



EUROSAI

Working Group on
Environmental Auditing

National parks

A cooperative audit



Joint report



Seven European Supreme Audit Institutions have been partners in this cooperative audit on national parks




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|  | Polish Supreme Audit Office • www.nik.gov.pl |
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Photo on the cover:

Panoramic view of Zemaitijos National Park, Lithuania (Vladas Polikša)

Photos on pages:

4–5: *The Mistfjord seen from the top of Finnkonnakken in Sjunkhatten National Park, Norway (Martin Finstad)*

20–21: *Brents geese on land at Sneum canal lock in Wadden Sea National Park, Denmark (John Frikke)*

34–35: *Kovach peek and Ribno lake in Rila National Park, Bulgaria (Koino Koinov)*

50–51: *Endemic plant Sandwort in Paklenica National Park, Croatia (Zlatko Marasović)*



Supreme Audit Institutions

The role of Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) is to conduct independent audits of governments' activities. These assessments provide the national parliaments with objective information to help them examine the government's public spending and performance. The International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) is the international umbrella organisation for Supreme Audit Institutions. The aim of the institutionalised framework is to promote the development and transfer of knowledge, improve government auditing worldwide, and enhance the professional capacities, standing, and influence of member SAIs in their respective countries. The regional organisation for Supreme Audit Institutions at the European level is EUROSAI. One of its working groups is the EUROSAI Working Group on Environmental Auditing (EUROSAI WGEA). The aim of the working group is to contribute to increasing the capacity of SAIs in auditing governmental environmental policies, to promote cooperation, and to exchange knowledge and experiences on the subject among SAIs.



REPORT

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Summary

The cooperative audit of national parks was performed in 2013–2014 and involved the Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) of Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, and Ukraine. The report builds on the seven individual national audit reports.

The main objectives of the cooperative audit were:

- to assess if national parks are managed appropriately;
- to address the challenges regarding the conservation and protection of biodiversity in national parks;
- to evaluate whether public funds are being spent in the best way, allowing the goals of national parks to be achieved.

The audit results show that national parks in most of the participating countries are, in general, performing their functions and working towards achieving the goals set by their respective governments. The countries have employed different models of governance to national parks, but they all need an appropriate management plan as a precondition for the administration of each national park; this is in order to have specific guidelines for their work and for the conservation of nature and use of the national parks. The audit shows that not all authorities ensure that their national parks have a management plan. The involvement of local stakeholders in the management of national parks can give the national parks more legitimacy.

There is a potential conflict of interests between the use of national parks and the protection of nature against threats to the national parks. The public authorities are responsible for the management and protection of national parks for future generations.

The audit shows that the majority of funds allocated to national parks come from the state budgets of the respective countries. Some national parks depend on other sources of income as well. Raising additional income may be in conflict with the protection and conservation of nature.

Recommendations:

In order to ensure that the national parks work towards achieving specific goals, all national parks should have management plans that should be operational and measurable.

In order to ensure that each park reaches its objectives and specific targets, the authorities should monitor the performance of the national parks more closely, and evaluate whether the objectives of the parks are being met.

In order for national parks to carry out their functions, public financing should be based on a needs' assessment of each national park.

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Background

National parks are generally seen as protected areas with stringent and restrictive nature conservation regimes. Some of the participating countries national parks also serve other purposes.

In light of the importance of protecting biodiversity, the Polish SAI initiated an international audit of national parks at the Nordic-Baltic-Polish meeting in Oslo in August 2011.

The purpose of the cooperative audit on national parks was to demonstrate some of the barriers and challenges related to this issue in Europe, as well as to show some of the policy challenges and examples of good practice related to the performance of national parks.

The cooperative audit also aimed at increasing cooperation among SAIs, by using and sharing their competences and knowledge.

Seven European SAIs agreed to cooperate in conducting an audit on national parks: Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, and Ukraine. The Estonian SAI started a national audit on their national parks in 2014 and then joined the team as an observer.

The main objectives of the cooperative audit were:

- to assess if national parks are managed appropriately;
- to address the challenges regarding the conservation and protection of biodiversity in national parks;
- to evaluate whether public funds are being spent in the best way in order to achieve the goals of national parks.

Scope

The participating SAIs developed a common framework (audit matrix) of audit issues to be addressed in their national audits. Three different subtopics and corresponding audit questions were identified. The subtopics agreed to be covered were *the management of national parks*, *the conservation and protection of biodiversity*, and *the financing of national parks*. Each SAI had to choose at least two subtopics for their national audits.

Table 1: A description of the subject issues covered by the SAIs

Country	Audit objective		
	Management of national parks	Conservation and protection of biodiversity in national parks	Financing of national parks
Bulgaria	√	√	√
Croatia	√	√	√
Denmark	√	√	–
Lithuania	√	√	√
Norway	√	–	√
Poland	√	√	√
Ukraine	√	√	√

All of the participating countries assessed the management of national parks and all countries chose to answer the corresponding audit questions.

The SAI of Norway did not look into the protection of biodiversity directly, because the conservation regulations for each national park state the objective of conservation, and the natural and cultural heritage assets that are to be protected; therefore, these were examined when assessing the management of national parks. Among the remaining participant SAIs which assessed some aspects of biodiversity protection, only Bulgaria, Croatia, Poland, and Ukraine chose to look into audit questions concerning the implementation of biodiversity conservation measures.

All participating SAIs except for the SAI of Denmark assessed the financing of national parks and answered the corresponding audit questions in their national audits.

Not all SAIs chose to respond to all aspects of the agreed subtopics; the extent to which they responded was decided by each SAI, based on the scope of its national audit. The national audit findings for each topic serve as the basis for the joint report.

For more details on the scope of national audits see the Country Abstracts on pages 57–79.

Audited period: 2010–2012.

Audit methods

The framework for the project plan was based on previous cooperative audit projects undertaken by The International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (**INTOSAI**), The European Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (**EUROSAI**), and their respective Working Groups on Environmental Auditing (**WGEA**). This cooperative audit also relied on the Guidelines of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (**IUCN**).

This cooperative audit acknowledges:

- the INTOSAI WGEA Coordinated International Audit on Climate Change (2010)
- the EUROSAI audit on Climate Change (2009)
- EUROSAI WGEA cooperative audit on Adaptation to Climate Change
- the INTOSAI WGEA guidance Cooperation Between SAIs: Tips and Examples for Cooperative Audits (2007)
- EUROSAI WGEA cooperative audit on Emissions Trading to Limit Climate Change: Does it Work? (2012)
- IUCN Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories (2013)

Each participating SAI conducted a national audit which had a national scope that could go beyond common audit questions, e.g. national strategies or reforms.

The national audit approaches, including the audit criteria, methodology, quality control, and publication of national results, were carried out in accordance with each country's standard procedures. Also, the interpretation and incorporation of the individual national findings, conclusions, and recommendations have been quality controlled by each individual SAI.

The methods employed in the national audits comprised a wide range of approaches, e.g. documentary analysis, questionnaires, interviews, field work, and data analysis. The audit approach was consistent with the national and international audit standard and guidelines (INTOSAI International Standards (ISSAI)).

For each of the three objectives, we present the general findings for the audit questions. We also use cases from national audits to illustrate our findings; cases can provide an example of a common problem or suggest solutions that other countries can learn from.



National Fact Sheets

In order to present the variety of definitions and approaches to national parks in the participating countries, we present some brief information from each country.

Among the differences are the number and age of the national parks. For example, Denmark and Bulgaria each only have three national parks, while Ukraine has 48. Furthermore, the first national park was established in Denmark in 2008, while the first national parks in Poland, Croatia and Norway were established back in 1932, 1949 and 1962 respectively.

In most participating countries, a national park implies the protection of the nature, whereas in Denmark the establishment of a national park does not imply any protection of nature per se. Instead, Danish national parks are subject to the same protective regulations regarding nature which already apply under Danish legislation, but the national parks provide a local framework to further strengthen and develop the biodiversity.

**Total area of the country:**

11 000 000 ha

Number of national parks: 3

Area of national parks: 193 100 ha

Ratio (percentage of total area): 1.75 %

Year of establishment:

1962, 1991, 1999

Financing of national parks: budgetary funding

Ownership ratio: 100 % state owned

Legal definition of a 'national park'

Areas of more than 1 000 ha, which have no nucleated and dispersed settlements falling within the boundaries thereof and which host natural ecosystems of high diversity of plant and animal species and habitats, with typical and remarkable landscapes and non-living natural features, shall be designated national parks.

Main objectives of the national parks

National parks shall be managed for the purpose of:

- the maintenance of the diversity of the ecosystems and protection of wildlife;
- the conservation and maintenance of the biological diversity within the ecosystems;
- the provision of opportunities for the pursuit of scientific research, education and recreation;
- the creation of prerequisites for development of tourism, environmentally-sound livelihoods for the local community, and other activities in conformity with the purposes covered under items 1 to 3.

Main tasks of national parks

Conservation and maintenance of the diversity of ecosystems and the natural processes covering the national parks, the protection of wild nature, the conservation and maintenance of the biological diversity and providing possibilities for development of scientific, educational, and recreational activities in the protected territories.



Total area of the country: 8 760 900 ha
(marine area 3 160 700 ha)

Number of national parks: 8

Area of national parks:
95 472 ha (marine area 21 905 ha)

Ratio (percentage of total area): 1.09 %

Year of establishment: 1949–1999

Financing of national parks: budgetary funding; sales revenues (visitor fee revenues, concession approvals etc.); other revenues (loans, grants and international funds)

Ownership ratio: approx. 43 % privately owned and 57 % state owned

Legal definition of a 'national park'

A national park is a large, predominantly unaltered area of land and/or sea characterised by exceptional and varied natural assets, comprising one or several preserved or predominantly unaltered ecosystems, and is primarily set aside for the conservation of original natural assets.

Main objectives of the national parks

The main objectives are prescribed in the 'Nature Protection Act' and national strategy. More specific objectives of the national parks are prescribed in the Spatial plans and Ordinance on Protection and Conservation (Internal Roles of Order) of each national park.

The national strategy defines the following strategic objectives of national parks:

- to continue the development of the system of protected areas, efficiently manage protected areas, increase the total area under protection and promote active participation of the public concerned;
- to ensure the long-term conservation of threatened and rare habitat types;
- to conserve and improve the existing diversity of wild taxa and recover part of the lost taxa where this is possible and justified;
- to ensure the sustainable use of plant, fungal, and animal taxa;
- to continue and complete designation of Special Conservation Areas (SCA) for threatened and rare taxa and habitat types within the CRO-NEN and NATURA 2000 network and define protection and management measures for such areas;
- to conserve and promote the existing diversity of indigenous domesticated animal breeds and cultivated plant varieties using all suitable conservation methods (in situ, ex situ, inter situ).

Main tasks of national parks

A national park is intended for scientific, cultural, educational, and recreational purposes.

Public institutions manage national parks in terms of protection, maintenance and promotion.

They may also perform other activities that complement the above mentioned activities (earn money from selling tickets for visiting national parks, providing accommodation services, compensation fees, etc.).

The main tasks of the public institution are:

- the protection and conservation of biodiversity and natural assets;
- to ensure the unhindered unfolding of natural processes and the sustainable use of natural resources;
- the promotion of the protection of nature, raising awareness of environmental issues, education, etc.



Skradinski buk in Krka National Park, Croatia (Drago Marguš)



Anica Kuk in Paklenica National Park, Croatia (Aleksandar Gospić)



Total area of the country: 4 300 000 ha
Number of national parks: 3
Area of national parks: 186 500 ha
 (116 600 ha marine area)
Ratio (percentage of total area): 4.34 %
Year of establishment: 2008, 2009, 2010
Financing of national parks: each park receives budgetary funding of approx. €1million per year, all other expenses must be raised from other sources
Ownership ratio: 48 % privately owned and 52 % state owned

Legal definition of a 'national park'

- National parks are defined by the National Park Act of 2007.
- A national park is established by the Minister for the Environment as an independent foundation with a board. The Minister establishes a national park by issuing an executive order setting out the objective and development targets of each national park.
- According to the law, establishing a national park provides no supplementary protection of nature to the area.

Main objectives of the national parks

The National Park Act defines ten equal objectives for national parks, not all of which support the protection of biodiversity and nature. The objectives are to:

- create and protect larger nature areas of national and international importance;
- protect the quality and diversity of nature;
- safeguard the continuity and free dynamics of nature;
- protect the landscapes and geological values;
- secure and render visible the culture-historical values and diversity of the parks;
- support research and education on the value of the area;
- improve people's access to the landscapes;
- promote knowledge of the value of the area and its development;
- promote development to support local businesses with respect for protection issues; and
- promote knowledge of nature through the involvement of the local population in the development of national parks.

