

National Park Sutjeska (Republica Srpska): some suggestions for communication planning and activities

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1. Introduction

A nature conservation organization is just as dependent on other people to get results as any other organization: no organization can successfully protect nature on their own. Step by step changes can be realized through strategic communication interventions, especially when combined with other adequate instruments, including economic, financial and others.

The establishment and management of protected areas is not an exception, including the EU Natura 2000 sites. Early communication is – as experienced in the EU member states – crucial for the success of the Natura 2000 implementation.

Although it is difficult to foresee the length and results of the process while working towards EU accession, the South Eastern European countries have an opportunity to improve their nature conservation practices. WWF is engaged in this process through several ongoing projects, with the overall goal of improving the biodiversity protection in the region.

This document is being elaborated in the framework of the WWF's Mediterranean Programme's project Europe's Living Heart Phase II (ELH II) in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The main goal of this project is to

enhance biodiversity conservation in Bosnia and Herzegovina by supporting the first steps of the implementation of the EU standards in the country.

The concrete current activity foresees to carry out a document to support the planning of the communication related activities in the area, including suggestions for strategic communication features (communication goals, target audiences, messages) for the 2 pilot areas selected in each of the 2 Entities:

- National Park Sutjeska (Republica Srpska)
- Ramsar Site Livno (Federation of Bosnia and Hercegovina)

The selection of these areas implies a more active engagement of WWF in them, with the overarching idea of supporting the process of implementation of the EU biodiversity protection standards in Bosnia and Herzegovina through the concrete experiences and results from the activities carried out there.

This document will focus on the National Park Sutjeska. Subsequent phases of the project can provide some capacity and resources for the concrete implementation of some of the key actions identified in this document.

2. Principles and main goal

The following are some key principles which will be followed in the elaboration of the current document:

- Building on the past, ongoing and planned communication activities related with sustainable development – nature conservation.
- Working towards compatibility and practical use of its conclusions for the existing management body.
- Ensuring input is provided by key persons and institutions during the elaboration of the document.
- Including some first steps to support the future implementation of EU biodiversity protection standards in the area.
- Trying to extract conclusions and recommendations useful for future work on communication on EU biodiversity protection standards in other levels in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- Simplicity and clarity.

Keeping these principles in mind, the main objective of this document can be defined as *to identify key communication elements to support nature conservation in the area, including first steps related with the EU biodiversity protection standards implementation.*

3. Background information

The National Park Sutjeska includes the wider area of Sutjeska River Basin, together with the strictly protected reservation Perućica, as well as parts of Maglić, Volujak and Zelengora mountains. The National Park “Sutjeska” was the first proclaimed national park in Bosnia and Herzegovina, founded in 1962. The total area of National park is 17,250 hectares, including the territory of three municipalities (Foča, Gacko, Kalinovik). It includes one of the biggest virgin forest in Europe (around 1,000 ha), and some important historic places for Bosnia and Herzegovina (e.g. this is the place where a very important battle during the Second World War took place). The Park Administration has 80 persons permanently

employed plus 30 seasonal; from them, 28 are working directly on nature protection. This includes 12 rangers geographically distributed in the territory of the park. The Park Administration is also responsible for the management of the hunting within the area of 53,700 ha (which goes beyond the National Park territory). According to the Protected Areas management categories of the IUCN, the National Park Sutjeska is second (II) Category of Protected Areas.

The key information was obtained from the management body of the National Park Sutjeska, during a field visit of WWF staff to the office of the National Park in Tjentište. The meeting took place the 2nd of April 2009, and the following persons were present:

- Semra Fejzibegovic, WWF
- Alberto Arroyo, WWF
- Slobodan Čarapić, National Park Sutjeska (Executive Director for Economic and General Affairs)
- Zoran Čančar, National Park Sutjeska (Technical Director)
- Miloš Živanović, National Park Sutjeska (Chief of Protection and Safety Department)
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After the preparation of the first draft by WWF staff, the document is circulated among the people present in the meeting for their input.

4. Past, ongoing and planned related activities

Several projects and activities with a communication component have been or are running in the National Park Sutjeska, including:

- Management Plan for Sutjeska National Park 2003-2012, prepared within the World Bank Forestry Project for B&H; Plan has been prepared by a “Scandia consult Natura” Sweden in cooperation with the Economic Institute Banja Luka, B&H.
- Regione Lombardia’s project on the creation of a Botanical Garden (currently on hold): at this point the restoration of the current situation has been done and just the dendroflora part has been established. Next steps include the construction of a laboratory and the creation of a genetic bank, as well as further implementation of the project.
- Project: Cooperation in realization of the Conservation and development of Environment Process in B&H- register of the vegetation biodiversity within the Perućica virgin forest of Sutjeska National park. Project has been realized in cooperation with Forestry Faculty Banja Luka, and financed by Lombardy region of Italy through the International NGO “Alisei”.
- World Bank’s Forest and Mountains Protected Areas for BiH project: one of its components has planned public awareness activities, which have not been carried out yet.
- Project analyzing the impact of grazing on plants within World Bank’s Forest and Mountains Protected Areas for BiH
- Project on the protection of the Brown Bear within World Bank’s Forest and Mountains Protected Areas for BiH
- Project to construct Hides for bird-watching within World Bank’s Forest and Mountains Protected Areas for BiH
- International Soccer Cup for children “Football friends”: not really related with the National Park management, but an event to be considered as it possibly has potential communication opportunities (eg EU supports this kind of events, including Olli Rhen). Yearly in May

5. Challenges and opportunities

Sutjeska National Park is a well known national protected area, with number of overnight stays of 9,000 per year and number of visitors of 20,000 per year.

