
Arlington, VA 22202
USA

We will share all grievances – and a proposed response – with the Regional Implementation Team and the CEPF Grant Director within 15 days. If the claimant is not satisfied following the response, they may submit the grievance directly to the CEPF Executive Director at cepfexecutive@conservation.org or by surface mail. If the claimant is not satisfied with the response from the CEPF Executive Director, they may submit the grievance to the World Bank at the local World Bank office.

F. Implementation Arrangements

The project has been conceptualized in partnership with the municipality of Debrca and it builds on the findings of previous project (“Improving the management and sustainable use of the Belchishko Blato (Sini Viroi)” (May 2018 - August 2019) under the project “Improving the management of the protected areas” funded by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), that this partner has been involved in. This kind of approach, starting from the onset of the project substantially minimizes the likelihood of conflicts or grievances.

The project goals, activities, scope and expected results, as well as the safeguard mechanisms, will be presented and discussed with all affected persons during the project kick-off meetings. Regular meetings will be organized to update the stakeholders about the progress of the implementation. Educational trainings are planned as part of many of the project activities, which should furthermore promote efficient and meaningful participation.

“Ecotourism 2016” is formally responsible for all elements of implementing this grant, including ensuring that community members invited to trainings and or meetings, are able to attend, and are given a proper voice during those. “Ecotourism 2016” will control all financial and logistic resources.

Overall, this kind of participative approach decreases the likelihoods for complaints and conflict situations during the entire duration of the project.