Main tasks of national parks

National parks in Denmark can:

- raise money;
- buy land and property on market terms;
- give grants and loans;
- enter voluntary agreements with landowners and other stakeholders about the use of land;
- pay expenses to raise awareness and knowledge of environmental issues.



Country area: 6 530 000 ha
Number of national parks: 5
Area of national parks: 157 016 ha
Ratio (percentage of total area): 2.41 %
Year of establishment: 1 national park established in 1974, the remaining 4 in 1991
Financing of national parks: Budget funding constitutes 94 % of all funding. Remaining 6 % are raised from other sources
Ownership ratio: approx. 40 % privately owned / approx. 60 % state owned

Legal definition of a 'national park'

The protected areas established for the protection and management of the natural and cultural landscape of national significance, representing the natural and cultural singularities of the country's ethno-cultural regions. Historical national parks shall be established for the preservation of cultural complexes of Lithuania's historical statehood centres and their natural environment.

Main objectives of the national parks

The objectives of establishing state parks are to:

- preserve naturally and culturally valuable landscapes;
- preserve typical or unique ecosystems; restore destroyed and damaged natural and cultural complexes and objects (properties);
- provide suitable conditions for scientific research in the field of the protection of Lithuania's natural and cultural heritage;
- promote and support the ethno-cultural traditions of Lithuanian regions;
- provide the conditions for recreation - primarily cognitive tourism;
- develop environmental education, and to promote ecological farming; and
- implement the other objectives of their establishment provided for in the statutes of the state parks.

Main tasks of national parks

Any activities which may harm protected complexes and objects (properties), as well as recreational resources shall be prohibited or restricted in national parks. In national parks, those activities which foster, highlight, and promote protected complexes or objects (properties) of landscape, as well as those which restore traditional elements of the natural or cultural environment are promoted. In addition, cognitive tourism, the adaptation of the territory for visits which take into consideration the preservation requirements of protected complexes and objects (properties) shall be promoted. In addition, cognitive tourism, the adaptation of the territory for visits which take into consideration the preservation requirements of protected complexes and objects (properties) shall be promoted.



Total area of the country (Mainland Norway): 32 377 100 ha
Number of national parks: 37
Area of national parks: 3 160 500 ha
Ratio (percentage of total area): 9.76 %
Year of establishment: 1962–2013
Financing of national parks: State budgetary funding
Ownership ratio: approx. 72 % state owned and 28 % owned by others (private and municipalities)

Legal definition of a 'national park'

A national park is a large natural area containing unique or representative ecosystems or landscapes without major infrastructural development.

Main objectives of the national parks

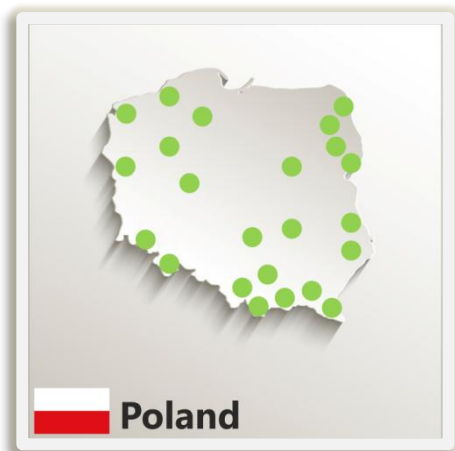
The establishment of national parks protects vulnerable and endangered habitats and preserves areas with international, national, and regional value. The natural environments or cultural monuments must not be permanently affected, unless, such intervention is necessary to meet the conservation objective. Section 35 of the Act relating to the Management of Biological, Geological and Landscape Diversity (Nature Diversity Act) authorises the establishment of national parks.

Main tasks of national parks

To protect large natural areas with distinctive or representative ecosystems or landscapes from the coast to the mountains.



Sjunghatten National Park, Norway (Martin Finstad)



Country area: 32 257 500 ha (marine area 868 200 ha)

Number of national parks: 23

Area of national parks: 328 132 ha

Ratio (percentage of total area): 1.02 %

Year of establishment: 1932–2001

Financing of national parks: budgetary funding, funds from the National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management, voivodship funds for environmental protection and water management, EU funds and activity (sales) revenue

Ownership ratio: approx. 18.8 % privately owned and 81.2 % state owned

Legal definition of a 'national park'

A national park encompasses an area distinguishable by its special natural, scientific, social, cultural and educational values, of area no smaller than 1000 ha, in which all the nature and land aesthetics are preserved.

Main objectives of the national parks

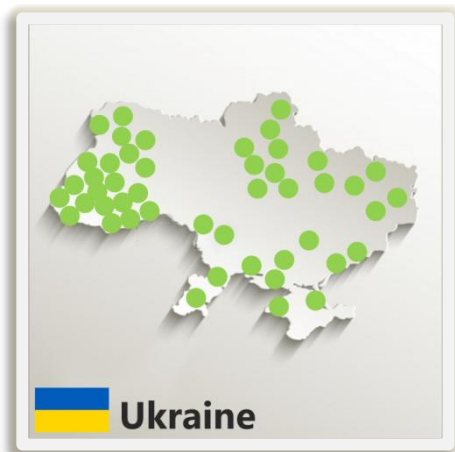
A national park is created in order to preserve the biodiversity, resources, features, and elements of inanimate nature and land aesthetics, to restore the proper state of natural resources and elements and reconstruct the deformed natural habitats of plants, animals, and fungi.

Main tasks of the national parks

The national park's tasks include, among others:

- the implementation of conservation activities in the national park's ecosystems, carried out in order to complete the above mentioned goals;
- making the park's premises accessible, but in a way that will not negatively influence the national park's nature; and
- the conduct of activities connected with the environmental education.

Those tasks connected with the conservation of nature, scientific research, and educational activities are carried out by the National Park Service, which also oversees the protection of the park's property, as well as fighting crime and offences against the conservation of nature on the premises of the national parks.



Total area of the country: 60 362 800 ha
Number of national parks: 48 (42 are acting)

Area of national parks: 1 224 400 ha
Ratio (percentage of total area): 2.03 %
Year of establishment: 1980–2013

Financing of national parks: budgetary funding, charitable contributions and grants

Ownership ratio: ownership is in the process determination

Legal definition of a 'national park'

According to the legislation of Ukraine, national parks protect the environment, as well as being recreational, cultural and educational, scientific and research institutions of importance to the state; they have been established with the aim of the conservation, re-creation and effective utilisation of the natural complexes and objects, which have particular nature-protective, health-improving, historical-and-cultural, scientific, educational, or aesthetic value.

Main objectives of the national parks

The main aims of national parks in Ukraine are the conservation, regeneration and effective utilisation of the nature complexes and objects, which have particular nature-protective, health-improving, historical and cultural, scientific, educational and aesthetic value.

Main tasks of the national parks

- The conservation of the valuable nature and historical and cultural complexes and objects;
- the arrangement of conditions for organising tourism, rest and other types of recreational activities in the natural conditions according to the regime of the protection of the nature reserve complexes and objects;
- carrying out the scientific research of nature complexes and the changes in their conditions of recreational usage, the development of scientific recommendations on environmental protection and the effective usage of the natural resources; and
- carrying out ecological and educational activities.



FINDIGS



1. The Establishment and Management of National Parks

In order to assess if national parks are managed appropriately, the following audit questions were addressed:

- Are there clear definitions and objectives set for the national parks at a national level?
- Have national parks developed an appropriate and concise system for strategic/long term planning (management plans)?
- Does the Government Administration ensure that the objectives for national parks are met?
- Are there appropriate procedures for establishing new national parks and/or expanding existing parks?

The national parks are managed quite differently in each of the participating countries. Table 2 below presents an overview of the different management models.

Table 2: Management models of national parks

Country	Number of national parks	Park management body (e.g. directorates, boards)	Involvement of local communities	Supervising authority
Bulgaria	3	3 directorates for 3 national parks	Indirectly, through public discussions	The Ministry of the Environment and Water
Croatia	8	Governing councils with no more than five members appointed by the Minister of Environmental and Nature Protection	Partially, in some governing councils there are local representatives. The participation of the public is needed in the decision-making process while issuing management plans and establishing new national parks	From December 2003 to December 2011 by the Ministry of Culture; From December 2011 by the Ministry of Environmental and Nature Protection
Denmark	3	3 boards with members from municipalities, Danish Nature Agency, local business organisations, and relevant NGO's	Yes, the boards consist entirely of local representatives. The establishment of new national parks depends on local community	The Danish Nature Agency under the Ministry of the Environment
Lithuania	5	5 directorates of 5 national parks	Partially, in some joint boards. The establishment of new national parks partially depends on the local community	4 national parks by State Service for Protected Areas under the Ministry of the Environment, 1 national park by the Ministry of Culture
Norway	37	28 national park boards have been established ¹	Yes, on the board	The Nature Inspectorate under the Norwegian Environment Agency

¹ As of 31 December, 2013, 27 national park boards for managing national parks in Mainland Norway had been constituted.

Country	Number of national parks	Park management body (e.g. directorates, boards)	Involvement of local communities	Supervising authority
Poland	23	23 Directorates for 23 national parks	Yes, on the specific advisory council for each individual park, and also in the context of public participation in the decisions taken	The Ministry of Environment
Ukraine	48	Special administrations of the national parks	Partly, when the issues of land allotment are solved	The Ministry for Environmental Protection

There is great variety in the way the participating countries manage their national parks. In most countries, national parks are managed by an administration employed by the state. However, in Norway and Denmark, national parks are managed by an independent board with the representation of local stakeholders. Nonetheless, their responsible ministries still have the final responsibility for the national parks.

The recent reform of the Norwegian national parks gives an example of how to improve the impact of local democracy and the involvement of local stakeholders in the management of national parks.



1

Midtre Nordland National Park Board manages five national parks

The first national park board, the Midtre Nordland National Park Board, was established in 2010 and manages five national parks: Junkerdal, Rago, Saltfjellet - Svartisen, Sjunghatten and Lakho (from 24 September 2013)², covering a total of 3 560 500 ha spanning nine municipalities. It was the Salten Regional Council that recommended the approval of a joint board for the national parks. The interests of the Sami are represented on the national park board. The municipalities are important partners for the Midtre Nordland National Park Board. The national park board meets in varying locations, hence managing to combine their meetings with inspections, which provide local insight and help to increase interest in the work. The management model, with a national park board that manages several national parks in the region, contributes to the uniform management of the parks across municipal boundaries.

² At the time the audit was conducted, the Midtre Nordland National Park Board managed four national parks. The four national parks were Junkerdal, Rago, Saltfjellet-Svartisen and Sjunghatten. Effective as of 24 September 2013, the national park board also manages the newly created Láhko National Park.

The management of national parks requires the collaboration of many parties. Through an expert advisory committee, the national park board shall therefore cooperate with other involved parties, such as (among others) landowners, NGOs, and public agencies with interests in the national park. In the interview with the expert advisory committee in Midtre Nordland, the value of having a forum where you can exchange experiences and expertise was mentioned, even if the actors do not necessarily agree on the use and protection of the national park.



Junkerdal, Rago, Saltfjellet-Svartisen, Sjunkehatten and Lahko National Parks in Midtre Nordland, Norway (Norwegian Mapping Authority www.kartverket.no)

1.1. The definitions and objectives of national parks

This section investigates whether all participating countries have clear definitions and objectives (e.g. in legislation) for national parks, so that it is clear for the management of the national parks what their responsibility is and what is expected of them.

The audit results reveal that all participating countries have separate laws regulating the establishment, objectives and purpose of national parks. Bulgaria – the Law on Protected Territories; Croatia – the Nature Protection Act; Denmark – the National Park Act; Lithuania – the Law on Protected Areas; Norway – the Nature Diversity Act; Poland – the Nature Conservation Act; and in Ukraine – the Law On Natural Reserve Fund.

All countries have clear definitions and objectives set for national parks at the national level in the above-mentioned laws. However, the case of the Danish National Park Act shows that the main objective of strengthening nature is not always clearly stated.

CASE

2

Unclear main objective of national parks

The Danish National Park Act of 2007 defines 10 equally important objectives for national parks that concern biodiversity, but also tourism and recreational purposes. At the same time, the regulatory notice states that the main purpose of the act is to strengthen and develop nature and create larger connected natural areas. Furthermore, the act states that the national parks should represent the most important Danish nature areas. Therefore, the development of nature as the main purpose of national parks is not clearly defined in the act.