Regarding the **awareness of the local population on nature conservation is very low** –which is probably also applicable for B&H nationally, e.g. regarding waste dumping–, and there has been no specific activity to increase this awareness for now. We should keep in mind that the economical situation in B&H is not very positive, therefore local population in Sutjeska National Park needs to use the natural resources for their living, sometimes not in a sustainable way (e.g. uncontrolled collection of product from the forests, illegal grazing). Furthermore, the current financial crisis is making law enforcement less and less effective.

In any case, the **local population has been involved in some activities** of the projects mentioned in the previous chapter years ago –e.g. participating in workshops–. The Park Administration found this involvement useful, so **it is considered negative that most of these activities are halted**.

In particular, **illegal hunting** has become increasingly a concern, but it is not possible to improve the situation without the involvement and support of some key institutions (like the municipalities or the police) to get a better law enforcement.

Currently there is **no developed presentation of the whole range of touristic opportunities** of the National Park, which e.g. would help the local populations to obtain more benefits to sell their products. Actually, an improvement in this situation would help not only the population within the protected area, but also in the surrounding area. In any case, any action to increase the number of visitors should be accompanied by an evaluation of the impact of a higher level of tourism, plus some planning and improvement of visitors' facilities (signs, equipment and plan).

In some areas of the National Park there are still some **transhumance activities**, with practically no impact over the natural values. The existence of this activity supports a more respectful approach to nature from visitors, as they find human activity in the area they are visiting. They also produce quality organic products, which commercialization could be improved. The Park Administration would be happy to continue the support of these activities.

In any case, it has **not been done a general awareness rising for local communities** on the relevance and benefits of the National Park for their lives, which is believed to be crucial by the Park Administration.

Finally, the **knowledge on EU biodiversity protection standards of the National park staff and the Park Administration itself could be improved**.

6. Some suggested basic communication elements

Building on the previous information, and considering the main objective of this document, the following possible communication goals can be suggested in two years time:

- To increase the level of awareness of local population on the relevance and benefits of the Protected Area, possibly including the EU value.

- To achieve a friendly and cooperative day to day relation between the Park Administration and hunter associations.
- To ensure some local shops are offering local products using the National Park as quality evidence.
- To increase the knowledge of the Park Administration staff on EU biodiversity protection standards.

Building up on the previous possible goals, the following key target audiences are suggested, including possible adapted messages for each of them:

- Local population of the 3 municipalities
 - The natural values around you could have economic advantages for you (examples should be provided, including e.g. benefits from tourism, commercialization of products from protected areas).
 - To keep these values, we need to take some care: think where you throw the waste!
 - Do you know you live in a very valuable area, not only for B&H, but for the EU?
- Local authorities
 - The natural values around you could have economic advantages for you (examples should be provided, including e.g. availability of EU funds for biodiversity protection in general and Natura 2000 in particular).
 - Do you know you live in a very valuable area, not only for B&H, but for the EU?
 - Hunting is a valuable activity, but not the only one!
- Hunters (through hunters associations?)
 - Hunting needs nature – protection of the nature is protection of the hunting: we have the same goal!
 - It is necessary to implement the growth measures: nurturing, protection from diseases in order to increase the number of game and to achieve the level of commercial hunting.
- Park Administration staff
 - EU biodiversity protection standards are not only a tool for EU accession, but also a way to improve nature protection.
 - As soon you start to plan and discuss with stakeholders your plans, as easier the process of implementing Natura 2000 will be.
 - All employees in the Park should have the awareness level on protected areas on EU standards level.

7. Some possible activities identified

Keeping in mind the previous structure (goals, target audiences, messages + identified opportunities), some possible concrete actions can be suggested:

- Organization of a (series of) workshops or discussion forums with municipalities and/or hunters to start an opened dialogue on the future vision of the National Park, with the overall goal ensuring conservation and sustainable use of the game in the area managed by the Park Administration.
- Meetings with cattle owners carrying out transhumance activities, aiming to identify the best way forward to support a) their activity and b) the commercialization of their products in the municipalities

using the National Park as a quality evidence. The results from the project analyzing the impact of grazing on plants on the National Park should serve as a base for this discussion.

- Liaison with the Football Children World Cup to use the opportunity for awareness raising among local population and authorities of the relevance and benefits from the National Park, including its value from an European and global perspective.
- Training modules on EU biodiversity protection standards for staff of the Park Administration, probably with a special focus on practical management issues, including the identification and conservation requirements of habitats and species of Community Interest, elaboration of management plans, assessment of plans or projects.
- Support to the finalization of the Botanical Garden facilities, or its promotion.
- Public awareness through the local media (radio stations and TV).

Subsequent phases of the Europe's Living Heart project (phases III, IV and V) could consider some of these activities as eligible to be financed and implemented.