CASE

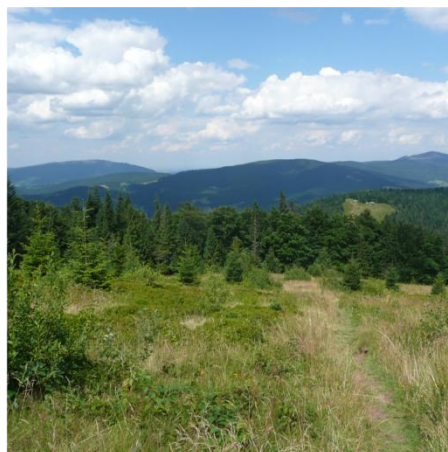
3

The definition of the national park, objectives and distinguishing features are clearly defined and are fully in line with the IUCN

In Poland, a national park is area distinguishable by its special natural, scientific, social, cultural and educational values, of area no smaller than 1 000 ha, in which the whole nature and land aesthetics are preserved. The main objective is to preserve the biodiversity and, if necessary, restore the proper state of natural resources.



*Karkonosze National Park, Poland
(Katarzyna Papińska)*



*Gorce National Park, Poland
(Katarzyna Papińska)*



Pirin mountains in Pirin National Park, Bulgaria (Alexandr Ivanov)

According to the IUCN, national parks (II category of protected areas) are large natural or near-natural areas set aside to protect large-scale ecological processes, along with the complement of species and ecosystems characteristic of the area, which also provide a foundation for environmentally and culturally compatible spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities. Their primary objective it is to protect natural biodiversity along with its underlying ecological structure and supporting environmental processes, and to promote education and recreation.

1.2. Management plans of the national parks

This section investigates if all the national parks in a country have an appropriate management plan to ensure that each park reaches its objectives and specific targets.

All of the participating SAls agreed on the importance of having a specific strategic document in which the clear objectives of the park and ways of achieving the identified objectives were specified, as well as the concrete indicators for measuring success. Although the title and scope of these strategic documents varies in each country, for the sake of this joint report, they shall be referred to as 'Management Plans'.

In Norway, management plans of national parks last indefinitely and are effective until a new management plan is approved.

The audit results show that:

- management plans at national park level are stipulated as compulsory by legislation for all countries. However, despite this, a management plan has not yet been drafted for each national park in all of the participating countries;
- the quality and precision of the management plans may vary among national parks in one country (e.g. Bulgaria, Croatia, Ukraine). This means that it can be difficult for the national parks to plan their resources, and for the responsible Ministry to evaluate when they have successfully achieved their targets;

- the planning period of the management plans varies from six to 20 years. The audit shows that it can be difficult to plan actions and resources many years ahead; and
- the ambiguity or absence of measurable indicators makes it difficult to evaluate the results of performance of the national parks.



4

Although all audited national parks had management plans in place, their implementation could have been improved

In Bulgaria, all activities in the national parks are planned on a long-term basis through the management plans and on a short-term basis through the annual activity plans. In the period 2010–2012, only one of the national parks performed its activity on the basis of a valid management plan. The management plans of the other two parks were valid until the end of 2010, and had not yet been updated at the end of 2013 for the next 10-year management term. The analysis of the content of the management plans of the national parks revealed some substantial omissions in the process of their elaboration, such as: i) a lack of assessment of the necessary financial resources for the implementation of all measures and activities envisaged for the 10-year implementation period; and ii) the objectives are not time-bound, and for part of them quantitative indicators are not determined in order to measure and assess their achievement.



5

The system of long-term planning is not developed sufficiently

In Croatia, two out of the four audited national parks had not developed management plans (one of them had developed a draft plan, which was not yet approved during the audit). The two developed and approved management plans of other audited parks did not have explicitly specified goals and they lacked objective measurement indicators.

CASE**6****Management plans are developed by a board of local stakeholders**

The board for each national park is responsible for developing a management plan for a period of six years. The plan describes the objectives for the park and how the board plans to fulfil them. The plan is the result of local consensus and contains what the local stakeholders in the board can agree on. While this ensures the legitimacy and local support of national parks, there is no guarantee that the action plan will ensure the actual improvement of biodiversity. All three plans do contain objectives and project plans related to the development of nature. However, there are differences in how specific the management plans are, and the level of priority given to nature-related projects. Only a few of the objectives in the three management plans are specific and measurable. This makes it difficult for each national park to prioritise their resources and for the Ministry and Parliament to evaluate if the national parks have contributed to the overall objective of the law. As the Danish national parks are new, the action plans are the first ones developed by the boards.

CASE**7****None of the 11 audited national parks had an approved statutory 20-year management plan**

In Poland, during the audited period, the parks functioned on the basis of the so-called 'conservation tasks' established by the Ministry of Environment for a period of one to five years. The draft management plans had been prepared for four national parks, and in another six, the drafts were in progress. Local stakeholders should accept the plan and the Minister of the Environment then grants official approval. The lack of management plans made it difficult to ascertain appropriate management, especially in the buffer zone of the national park.

CASE**8****Where management plans are not approved, the protection regime is not set for different types of protected areas within the national park**

Ukrainian auditors used a geographic information system (GIS) to compare the territories of the Goloseevskiy National Park, which was established in 2007 and still does not have a management plan. The auditors compared pictures of the national park dating from the 2006–2012 year span and found illegal activities (namely, deforestation and construction) in several parts of the national park. The perpetrators explained that they had no knowledge that it was illegal to carry out such activities in these areas, because the management plan for this national park had not been approved.

1.3. The responsibilities of Ministries in monitoring the performance of national parks

This section investigates if the responsible ministries monitor and supervise the national parks to ensure that the national parks live up to their responsibility and that the overall objectives are met.

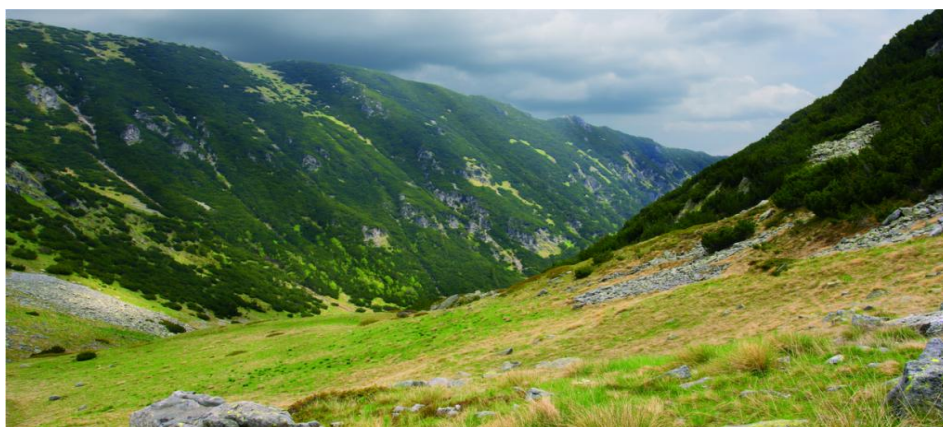
The responsible ministries in some countries could have provided more guidance and support to the national parks; moreover, the relevant authorities did not sufficiently monitor or supervise the performance and results of the national parks. As a result, it can be difficult for any stakeholder to assess the performance of national parks and the extent to which the aims of the parks had been fulfilled.



9

The system for the monitoring and control of the implementation of the management plans is not sufficiently effective and needs improvement to ensure ongoing monitoring and control of the activity of the national parks directorates

In Bulgaria, the Ministry of Environment and Water, which is responsible for the implementation of the state policy in the field of nature protection, does not have the designated control and coordination functions in relation to the activity of the national park directorates. The non-implementation of the procedures envisaged in the law for organising public discussions on the fulfilment of the management plans of the national parks was admitted. Ongoing/annual monitoring of the progress in implementing the management plans in accordance with the indicators for evaluation is not performed either. The review of the implementation of some measures and activities with investment nature included in the management plans revealed that there is a rather high risk of not achieving the objectives of the management plans to a full extent.



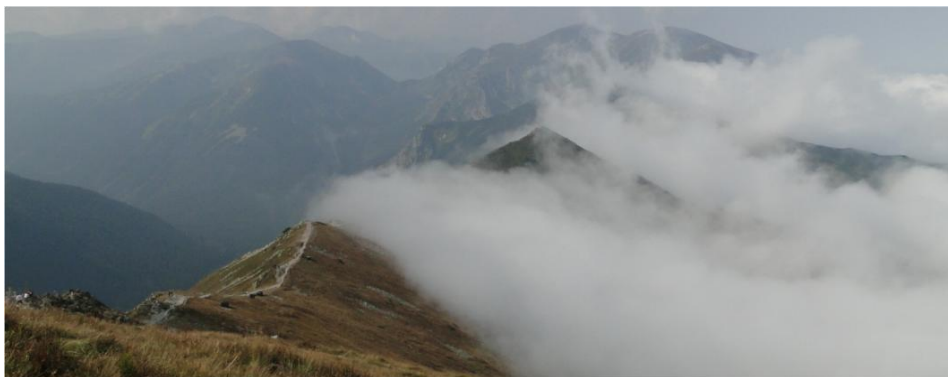
Ropalitsa in Rila National Park, Bulgaria (Koino Koinov)

CASE**10****The Ministry of the Environment does not yet follow up on the work and results of the national parks**

In Denmark, the Ministry receives the annual reports from the national parks, but there is no systematic feedback to the national parks. It is important to note that the Ministry has no legal authority to instruct the national parks and that the parks are new and have all been established since 2008. Every six years, the national park boards must evaluate their own implementation of the management plan and revise the plan. No programme to investigate the development of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) has yet been established. This is also not required in the legal framework for the national parks. The development of KPIs and the comparison between the national parks results are difficult due to the fact that the tools of the national parks are based on voluntary agreements with landowners and the fact that funding is uncertain. The Ministry has no authority to establish performance goals for the national parks.

CASE**11****The Minister of the Environment did not obtain the data necessary to assess the degree to which the conservation tasks established by his resolutions were implemented and what their effects were**

In Poland, the system of annual reporting on the parks' activity could not serve its aim, as it included only selected statistical data, which did not provide a full view. The annual statements routinely submitted by the parks were not subject to an on-going comparative analysis in the scope of changes occurring in the following years and differences between parks. Furthermore, the Minister's statutory duty concerning the preparation of annual statements on the parks' activities was carried out in an unreliable way and some data on the national parks submitted to other bodies were incoherent or even contained errors.



Tatra National Park, Poland (Katarzyna Papińska)

1.4. The procedures for establishing new national parks and expanding existing ones

This section investigates if the procedures for establishing or expanding national parks are appropriate or if they contain barriers that prevent the establishment or expansion of national parks. These barriers could prevent the protection of biodiversity.

The audit results show that all participating countries have set out a procedure of establishing new national parks, and expanding the existing ones, which involves consultation with local authorities and other stakeholders.

The audit findings indicate that involvement of local stakeholders is important to ensure the commitment of all stakeholders to the objectives of the national parks. However, local stakeholders are not always willing to vote in favour of a new national park as they see a threat of limitations imposed on their economic activities, etc. This has been a barrier for the establishment of new national parks and/or expanding already existing national parks in several countries such as Denmark, Poland, and Lithuania.

It is advised that Governments and national park administrations should actively try to engage local communities in the management of the national parks and put additional effort into making the benefits and importance of protecting nature better known to a wider public.

CASE

12

Lack of local support prevented the establishment of a relevant national park

The Danish audit shows that so far, local support has been politically important when establishing a national park. Furthermore, a hearing among local stakeholders is a precondition for establishing a national park. This can ensure legitimacy and support among local landowners, but can also prevent relevant areas from becoming national parks. This has been the case in the 'Skjern Aa area', which had been appointed to become a national park by The Ministry of the Environment. Later on, the process was stopped by the parliament due to the lack of local support. The national parks can buy land on market terms and make agreements with landowners regarding the use of the land, but they have no authority to expropriate land to expand.



Deer in Tatra National Park, Poland (Katarzyna Papińska)

CASE

13

The plans to establish one new national and one new regional park were rejected by local communities

Even though the appropriate procedures for establishing new parks exist, and the establishment of two new parks were projected in Lithuania's aggregate planning documents, attempts to establish them have failed due to the negative perceptions of the protected areas by the local community expressed in public debates on the establishment of Daugu Regional Park. After failing to establish the new park, the Ministry of the Environment decided to withdraw their plans for establishing one new national and one new regional park.



Protective ridge in Kursiu Nerijos National Park, Lithuania (Kuršių Nerijos National Park archive)

Attempts to establish three new national parks failed. Only one out of two of the proposed plans to expand existing parks was implemented

Plans were made to establish three new and enlarge two existing national parks in Poland. Due to the negative attitude of local community and administration towards protected areas, no new park was created; moreover, of the planned two enlargement plans, only one is likely to succeed. It became possible to commence the enlargement process in the Ministry of the Environment because of the fruitful cooperation of the park administration with the local government. The Town Council agreed to widen the borders of the park and add the adjacent land that belongs to the State Treasury to the territory, as well as land bought by the park.



Karkonosze National Park, Poland (Katarzyna Papińska)





2. The Conservation and Protection of Biodiversity in National Parks

In order to assess the conservation and protection of the biodiversity in national parks, the following audit objectives have been addressed:

- Have the most important threats to biodiversity been identified?
- Is monitoring and stocktaking conducted on regular basis and with what results?
- Are the most important threats to biodiversity mitigated, and are effective conservation measures implemented where relevant?
- Is tourism being managed effectively, and is its impact mitigated appropriately?

2.1. The threats to biodiversity in national parks

Only the SAIs of Bulgaria, Croatia, Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine included this question in their national audits and the findings in sections only concern these countries.

This section investigates if the threats to biodiversity, for example, alien invasive species, illegal human activity, soil erosion, pollution from the surrounding areas, have been identified and prioritised – either by the national parks itself or by the responsible ministry. All the participating countries see identifying the specific threats to biodiversity as a necessary precursor to mitigating them.

The audit results show that:

- countries have identified the threats to biodiversity as part of the description of the work of national parks, but not all the countries have sufficiently updated their list of threats, and as a result, it is potentially out of date in some countries; and
- in some countries, the list of threats is not prioritised or it does not recommend suitable actions to mitigate the threats.

In Bulgaria, Croatia, and Lithuania, the threats to wildlife and biodiversity are stipulated in the national strategies for biodiversity and in greater detail in the management plans of the national parks. In Denmark, Poland, and Ukraine the main threats/risks are stipulated in the management plans or founding documents of national parks. However, they are not ranked in order of importance in all countries. The measures and activities for the management of the main risks and restriction of the potential threats are prioritised in the management plans or subsequent actions plans.

Bulgaria has developed the National Strategy for Biological Diversity Protection (1998), which identifies the main threats and risks of biological diversity loss, such as: the loss and destruction of habitats; environmental pollution; excessive exploitation; the appearance and spread of invasive species; intensive agricultural development; the change of land ownership; global problems including climate change; a lack of knowledge and effective managerial policies. In order to implement the National Strategy for Biological Diversity Protection, National Plans for Biological Diversity Protection for the periods 1999–2003, 2005–2010, and 2011–2020 have been adopted, in which the threats, objectives, and measures for their achievement have been revised. The management plans of the national parks are brought in line with the national strategic documents in relation to the objectives that are relevant to biological diversity, identifying at the same time concrete threats which could lead to a loss in biodiversity in the territory of the parks; furthermore, specific measures and actions for achieving the objectives at this managerial level are outlined.

In Croatia, the strategy was approved in 2008. The national audit concluded that the threats to biodiversity and their possible impact have not been clearly described in national strategy and specific protection measures have not been

specifically linked (associated) with the anticipated negative impacts and the possible consequences on biodiversity. Furthermore, the strategy does not define in detail the protection of the marine areas of national parks. The strategy must be assessed and renewed every five years, but this obligation was not performed during the audit. The new Nature Protection Act, which came into force in July 2013, stipulates that the new strategy should be adopted by the end of the 2014.

In Lithuania, the national strategy was approved in 1998 and has not been updated since. There is a risk that identified threats which were apparent back then may no longer be valid and that new threats might have emerged.

The staff of national parks indicated that among the most important threats are those arising as a result of invasive species and tourism in some of the protected areas. The most common invasive species are identified and the ways of treating them are determined.



15

Existing and potential threats to biodiversity stipulated in action plans were approved by the Minister of the Environment

In Poland, the existing and potential external and internal threats to the condition of nature and biodiversity in the audited parks were identified; and the means of their respective elimination or mitigation were specified in the action plans (conservation tasks) approved by the Minister of the Environment.



16

National parks take into account the identified threats during the elaboration and implementation of environmental protective measures

In Ukraine, the main threats in the national parks are: anthropogenic and technogenic impacts, forestry activity, the degradation of forest ecosystems, unauthorised deforestation, fires, excessive anthropogenic and recreational measures, pollution, poaching and excessive hunting, the gathering of unique plants, damage by plant pests, the pollution of basins, forests, air and soil, nature disasters (floods, freshets, drought etc.), invasion of alien types of flora and fauna.

With the aim of conservation and reproduction of natural complexes and objects, flora and fauna, the national parks annually develop plans of environmental protection measures. To save species which are endangered and to eliminate invasion of alien species, the parks also develop tasks and management plans, including those directed on conservation of the abiotic environment.

2.2. Biodiversity monitoring

This section investigates if stocktaking is being conducted regularly. Monitoring and stocktaking is an important step in building up the knowledge of the biodiversity and making decisions on conservation and mitigating the negative impact.

The audit results show that:

- countries carry out monitoring as part of their nature protection regime; and
- monitoring and stocktaking can be outsourced.



17

A Nature Protection Information System in Croatia is insufficiently developed in order to provide information on biodiversity within the reasonable time to all stakeholders

The State Institute for Nature Protection organises and coordinates the monitoring of the state of biodiversity at national level. Within this framework, the Institute collects, processes, and compiles data on the state of nature, as well as drafts reports, keeps databases and prepares expert documents on the protection of the individual components of biological and landscape diversity. However, the State Institute does not compile separate data for each national park and was not able to provide the numbers of species of plants, animals and fungi, including extinct and endangered species, endemic species and unique natural habitats for each national park. Also, the databases of some national parks have still not been updated which is an obstacle for performing monitoring and sound analysis.



18

National legislation needs to be amended to ensure that monitoring nature is compulsory and properly supervised

The State Institute for Nature Protection in Croatia is responsible for inventory and monitoring activities at the national level. However, the Nature Protection Act does not clearly stipulate whether the public institutions that manage national parks are obliged to perform monitoring and inventory on the parks' premises. The audit found that those activities were performed on the parks' premises, but they were not equally represented in all national parks. Only one park performed monitoring on regular basis (annually). Monitoring the achievements of the objectives and indicators of the implementation of the management plan was not performed. The audit found that coordination between the State Institute, the Ministry and national parks in relation to long-term planning and the performance of monitoring was insufficient and inadequate.

Since the Danish national parks are not responsible for the protection of nature, the task of stocktaking in the national parks is carried out in the national framework of nature protection legislation every six years. All reports are made available publicly. However, the national parks can initiate monitoring of their own projects in order to follow the effects of specific projects. All three national parks do this kind of specific monitoring in cooperation with universities.



Warta Mouth National Park, Poland (Katarzyna Papińska)

In other countries, monitoring and stocktaking is performed or administered by the national parks administrations or is delegated to an agency. The national audits in Bulgaria, Croatia, Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine revealed some issues regarding the methodology, compilation of data, etc.

In Bulgaria, stocktaking of the species identified in the territory of the national parks is conducted once every 10 years for the purpose of elaborating the management plans for the respective 10-year period. In parallel with this, part of the species with conservation importance that are defined as protected in the national parks are monitored annually in the frame of the monitoring of the biological diversity. Data about the number of the population of some of these species are included in the annual activities reports of the national parks directorates (NPDs) as the competent management authorities.

In Croatia, the audit found that the stocktaking on the park premises was conducted to some extent, but the exact data have not been yet compiled and organised in order to serve as a joint foundation for the creation, organisation, and planning of nature conservation tasks in national parks. Also, there the processes of identifying and updating databases periodically differ greatly among the parks. Some parks do it very efficiently while some do it very rarely. Two out of four national parks update their databases regularly, one national

park updated the database to some extent in 2012, whereas one national park has not yet updated its databases at all. Consequently, the exact number of species of animals and fungi in national parks is still unknown. It is the species of plants that have been most widely explored, and all parks (except the Mljet National Park where the databases have still not been updated) were able to provide the number of plant species in the park, including extinct and endangered species.

CASE

20

The Ministry of the Environment has a database on protected species, which may be used by any person who has obtained relevant authorisation

In 2008, The Ministry of the Environment of Lithuania launched a Database for Protected Habitats, Fauna and Flora. The database compiles information about living, growing, protected or rare, endangered and vulnerable species, and natural habitats. The Ministry's specialists hope that the practical benefits of the system will be unquestionable once more data is compiled. It must be noted that the data in the system can be provided not only by departments of the Ministry of the Environment and its subordinate institutions, but also by various specialists and anyone who is interested in the conservation of nature; the information provided is carefully double-checked before it is entered into the database.

CASE

21

In all 11 audited national parks, the systematic monitoring of nature was carried out

In Poland, monitoring activities in the parks were conducted in accordance with the parks' action plans and the State Monitoring Program. The scope and frequency of the monitoring of particular species or habitats varied depending on the existing needs and possibilities; for instance, studies of endemic, endangered, and reintroduced species are conducted at least once a year, and in the case of habitats or sites, once every several years. As part of the monitoring, constant observation and a record of selected threatening alien species were conducted in the parks. Evidence and monitoring of alien species, including the sources and ways of their expansion and influence on the native species and ecosystems were conducted, depending on the extent to which they threaten the native nature. The results of the monitoring were used to prepare the conservation task plan and to modify the applied measures.



Bison in Białowieża National Park, Poland (Katarzyna Papińska)



Wooden pathway through a swamp in Biebrza National Park, Poland (Katarzyna Papińska)

CASE

22

The majority of national parks conduct monitoring in accordance with the annual plan on scientific and research work

In Ukraine, the staff of national parks conduct the planned monitoring of animals and plants annually, and then analyses, systematises and generalises the monitoring findings in accordance with the methodological recommendations. Monitoring is conducted either in set areas or through expeditions on the park premises. The monitoring results are published in the relevant volumes of the 'Chronicle of Nature', various reports, scientific publications, booklets, studies, newspapers, and magazines. Each national park knows the existing types of plants, animals, fungi, endemic species, etc. on its territory, including ones recorded in 'The Red Book'.

2.3. Conservation of biodiversity and mitigation of identified threats in national parks

This section investigates if the identified threats are being mitigated in order to protect biodiversity, as well as the prevention and conservation measures that are being implemented.

The audit results show that:

- in most countries, the national parks do work to mitigate the threats to biodiversity;
- it is not clear to what extent this work is successful; and
- in countries that have chosen to look at the implementation of biodiversity conservation measures these were mostly implemented as relevant, but there is scope for improvement.

In Bulgaria, the detailed activities that are permitted on the territory of the national parks are set out in the management plans, e.g. – tourism zones, reserve zones, zones for limiting human influence, zones for the protection of the forest ecosystems and their recreation (forests), zones for the sustainable usage of the open spaces and their recreation (pasture lands), zones for buildings and facilities (tourist huts, administrative buildings, etc.).

In Croatia, national parks still have great wealth and diversity, and a high level of value and conservation of biological and landscape diversity, but numerous threats have been identified, which if not dealt with in an appropriate way, could undermine the existing nature and biodiversity situation in the future. The audit concluded that there is a need to strengthen and develop the system of planning and monitoring population trends in the area of national parks.



23

The problem of incoming waste in the marine park was successfully solved

Mljet national park in Croatia is constantly faced with a large amount of waste coming from the south Mediterranean Sea. Waste constantly threatened the system of two salt lakes that are great karst sink-holes flooded by the sea several thousand years ago, hence creating a unique bio-system. The problem of waste has almost completely been solved by erecting the construction of reinforced concrete pillars, with a double row of iron twists mounted between these pillars. This barrier prevents the waste from entering the salt lakes; the public institution that manages the national park constantly performs cleaning up procedures and disposes of this waste.

In Denmark, the protected areas inside of the parks are under the supervision of the Ministry of the Environment or the local municipality in the same way as the protected areas outside the national parks. Hence, nature protection is not the responsibility of the national parks and they have no authority to ban or prohibit any use of the parks. Even though the national parks are very new, the audit shows that all national parks are working actively to manage the task set up in their management plans, which also contain specific nature projects, e.g. to protect endangered species.

In Lithuania, various restrictions and prohibitions are stipulated in the laws on protected areas, environmental protection, the protection of immovable heritage, construction, etc., as well as in various planning documents and by-laws. The protection and management of parks is based on the zones of functional priorities in which various restrictions and prohibitions are imposed. Non-compliance with the above-mentioned restrictions and prohibitions is punishable.

In Poland, the list of prohibitions and bans in force on the parks' premises is stipulated in the National Conservation Act, which significantly restricts the possibility to conduct any activity if it is not connected with protection and the execution of tasks included in the management plan, or conservation tasks. A business activity carried out by one national park was mainly connected with the construction of tourist shelters, the use of area by telecommunications companies or commercial and service activity, as well as other activities, among which are the sale of souvenirs and publications. Commercial and service outlets were located in the area of six audited parks; the negative influence of such establishments on nature was not material, and the conduct of activities was rigorously regulated. In the case of other national parks, commercial activity was conducted outside their premises. The strict protection zones encompassed from 4.6 % to 57.6 % of the area and were marked on site; other areas were under active or landscape protection. The sites in the audited parks which are open for research, tourism, and educational purposes were also specified.

CASE

24

Among the conservation tasks, activities were conducted in order to mitigate the spread of alien species and protect the ecosystems against their threats

The most common way to eliminate the threat was the elimination of excessively developing trees and bushes, the cultivation of the remaining ones and moving herbaceous vegetation. Within the project 'Protection of water and marsh birds in five national parks – reconstructing habitats and curbing the influence of invasive species', nest-boxes secured from the intrusion of minks were installed on trees (for the Common Goldeneye and Common Merganser).

To mitigate the impact of neighbouring unprotected areas, buffer zones were determined in all Polish national parks.



Protection against American mink in Warta Mouth National Park, Poland (Roman Skudynowski)



Invasive American mink in Warta Mouth National Park, Poland (Roman Skudynowski)

The SAIs of Bulgaria, Croatia, Poland, and Ukraine have chosen to look into the implementation of conservation measures.

In Bulgaria, not all conservation measures and activities, implemented by the national parks directorates were carried out in accordance with the management plans and the operational plans. For example, in the period 2010–2012, the annual monitoring plans were implemented to a certain extent and fewer species were monitored than had previously been envisaged. Regarding the use of natural resources, despite the well-established administrative organisation for permitting and controlling the grazing, hay collection, picking of wild fruits and medicinal plants, a general reduction in the size of the implemented activities, and in turn, of the received revenues has been observed.

In Croatia, conservation measures are mostly implemented where relevant. Prohibiting certain activities is a precondition for protecting areas of the parks. However, there is room for improvement in implementing conservation measures.



25

Non-compliance of spatial plans with other nature protection regulations forms an obstacle to the effective conservation of biodiversity in a marine national park

Anchoring destroys the sea-grass meadows of *Posidonia Oceanica* (an endemic species of the Mediterranean Sea that is extremely important for the survival of other species) and leads to the transfer of the invasive Alga *Caulerpa* that rapidly reproduce and threaten the *Posidonia* meadows. In order to protect *Posidonia Oceanica*, the public institution of a marine park tried to prevent individual anchoring bolts by amending the park's Internal Rules of Order in 2011, making it permissible to place buoys in the sea with anchor blocks or anchors fixed to the seabed. However, it was not possible to implement this as it was not included in the spatial plan of the marine national park, which was adopted in 2003. It was envisaged to set 16 anchorages for visitors, but there was no provision to place a specific set of buoys that would be attached to the seabed.



Noble Pen Shell and Invasive alga Caulerpa racemosa in Kornati National Park, Croatia (Kornati National Park archive)



26

Conservation measures in the Paklenica National Park in Croatia were effective

On the premises of the park, the condition of forests, grasslands, birds, chamois, wolves and bears were monitored regularly (once a year). The park staff actively participated and carried out these activities, although they were not legally obligated to do that. The number of individuals of endangered species (Golden Eagle, Short-toed Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Montagu's Harrier, Chamois, etc.) which were being monitored were relatively constant (according to the monitoring results from the database of the park, the number of chamois has been slowly increasing, while the number of grey falcons has been slightly declining); the number of specimens of invasive species (Spanish Sparrow) is also in decline. Also, the state of forests and meadow habitats that were regularly monitored are of excellent quality (according to the research reports), and the biodiversity index (Shannon-Weiner index) which was applied in research showed a high diversity of nesting birds.

In Poland, most of the planned conservation activities were implemented. In nine out of 11 audited national parks, extinct or endangered species were cultivated or bred; additionally, the number of habitats beneficial for such species was enlarged. In six out of the 11 audited parks, plant production in nurseries was also conducted.

The reintroduction and restitution of species were conducted in seven parks. The number of five critical species (extinct, endangered) unique to a given park, despite certain discrepancies, remained at a comparable level. Due to the introduced procedures, it was possible to prevent the decline of habitats or species, and in some cases, the biodiversity was even enriched. The effects of conservation activities were monitored by the parks' service. Field inspections and performance audits of conservation tasks were carried out both by employees of the park guard and the employees of park.

In Ukraine, with the aim to conserve and reproduce rare types of plants and animals, the national parks of Ukraine regularly undertake scientific and research work. As a result, the theoretic basis of the conservation of rare species is developed in the framework of theoretical and practical themes for further practical implementation.

2.4. The management and mitigation of the impact of tourism on biodiversity

This section investigates whether the impact of tourism is monitored and, if necessary, mitigated in order to protect biodiversity.

The audit results show that:

- in general, the number of visitors to national parks is growing;
- it is difficult in most countries to measure the exact number of visitors;
- in some countries it is an objective for the national parks to increase tourism which can be a threat to biodiversity; and
- the incentive of national parks to mitigate negative impact from tourism can be affected by the pressure put on the national parks to secure income from entry fees and other business activities, etc.

National parks in many countries have identified the growing numbers of visitors as a threat to the nature. In some countries developing tourism and educational activities is among objectives of the parks stipulated in the legal acts. Parks are encouraged by the governments to develop tourism services and attract larger numbers of visitors. In Ukraine, for instance, one of the main purposes of national parks is tourism; the developing of infrastructure (i.e. hotels) to that end is seen as a priority. Also, the income from tourist services is growing in most countries.

In some countries, it is difficult or impossible to calculate the numbers of visitors to national parks, especially where there are settlements and towns on the parks' premises and entrance is not restricted by means of fences or other barriers.

In Croatia, visitor numbers are calculated on the basis of the number of tickets sold. However, in the Kornati national park, covering a number of islands, the tickets are sold per boat, which may not reflect the number of individuals visiting the park.

In Poland, the number of park visitors was estimated by the parks' employees, on the basis of the number of tickets, maps and publications sold, and the repeated calculations of visitors entering the park or cars on the parking lots. In two parks, as part of the executed projects connected with the conservation and preservation of the park, electronic sensors to monitor the movements of tourists were installed.

The audit results showed that national parks are becoming increasingly popular among tourists. In Bulgaria, for example, the number of visitors doubled during the audited period. As such rapid growth in the number of visitors to the parks poses a threat to the biodiversity, it is important that tourism is managed properly and means are taken to mitigate the threat.

In order to manage tourism, national parks have established tourism information centres where the visitors can get information about the park's nature values, zones for tourism and recreation, tourist and bicycle routes and trails.

In order to keep visitors away from the areas where their presence can cause damage to nature, national park administrations have put signs and fences; there are marked areas where visitors are only allowed if accompanied by a guide.



Nature exposition in Zemaitijos National Park, Lithuania (Žemaitijos National Park archive)

Cepkeliai swamp, Lithuania (Dzūkijos National Park archive)



27

Methodology to assess the impact of tourist flows in protected areas

Bulgaria developed a methodology that enables the ongoing monitoring and annual assessment of the impact of the flow of tourists on the environment and the biological diversity in the national parks on basis of the data collected from: representative routes; huts, camping sites and tent camps; phyto monitors for tracking the invasion and development of ruderal specie; a mathematical model is then applied to define the assessment of the impact of the tourist flow on the nature. The assessment then is made based on such indicators as: the width/depth of the tourist routes, the number of destroyed and/or injured trees, damage caused to the rock formations and the status of the landscape elements, the presence of ruderal species and quantitative assessment, the status of the marking and of the information and/or tourist infrastructure, etc.

The methodology has been endorsed by the Minister of Environment and Water for application from 2004 onwards. However, in the period from 2010–2012, it had only been applied in 2010 in two of the three parks.



28

Krka national park attempts to assess its carrying capacity

The number of visitors has grown constantly in Krka national park, especially during the summer. Since 2012, the park has opened five entrances to provide a better spread of tourists throughout the tourist zone; this, in turn, is likely to result in more effective controls of tourist behaviour. The project Carrying Capacity for Krka National Park visitors is in progress; the carrying capacity assessment and preliminary research have been done and will continue during 2014. The audit concluded that determining the carrying capacity of the environment is important in order to be able to limit the number of visitors in a national park if an excessive number of visitors threaten the existing biodiversity in the protected area.



Skradinski buk in Krka National Park, Croatia (Drago Marguš)

In Lithuania, the park administrations assess the impact of tourism and recreational activities on the landscape of a park. The vulnerable sites are photo-fixed to assess the negative impact on nature and biodiversity.



29

The assessment of damage caused by tourists

During the high season, on at least two occasions, the park administrations monitor the number of visitors and their impact on the biological diversity in several of the most visited spots. If any threat is observed, the parks limit the number of visitors in that area and try to restore the landscape.



Bicycle tourism in Dzūkijos National Park, Lithuania (Dzūkijos National Park archive)

The directorates try to limit number of visitors just in several critical areas (e.g., sanctuaries) by setting up walking routes, fences, warning signs, etc. However, these measures are not enough to regulate the flow of visitors in those areas which are attractive to tourists. The rules of park visiting stipulate that any violation of the rules is punishable in accordance with the Law on Protected Areas and Law on Protection of Immovable Cultural Heritage.

CASE

30

The impact of tourism assessed in five of the most crowded national parks

Although the movement of tourists in Poland was monitored in all the audited parks, only in five parks was the impact of tourism on the condition of nature in the parks analysed and assessed, and activities undertaken in order to minimise it. Based on the analysis of threats associated with antropopressure, and surface water erosion, as well as the analysis of the distribution and volume of the movement of tourists, limits of simultaneous visitors were set. As a result of the analysis of the impact of the movement of tourists on nature in one national park, the following steps were taken: two tourist routes were closed; and the obligation for horse sleds to use under-tail sheets within the premises of the conservation area was introduced. The number of visitors who can be within the reserves at any one time is strictly limited to either 200 or 500.

CASE

31

Setting limits for recreational activities and visits to the national parks

With the aim to avoid damage to the natural landscapes, and to mitigate the impact of tourism on biodiversity, some national parks in Ukraine have implemented a system of capping the load for recreational activities and resources when visiting popular routes. Recreational activities and visiting the national parks are carried out in accordance with the approved limits for the utilisation of natural resources. Visitors and excursions are prohibited at the natural reserve areas.





3. Financing of National Parks

In order to assess the funding of national parks, the audit investigated the sources of funding for national parks; whether funding is based on a needs' assessment was also analysed.

The SAI of Denmark did not investigate the funding of national parks in their national audit.

Only in Norway are national parks funded entirely from the state budget. In addition to budgetary funding, the national parks of Bulgaria, Croatia, Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine raise income from other sources, such as operational revenues, fines, fees, EU funds, grants, etc.

It is important to highlight that the aspiration to raise more income from other sources, such as tourism or tree felling may be in conflict with the aim to protect the biodiversity in protected areas.

The audit revealed that financing is not always provided based on the estimated needs of the national park, and sometimes the lack of funds made it impossible to carry out the necessary actions.

In the following, we present the key findings on the financing of national parks as a series of cases for each participating SAI.

**32****The share of funding from the EU was not sufficient to compensate for the decrease in public funding. Funds to ensure the sustainability of the functions of national parks are not earmarked**

The activity on the management of the national parks in Bulgaria is financed from budgetary and extra-budgetary sources. The share of the budget resources is the highest and represents 73 % of the total amount of the resources spent on the management of the national parks. For the period 2010–2012, this share decreased by 18 percent. The decrease in the financing from national sources to a great extent was due to the possibility to use the funds from the EU to finance environmental protection activities, but the increase of the share of paid financial resources from the EU financial instruments, for the same period, is not sufficient to compensate for the decrease of the national financial resources. There isn't a clear correlation between the approved annual budget expenditure on the management of the national parks and the estimation of all the measures and activities, included in the national park management plans, because the management plans do not contain a general financial estimation of the financial resources necessary for their implementation.

**33****National parks in Croatia are funded from the state budget, their own self-generated income, as well as international aid and donations**

The highest revenues of each national park are from self-generated income which is followed by revenues from the state budget, while other revenues (EU funds, bilateral cooperation and other) are relatively poorly represented. Self-generated income is predominantly derived from visitor fees, but there are great disparities among national parks in relation to self-generated incomes (depending on the number of visitors). The majority of national parks are underfunded to perform all the functions imposed by legislation.

The vast majority of national parks require additional state funding through the annual budgeting process. However, state funding is limited and tended to decline in the period 2010–2012. This has resulted in under-funded, under-staffed and under-equipped national parks (parks with not so many visitors/parks where real number of visitors cannot be counted properly).

**34****Lithuanian national parks depend on budgetary funding**

The objectives of national parks are directly dependent on funding from the budget, nonetheless, they are encouraged to seek opportunities to participate in international projects and provide additional services. Even though national parks are encouraged to look for additional sources of income, additional funds received during the period of 2010–2013 constituted six percent. These were mostly income gained from visitors to national parks and have been used to manage protected areas, to promote the protection of valuable complexes and objects, and to organise educational tourism.

**35****Norwegian national parks are financed from public funds. Access to the national parks for visitors in Norway is free of charge**

In Norway, the national park managers and boards are funded via earmarked funds in the Norwegian Environment Agency's budget. One part of the funds for the management of the national parks and the other protected areas managed by national park boards and other protected area boards, is allocated for salaries and the operation of the secretariat/managers, and for the operation of protected area boards and expert advisory committees. Another part of the funds is allocated to maintenance and facilitation measures for the follow-up of management plans. Some of these funds are allocated according to a distribution formula by which each national park that had an approved management plan received a fixed amount, in addition to each national park receiving an area-dependent amount. National park boards also apply to the Norwegian Nature Inspectorate (SNO) for funding for maintenance and facilitation measures through an "ordering dialogue". The ordering dialogue starts in the autumn each year and includes both the actions to be performed by the Norwegian Nature Inspectorate, and the purchase of services from others. Each national park board is allocated an overall amount based on submitted and priority applications. The funds will cover the state capital expenditures and other types of measures in protected areas and go to the measures necessary to preserve conservation values, including spending on information, management, and facilitation measures. All measures should be in accordance with the approved management and maintenance plan for protected areas.



Steigtind in Sjunghatten National Park, a national park for children, Norway (Martin Finstad)

CASE

36

National parks in Poland are mainly financed from the state budget

In Poland, the activity of national parks was financed by the funds from the state budget, the National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management, 'voivodship' (local county/province) funds for environmental protection and water management, European funds, in addition to any income derived from the parks' own activity. Resources from the state budget constituted 66.1 %, 81.3 % and 42.4 % of the total amount in 2010, 2011, and 2012 respectively. The execution of statutory parks' duties depended to a significant extent on obtaining additional resources. Seven out of 11 national parks collected income from the entrance fees. No correlation between the spent amounts/carried costs and the park's area, number of visitors, or educational offer was noted. The amount of money spent depends on ongoing tasks and projects.

CASE

37

Funds were not allocated for the implementation of some of the Presidential Decrees regarding the establishment of new national parks and the support of existing ones

In 2011 allocations from the State Budget expenditure were insufficient to implement the provisions of 19 legislative acts, particularly, 16 Presidential Decrees regarding the establishment and expansion of national parks and the maintenance of eight national parks in Ukraine. Six national parks which were established received no funding from the state budget. Furthermore, five legislative acts were not implemented in 2013 because of a lack of financing to carry out these tasks.



Conclusions and Recommendations

The cooperative audit of national parks results show that national parks are important players in protecting nature for generations to come. In most of the countries they perform functions delegated to them by their respective governments. However, rapid economic development poses new threats to nature, and in order to mitigate such risks, more concentrated efforts may be needed.

Conclusions:

- The audit results show that the management plans at national park level are stipulated as compulsory in legislation for all countries. However, a management plan has not been drafted for all national parks in all participating countries. Also, the quality and precision of the management plans may vary among national parks in one country (e.g. Bulgaria, Croatia, and Ukraine). This means that it can be difficult for the national parks to plan their resources and for the responsible Ministry to evaluate when they have successfully achieved their target. The ambiguity or absence of measurable indicators makes it difficult to evaluate the results of performance of the national parks. A lack of understanding of the goals and objectives of a national park by local communities may negatively affect the commitment of all stakeholders to the objectives of the national parks; local stakeholders are not always willing to vote in favour of a new national park, as they may see the threat of limitations imposed on their economic activities, etc.
- The responsible Ministries in some countries could have provided more guidance and support to the national parks, and the relevant authorities did not sufficiently monitor or supervise the performance and results of the national parks. As a result, it was difficult for any stakeholder to assess the performance of national parks and the fulfilment of its aims.
- The audit revealed that financing is not always provided based on the estimated needs of the national park and sometimes the lack of funds made it impossible to carry out the necessary actions. Also, national parks in some countries are encouraged by the Governments to develop paid tourism services and attract larger numbers of visitors. It is important to highlight that the aspiration to raise more income from other sources,

such as tourism or tree felling, may be in conflict with the aim to protect the biodiversity in protected areas.

Recommendations:

- In order to ensure that national parks work towards achieving specific goals, all national parks should have management plans that should be operational and measurable. It is advised that the respective Governments and national park administrations should actively try to engage local communities in the management of national parks and put additional efforts into making the benefits and importance of protecting nature better known to a wider public.
- In order to ensure that each park reaches its objectives and specific targets, the authorities should monitor more closely the performance of the national parks and evaluate whether the objectives of the parks have been met.
- In order for the national parks to implement their functions, public financing should be based on the needs' assessment of each national park.



National Abstracts



BULGARIA

Title of the national audit: Management of the National Parks for the Period 01.01.2010–31.12.2012

Publication date: 16 September, 2014

Link to the audit: <http://www.bulnao.government.bg/en>

Objective of the audit:

1. Presenting the legal and executive authority, the management of the audited authority and other users of the information an independent and objective assessment of:
 - the effectiveness of the management of the national parks in Bulgaria and the extent of achieving the set objectives and priorities in the planning and programming documents in the field for the period 2010–2012;
 - the reliability of the systems for the monitoring and control on the implementation of the planned measures and activities on the territory of the national parks.
2. Supporting the legal and executive authority and the management of the audited organisation to achieve improvement in the effectiveness when managing the national parks.

Scope of the audit:

- long-term planning of the activity for management of the national parks as a precondition for the clear vision, effective management and ensuring continuity;
- short-term planning of the activity for management of national parks as an instrument for the implementation of the long-term objectives and priorities;
- effectiveness in the implementation of the planned measures and activities for the period 2010–2012 and the extent of achieving the set in the planning and programming documents objectives;
- conformity with the law and effectiveness of the activities for monitoring and control of the implementation of the planned measures and activities by the National Park Directorates (NPDs) and by the Ministry of the Environment and Water (MOEW).

Main findings:

1. There are general conditions created in Bulgaria for the protection of biological diversity through the development of the national regulatory framework in the field, which is harmonised with EU law.
2. The government does not underestimate the loss of biological diversity as one of the main risks in the environmental field, and defines the objectives and priorities directed towards the biological diversity protection in its planning and programming documents, and national, and regional policies.
3. The national legislation in the field of environmental protection permits the development of the protected territories' system as a means for the conservation of the natural ecosystems, the variety of species, and natural phenomena by delegating the initiation of the procedure for declaring or change of the protected territories to a maximal range of interested persons.
4. The Minister of Environment and Water:
 - develops strategic and planning documents in the field of biological diversity;
 - issues normative acts related to defining the functions and tasks of the regional authorities, responsible for the management of the National Parks and the protected territories;
 - creates and develops the National System for Monitoring of the Biological Diversity.
5. The directors of the NPDs elaborate, endorse, and update the internal rules, instructions and guidelines for their implementation related to: the usage of natural resources on the territory of the parks; the organisation, planning, implementation, reporting and documenting of the activities guarding and control of the protected territories; the development of tourism, educational, informational and scientific activities on the territory of the national parks.
6. The main identified problems related to ensuring sufficient preconditions for the effective implementation of the management of the national parks and the biological diversity protection in the protected areas are:
 - legally restricted powers of the authorities carrying out control in the protected areas in comparison to the powers of the authorities carrying out control in the forest territories;
 - the reduction of the budgetary funds for the realisation of measures and activities in the national parks which cannot be counterbalanced by the increase of the absorbed funds from extra-budgetary sources;
 - the lack of up-to-date long-term planning documents for the period 2010–2012 for two of the three national parks, which should define

the long- and mid-term priorities, objectives and tasks in the management;

- the lack of approved requirements by the Minister of the Environment and Water towards the content and form of the short-term planning documents for the annual planning of the activities in the national parks, which should guarantee the interrelation with the management plans.

7. In the period 01.01.2010–31.12.2012 the management of the national parks is not sufficiently effective, as:

7.1. Despite the entrances for people and motor vehicles, the borders of the national parks are not clearly marked on the ground.

7.2. The established within the NPDs organisation for planning, personnel hiring, documenting and reporting of the activity on guarding and control of the protected territories does not guarantee the permanent guarding and maximal coverage of the guarded sectors; the normative requirement for maximal allowed territory of guarded sector of up to 1 500 ha was not kept in any of the national parks.

7.3. The administrative control carried out by the NPDs does not achieve the expected preventive effect.

7.4. The activities on monitoring of biological diversity in the national parks are not implemented to a full extent, and there is not enough comparable analytical and/or interpretative data about the status of the monitored species in order to be the basis for taking managerial decisions. There are no endorsed methods for monitoring of objects defined for monitoring in the national parks. The number of some of the endangered species is decreasing.

7.5. The system for monitoring and the control of the implementation of the activity of the NPDs does not provide enough data to the Minister of the Environment and Water about the results from the carried out activity on the management of the national parks and the status of the biological diversity therein.

On these grounds, the data from the system for monitoring and control on the management of the national parks hinders:

- carrying out a comparative analysis of the management of various national parks;
- the analysis and assessment of the progress in the implementation of the objectives and tasks set in the long-term planning documents for the management of protected territories;
- taking managerial decisions for change and/or optimising of the regulatory framework in the field of the protected territories and biological diversity protection.

Key recommendations and conclusions:

1. To elaborate and propose to the Council of Ministers a draft for the amendment and supplementation of the Law on the Protected Territories in order to synchronise the powers of the sector guards with the authorities responsible for guarding the forest territories.
2. To elaborate and endorse the amendment and supplementation of the Rules of Procedure of the MOEW in order to expand the powers of the specialised administration within the MOEW, adding the functions of coordination and control on the activity of the NPDs in the national parks in their capacity of regional authorities of the Ministry.
3. To elaborate and endorse the amendment and supplement of the Ordinance for Elaboration of Management Plans of the Protected Territories in order to guarantee:
 - the usage of good managerial practices when defining the objectives in the management plans;
 - carrying out of the financial assessment of the management plan and setting the measures and activities for its implementation;
 - the assessment of the risk for non-implementation of the plan's objectives;
 - defining the deadline for undertaking the actions for updating the management plan;
 - identifying the indicators for the annual monitoring of the status of biological diversity and of the extent of achieving the objectives set in the management plan.
4. To elaborate and endorse the internal acts for the planning, implementation, reporting and documenting of the activities related to the management of the national parks in order to guarantee the same practice in the different NPDs, defining at least:
 - the form and content of the annual plans for monitoring of the environmental components and of the flow of tourists;
 - the organisation and implementation of the activities permitting the usage of natural resources;
 - the clear designation on terrain of the borders of the national parks and the different zones defined therein, in particular the method of marking and the regularity of renewing the marking;
 - the interrelation between the annual plans and annual reports for the activity of the NPDs and the management plans of the national parks through defining of limited number key indicators for measuring and assessment of the extent of achieving the set in the plans objectives, reporting also on the progress of implementation of the management plans in the annual activity reports.
5. Strengthening the administrative capacity of the NPDs to ensure that:

- the legal requirements for maximal area of the guarded sectors served by one guard are kept;
- the professional experience of the guards to implement activities on monitoring and administrative control is increased.

Response of the Government to the audit:

The Minister of the Environment and Water should inform the President of the National Audit Office about the measures and actions undertaken for the implementation of the given recommendations within one year.



Title of the national audit: Nature Conservation, Biodiversity Protection and Management in National Parks

Publication date: 28 May, 2014

Link to the audit: <http://www.revizija.hr/izvjesca/2014/bio/ocuvanje-prirode-zastita-bioraznolikosti-i-upravljanje-nacionalnim-parkovima.pdf>

Objective of the audit:

The objective of the audit was to assess whether:

1. the legal and institutional framework for the nature conservation and biodiversity protection in national parks has been appropriate in order to fulfil the obligations related to international agreements;
2. the system of conservation and protection of nature and biodiversity in national parks has been efficient;
3. national parks have been managed efficiently.

Scope of the audit:

The audit focused on the implementation of the paragraphs of the Convention on Biodiversity, the National Strategy and Action Plan and other plans and programmes, in order to conserve and promote the existing biodiversity and use of natural resources rationally. The report looked at the efficiency of monitoring, research work, the impact of tourism, and the efficiency of management in national parks. Funding was assessed to establish if it was sufficient to meet the objectives of national parks.

Main findings:

- The marine areas of national parks have not been adequately protected - overfishing, using illegal tools for fishing and destructive fishing practices (more clear legislation on protection issues and stricter regulation on fishing performed by the domicile population is needed; inspection and fines system need to be improved).
- Threats to biodiversity and their possible effects on biodiversity have not been clearly described in the National Strategy, and specific protection measures have not been specifically linked with the anticipated impacts and possible consequences on biodiversity.
- No buffer zone exists in the majority of national parks, and legal relations regarding assets and the status of ownership are unresolved (the land register has not been updated).
- Not enough research programmes on biodiversity, compiling a comprehensive inventory, or monitoring were performed due to insufficient financial and staff resources at the Ministry, State Institution for Nature Protection, and the majority of public institutions of national parks;

there is no unique register of research work (risk of overlapping research or no research on some important issues).

- No adequate system is in place to monitor the status on biodiversity due to a lack of comprehensive monitoring databases; unclear legislation related to the obligation of performing monitoring in national parks; monitoring is not performed on a regular basis.
- Insufficiently developed information system for nature protection (databases on biodiversity have to be improved and updated).
- The lack of a Register of Alien Species (still in progress), no systematic programmes and monitoring system of the alien species.
- Difficulties in tracking the number of visitors and their impact on protected areas (a uniform ticket charging system has not been established in national parks); some parks lack activities related to investments in educational paths, and training programmes that would enhance the awareness of the need for nature and biodiversity conservation in protected areas.
- Insufficiently developed system of long term preservation planning and adaptive management (lack of management plans, existing management plans lack explicitly specified objectives, and objectives indicators, measures for expected results are not being sufficiently tracked and monitored; the basic documents for preservation and management have not been aligned (a spatial plan, management plan and rules on the protection and conservation); not providing technical assistance to local population (private landowners) to protect ecologically sensitive lands in the area of national parks.
- Public institutions of national parks don't have sufficient authority to manage parks in an efficient way.
- Insufficient permanent education system, professional specialisation and advancement of park staff, lack of adequate park personnel capacities related to preparing infrastructural (and other important) project activities to be financed from EU structural and other international funds.
- Lack of communication and coordination between institutions in charge of nature protection.
- Insufficient long-term financing (the majority of parks require additional state funding, which is limited).
- A revenue generating policy option is needed in order to collect the determined percentage of self-generated revenues (to be allocated to a special account to ensure the appropriate level of sustainable financing of all national parks at the same level in the future).

Key recommendations and conclusions:

The State Audit Office finds that there is a need to strengthen and develop the system of planning and monitoring of population trends in the area of national parks. Considering the current situation, the reasons for the threats and problems related to the biological and landscape diversity in national parks, it

has been found that the national parks in Croatia still have great wealth and diversity with a high level of value and conservation of biological and landscape diversity. However, numerous threats have been identified, which if not dealt with in an appropriate way, could undermine the existing nature and condition of biodiversity in the future; though no serious threat that could significantly cause biodiversity loss has been identified by the audit. The audit has found deficiencies relating to the legal and institutional framework for nature conservation, the protection of biodiversity, and methods for protecting and managing of the national parks. Recommendations have been given to the competent authorities in order to improve the legal and institutional framework, ensure reliable and updated information on the state of nature, improve conservation measures of nature and biodiversity conservation and management in national parks.

Response of the Government to the audit:

As a result of the audit, 23 recommendations were made, among which nine were related to the improvement of legal and institutional framework, nine to the improvement of conservation and biodiversity protection, and five to the improvement of the system of management, supervision and financing in national parks.

All the audited entities (four national parks, the Ministry of Environment and Nature Protection and the State Institute for Nature Protection) consider the findings of the audit very useful and agreed to implement the audit recommendations.

The audited entities were obliged to inform the auditors about the implemented or planned measures and activities which are or will be undertaken to implement the given recommendations by September 2014.

In their response, it has been stated that some audit recommendations have already been completely or partly implemented such as: initiating the amending of the spatial plans of national parks, defining maritime boundaries at part of Mljet National Park, updating the national parks' databases, taking more activities related to research work and performing inventory and monitoring in the area of national parks, performing trainings for national parks' staff for preparing project proposals for EU Funds, etc.

By the end of 2015, the Ministry of Environmental and Nature Protection plans to initiate an amendment to the Nature Protection Act and other national regulations in order to ensure that the protection of the marine ecosystems, water areas and forests of national parks are adequately regulated. Furthermore, a new national Strategy is planned to be developed by the end of 2014. The State Institute has already improved the Nature Protection Information System and it is envisaged to establish an integrated Nature Protection Information System in Croatia in 2015.



Title of the national audit: The Establishment of National Parks in Denmark

Publication date: December, 2013

Link to the audit: <http://uk.rigsrevisionen.dk/publications/2013/62013/>

Objective of the audit:

To assess whether the Ministry of the Environment has supported and followed up on the target-setting and performance of the national parks so that in the long term they can strengthen and develop the nature, including the creation of connected natural areas.

Scope of the audit:

1. Has the Ministry of the Environment set clear objectives and quantifiable targets for the national parks in the executive orders on national parks?
2. Has the Ministry of the Environment helped the national parks keep their planning clearly focused on strengthening and developing nature and set clear and quantifiable goals to this end?
3. Does the Ministry of the Environment monitor and follow up on whether the operations of national parks focus on strengthening and developing biodiversity?

Main findings:

We have examined the establishment of all three national parks in Denmark, from those created under the National Parks' Act, which came into force in 2007, through to the present.

The objective of the national parks in Denmark is not only to strengthen and develop nature; Danish national parks must also meet other objectives, e.g., to promote an understanding of nature, tourism, and business development. In addition, national parks depend on the local land owners' willingness to cooperate and their own ability to raise external financing. Accordingly, there is no guarantee that the establishment of national parks will help strengthen and develop nature.

Key recommendations and conclusions:

Rigsrevisionen (the SAI of Denmark) found that in future, the Ministry of the Environment should increase its support of the national parks, so that in the long term they will be better positioned to strengthen and develop nature. The Ministry should particularly support the national park boards' formulation of clear, quantifiable targets, which the national parks can use as the basis for prioritising their activities.

Rigsrevisionen found it important that the Ministry of the Environment started monitoring and following up on national park development and performance to obtain a basis for assessing whether the national parks can contribute to fulfilling the objective of the National Park Act to strengthen and develop nature in the long term, including the creation of large connected natural areas.

Response of the Government to the audit:

In response to the report, The Minister for the Environment has stated that in the years ahead the Ministry will work to establish clearer and more quantifiable targets in the national park plans, as they are revised every six years or if a new national park is established.

Furthermore, the Minister has stated that the Ministry will systematically follow up on the work and results of the national parks through meetings and regular communication. The Ministry is also currently developing a model to track the work of the national parks using, among other sources, data from the annual reports of national parks.



LITHUANIA

Title of the national audit: Management of National Parks

Publication date: 30 June, 2014

Link to the audit: http://www.vkontrole.lt/audito_ataskaitos_en.aspx?tipas=15

Objective of the audit:

To evaluate whether the management of national parks is effective in terms of protecting biodiversity in Lithuania.

Scope of the audit:

- the regulatory and legal framework, organisational support for conservation of the nature reserve fund in the national parks;
- the planning and utilisation of the state budgetary resources for the establishment and operation of the national parks;
- the development of the network of national parks and the implementation of the tasks determined for them within the legislature.

Main findings:

Lithuania's adopted Biodiversity Strategy of 1998 has not been updated since. Even though the directorates of national parks know which conservation measures are most important and relevant, the country should still have a document enumerating the most important and relevant protection priorities and measures on a national level.

The audit also shows that local communities and enterprises are poorly involved in the decision-making of national parks when they are established. However, there were several instances when public opinion prevented the government from establishing new parks.

The directorates of national parks must supervise not only the territory of their respective national parks, but also some additional territories. Despite the increased territory to supervise and protect, no additional resources have been allocated, thus, threats to protected areas may arise and some functions may not be carried out properly.

All national parks have management plans; however, only one national park out of five renewed and approved a management plan in 2010. The remaining national parks have only renewed management plans, but their approval is falling behind.

National parks in Lithuania are open areas with many settlements with no entry restrictions, except one that has an entrance fee collected by the municipality. Thus, directorates cannot control the flow of visitors and always exactly

determine the possible impact of tourism on biodiversity and the need to regulate the flow.

Key recommendations and conclusions:

The auditors recommended that the Ministry of the Environment renew the Biodiversity Strategy and accordingly approve a new action plan, as well as ensure that local communities are better represented on the joint boards of national parks.

It has been recommended that along with the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of the Environment should review the capabilities and resources of national parks before assigning them new functions or new territories to manage which fall outside the territory of the national park.

The State Service for Protected Areas has been advised to analyse the need for action plans for certain protected areas and if necessary to prepare and approve such plans. Also, it has been recommended that the institution, along with the directorates of national parks, should more eagerly educate society and apply preventive measures to protect nature.

Response of the Government to the audit:

In 2015, the Ministry of the Environment plans to approve the renewed Biodiversity Strategy and its action plan, as well as to prioritise protected areas and prepare action plans for them if the need arises. The Ministry also plans to analyse the volume of activity and resources of national parks, and provide recommendations to the lawmakers to review the legal acts; adequate financing and resources will allow the national parks to fully carry out their functions.

By the end of 2014, the Ministry of Environment plans to initiate a change in the Law on Protected Areas so that the local communities and other interested parties are included in the management of parks.

In order to more effectively regulate the flow of visitors and educate society, the State Service for Protected Areas plans to establish nature schools in several national parks, and prepare suitable methodology for these schools.



NORWAY

Title of the national audit: The Office of the Auditor General's Investigation of the Management of National Parks

Publication date: 3 March, 2014

Link to the audit:

www.riksrevisjonen.no/en/Reports/Documents/ManagementOfNationalParks.pdf

Objective of the audit:

To determine whether the new management model for national parks functions in accordance with the decisions and intentions of the Storting (the Norwegian Parliament), and whether an expedient system has been established for state guidance, documentation, and oversight.

Scope of the audit:

In 2009, the Storting adopted a new management model to give locally elected representatives greater control over the management of national parks. Management is to be knowledge-based, locally-rooted and as uniform as possible. An inter-municipal national park board is to ensure that protected areas are comprehensively managed across administrative boundaries and within the framework of the Nature Diversity Act and conservation regulations. A secretariat of the board shall be assigned to a national park manager. The manager will be hired by the County Governor, but is subordinate to the board in matters relating to national park management. The expert advisory committees are an important part of the management model to ensure local roots, expertise, participation and collaboration in management. The County Governor shall ensure that management is in accordance with the Nature Diversity Act and the conservation objective and has the right to appeal on behalf of the state. The Ministry of Climate and Environment decides the appeals. The management model covers the management of national parks, other large protected areas and contiguous protected areas. This audit concerns the management of the national parks in Mainland Norway. The first national park board was established in 2010. As of 31 December 2013, 27 national park boards for managing national parks in Mainland Norway had been constituted. The establishment of a new local management model for national parks is in the final stages.

Two questions have been the point of departure for the audit:

1. Does the management model work as intended?

To ascertain the answers, the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) examined whether the management model was implemented in accordance with the Storting's decisions and intentions, whether the administrative procedure is in accordance with the principles of good administrative practice and the requirement of proper procedure, and whether the national parks are managed within the framework of the Nature Diversity Act and conservation regulations.

2. Has an expedient system been established for state guidance, documentation, and oversight?

The OAG examined whether the state follows through on the guidance responsibility it has towards the national park board and national park managers, whether the systems for handling appeals work and whether the Ministry of Climate and Environment carries out its overall follow-up and oversight responsibilities.

Main findings:

The new local management model has largely been implemented as envisioned; the model provides a basis for greater local participation and improved local coordination in national park management. The local management model also allows for the increasing use of empirically-based local knowledge as a basis for management, including knowledge of local Sami traditions and interests in the national parks. Many actors and three levels - national park board, agency, and ministry - are involved in the management of the national parks, and funding is divided accordingly. The consequence of this appears to be that the management of the national parks has become less efficient than it could be in terms of time and cost.

It is difficult to establish expert advisory committees and participation at many meetings has been low.

The audit shows that, on average, it takes just over one year for appeals to be processed.

Key recommendations and conclusions:

While it is still early to assess the extent to which the management model will safeguard the objectives over time, there are relatively few appeals from County Governors concerning the decisions of the national park boards, which may indicate that the management model safeguards the conservation objectives. The national park boards and the national park managers receive good support and guidance from the Norwegian Environment Agency.

The statutes for the national park boards, as laid down by the Ministry of Climate and Environment, are not entirely consistent with the Storting's decision concerning who appoints the national park boards. The consequence may be that the state has taken on a responsibility that the Storting had not intended.

The Ministry of Climate and Environment should clarify the role of the expert advisory committees in management.

The County Governors have different approaches to the follow-up of the national park boards and national park management activities, and there are a number of different ideas about the responsibilities and tasks of the County Governor in connection with national park management. There is a need for the

Ministry of Climate and Environment to clarify the management role of the County Governor, so there is less variation among the County Governors concerning the extent to which they involve themselves in the management of the national park boards. In addition, the audit shows that there may be a need to clarify the instruction authority and management rights of the national park board vis-à-vis the national park managers.

The follow-up of the Sami representatives on the national park boards can be improved, and the Ministry of Climate and Environment should therefore consider initiating an intensified dialogue with the Sami Parliament on how training and follow-up of Sami representatives on national park boards can be improved.

Response of the Government to the audit:

The Ministry of Climate and Environment believes that the draft main analysis report on the management of national parks provides a good picture of the new model for local management of the national parks and other large protected areas and the impact of the model on the management of this type of protected area. The Ministry considers the findings of the audit useful in the continuing work of strengthening the management of the Norwegian protected areas.

The statutes for the national park boards are not entirely consistent with the Storting's decision concerning who appoints the national park boards. The Ministry of Climate and Environment states that it will inform the Storting of this in an appropriate manner.

The Ministry of Climate and Environment acknowledges that the processing time is too lengthy for many of the appeals, and the Ministry stated that they are working to reduce the processing time of appeals.



Title of the national audit: The Functioning of National Parks

Publication date: April, 2014

Link to the audit: <http://www.nik.gov.pl>

Objective of the audit:

The assessment of activities undertaken in national parks in order to execute their statutory tasks, including: the conservation of ecosystems, making the park areas accessible, and environmental education.

The audited fields aimed at the execution of the above mentioned objective concerned:

- the organisation of the activity and management, the process of making parks accessible, and the Minister of the Environment's supervision over the national parks;
- the activities undertaken in order to preserve the biodiversity, resources, features and elements of inanimate nature and land aesthetics, to restore the proper condition of natural resources and elements, recreate the deformed natural habitats, the habitats of plants, animals, and fungi, and conduct environmental education;
- the management of financial resources.

Scope of the audit:

Activities implemented in 11 national parks and the Ministry of the Environment in the period 1 January, 2010 – 20 September, 2013.

The activities were assessed with regard to legality, sound management, reliability, and efficacy.

Main findings:

1. The parks properly implemented the tasks defined by legal regulations. Conservation activities were undertaken in order to preserve the biodiversity, resources, features and elements of inanimate nature and land aesthetics, as well as to restore the proper condition of natural resources and elements and mitigate threats, or recreate the deformed habitats.
2. National parks are a form of nature conservation, are also organisational units that have their administration and organisational structure. A post of the park guard functioned in each park, as well as from six to 27 organisational units and from one to 17 conservation ranges. As of the end of 2012, 718 persons were employed in the audited parks, including 421 in the National Park Service, making up 58.6 %. In certain parks, the number of employees of the National Park Service varied from 19 to 105.

3. The existing and potential, external and internal threats to the condition of nature and biodiversity on the premises of the audited parks, including those posed by the alien invasive species, were identified, and the means of eliminating or mitigating them were determined.
4. In nine out of all audited national parks, cultivating or breeding extinct or endangered species was conducted, or alternatively the number of their habitat patches was being enlarged.
5. The borders of all national parks were marked. Strict protection zones were established, encompassing from 4.6 % to 57.6 % of the area; active and landscape protection zones were also designated.
6. For each park, the rules and sites made accessible for scientific, educational, and tourist purposes were established. In ten parks, limits for tourists visiting and moving along the routes were set. The length of tourist routes in individual parks varied from 13.3 km to 555.3 km. The routes were properly marked and maintained, and the dangerous sites have been secured. In the years 2010–2012, the audited parks were visited by almost 18 million people.
7. Activities connected with environmental education were carried out in all parks. The richness and equipment of the educational base varied, as did the educational value of the parks. In the years 2010–2012, from 6 800–67 700 people took part in educational classes in particular parks. 10 national parks had from three to 13 educational trails ranging from 4.8 km to 86.8 km in length.
8. In the audited period, the parks functioned on the basis of the so called 'conservation tasks', established by the Ministry of the Environment for one to five years. Most of the planned works were executed; however, the scope of works was narrower than planned in several parks due to financial reasons, weather conditions, or other causes. None of the audited national parks had a required statutory long-term (20-year) management plan; in four national parks projected plans had already been prepared and submitted to the Minister of the Environment, while in six national parks, such works were still in progress. In the audited period, despite the legal obligation to do so, national parks did not specify in written form the specific goals of nature conservation resulting from the characteristics of a particular park, or set out arrangements connected with the need to prepare planning documents for the parks and the buffer zone created in the areas bordering with the park premises, which hindered the proper use of the neighbouring area.
9. In all audited national parks, field inspections and performance audits of the conservation tasks were conducted. In cases where there were breaches of the rules or prohibitions in force in the parks, fines were imposed by means of penalty tickets or suits filed in court. In total, 1 078

penalty tickets to the amount of PLN 156.400³ were imposed in the audited national parks.

10. Biodiversity in the national parks was assessed in various ways and did not follow a universal scope. There was not a unified set of biodiversity indices prepared, which could have been applied in relation to particular national park areas, habitats, or systemic groups, thereby constituting a basis for the establishment and comparison of the effectiveness of the undertaken activities. The Minister of the Environment did not formulate recommendations or guidelines for the national parks concerning the application of biodiversity indices, nor did he require reporting from the execution of this statutory national park obligation.
11. National parks spent annually from PLN 3.4 million to PLN 33.1 million on their activity. No correlation between the spent amounts/carried costs and the park's area, the number of visitors, or educational offer was noted. The activity of national parks was financed by the funds from the state budget, the National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management, local 'voivodship' funds for environmental protection and water management, European funds, including the Operational Programme Infrastructure and Environment and Financial Instrument Life+, as well as those obtained from the parks' own activities. Resources from the state budget constituted 66.1 %, 81.3 %, and 42.4 % of the total amount in 2010, 2011, and 2012 respectively. A significant part of the expenditures/costs of national parks was constituted by remuneration, although, the salaries in the national parks were significantly lower than in the state administration; in 2012 their share of the total cost of the audited National Parks amounted to 37.6 %. For six national parks, the received budget resources were not sufficient to cover the remuneration. The execution of statutory national park duties depended to a significant extent on obtaining additional resources; seven out of 11 national parks received income from entrance fees.
12. The activities of the Minister of the Environment, who is obliged by law to supervise the national parks, were not sufficient. The system that collects and processes data on the activity of national parks, which functions in the Ministry of the Environment, was unsatisfactory both with regard to the scope of the data, as well as the means of processing it. There was neither a mechanism to assess the execution of tasks in the national parks, a system and methods of effectiveness and efficiency assessment of the undertaken activities, nor solutions that would enable a joint analysis of the execution of planned goals and tasks to be undertaken. The system of annual reporting on the parks' activity could not serve this aim, as it included only selected statistical data, which did not provide a full view. The Minister did not obtain the data necessary to assess the degree to

³ The parks did not have information on the execution of the resources obtained as a result of fine collection, because such resources are entered locally into the account of the responsible Voivodship Office.

which the conservation tasks established by his resolutions were implemented and what their effects were. The annual statements routinely submitted by national parks were not subject to an on-going comparative analysis in the scope of changes occurred in the following years and differences between parks. Furthermore, the Minister's statutory duty concerning the preparation of annual statements on the park's activities was carried out in an unreliable way, and several pieces of data on the national parks submitted to other bodies were incoherent or even contained errors. The process during which legal acts concerning the national parks and their functioning are prepared in The Ministry of the Environment was also dilatory.

Response of the Government to the audit:

The Minister of the Environment announced the solutions prepared in order to accelerate the process of the establishment of management plans for national parks. On 1 July, 2014, the next plan was established. Minister also prepared assumptions to the database of the national parks, which is intended to simultaneously conduct reporting and a comparative analysis. Supervision of the preparation of the parks' annual tasks was intensified and the execution of the tasks will be analysed.



Title of the national audit: Performance Audit of the State Budgetary Resources, Allocated to Preservation of the Nature Reserve Fund in the National Parks

Publication date of information about the audit: 18 December, 2013

Link to the audit: <http://portal.rp.int/control/main/uk/publish/article/16743115>

Objective of the audit:

The establishment of the actual state of affairs with regard to the utilisation of state budgetary resources allocated to the preservation of the nature reserve fund in the national parks, in terms of their economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Scope of the audit:

- the regulatory and legal framework, organisational support for the conservation of the nature reserve fund in the national parks;
- the planning and utilisation of the state budgetary resources for the establishment and operation of the national parks;
- the development of the network of national parks and the implementation of the tasks determined for them within the legislature.

Main findings:

During the 30-year period of the formation of the system of national parks in Ukraine, 48 national parks have been established, 42 of which were functioning at the time of the audit. The history of the establishment of the national parks in Ukraine began in 1980, when the Carpathian National Park was established by Decree of the Council of Ministries of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. The latest national park in Ukraine, namely the National Park 'Male Polissya', was established upon the Decree of the President of Ukraine in August 2013.

It is necessary to note that areas of the national parks, including areas assigned to the national parks for permanent land-usage, are determined by Decree of the President of Ukraine on their establishment. At the same time, the territories of the national parks could include pockets of land or water of the other land-users or landowners.

The analysis of the functional zones of the national parks indicates that 60.8 % of the park territory in Ukraine belongs to the economic zone, 23.7 % – to that of regulated recreation, 15 % – to the reserve zone and 0.6 % – to the zone of the stationary recreation.

The audit has also revealed that the national parks of Ukraine are financed from the State Budget funds, the State Fund for Environmental Protection (SFEP), charitable contributions and grants.

At the same time, the main source of financing of the national parks is resources allocated from the State Budget of Ukraine. Thus, the analysis of the expenditure structure of the national parks in Ukraine showed that during the last three years, 80.3 % of the resources allocated to maintenance and carrying out activities were allocated from the State Budget.

Other financial resources, which were used by the national parks, were obtained as a fee for the provided services. The main sources of income of the national parks are from selling timber, and from providing services related to the recreational activities.

The audit findings showed that the national parks in Ukraine are subordinated to three different authorities, namely to the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine, the State Agency of Forest Resources, and the State Management of Affairs. Such a set up hinders the proper implementation by the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources regarding its functions in the framework of nature reserve fund, particularly with regard to the development of actual policy, and ensuring the effective management of the nature reserve fund.

Fees for paid services provided by the national parks are not determined within the current legislation of Ukraine. The legal settlement of this issue will help to increase the income of the national parks from paid services provided in accordance with their functional responsibilities, ultimately reducing the expenditure of the General Fund of the State Budget of Ukraine.

Activities related to the development and approval of the Projects of Organisation of the Territories (management plans) of the national parks should be strengthened in so far as the lack of approved projects makes it impossible for the administrations to carry out conservation measures, including receiving the documents which determine land ownership.

The insufficient financing of the national parks increases the risk of their inability to implement organisational measures.

Key recommendations and conclusions:

- to take measures with regard to strengthening the internal control system by the fund managers;
- to legally settle the procedures and methodology for determining the cost of services provided by the national parks in accordance with their functional responsibilities;
- to legally settle the procedures for informing the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine with regard to the activities of all national parks, by determining the form and content of such information;
- to enhance the activities related to the development and approval of the Projects of Organisation of the Territory of the National Parks (management plans);

- to resume the activity of the Coordination Council on the Formation of the National Ecological Network.

Response of the Government to the audit:

The Government of Ukraine has informed the SAI of Ukraine about actions taken with regard to the audit findings, in particular about development of the Action Plan on Conclusions and Recommendations of the Accounting Chamber of Ukraine. Besides, the Government enhanced its activities related to the development and approval of the Projects of Organization of the Territories (management plans).










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-  The National Audit Office of the Republic of Bulgaria
-  State Audit Office of the Republic of Croatia
-  Rigsrevisionen, Denmark
-  National Audit Office of Lithuania
-  The Office of the Auditor General of Norway
-  Polish Supreme Audit Office
-  Accounting Chamber of Ukraine