

Nature Conservation in Europe: Approaches and Lessons

Annex BG.1. Bilateral Cooperation Programmes Focussing on Bulgaria's biodiversity

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The **US-Bulgarian partnership for Biological Diversity Conservation** continued over 12 years and laid solid ground for development of Bulgaria's nature conservation policy during 1992–2004. Initial focus was on the first *National Biological Diversity Conservation Strategy*, for 1992–1994, which involved US technical assistance and the contribution of more than 100 Bulgarian experts. The process included broad participation of ministries, scientific institutions and universities and NGOs. This established a precedent for participatory biodiversity programming in the country. The Strategy received additional support from UNDP for the development of the nation's first *National Biodiversity Conservation Action Plan 1999-2003*.

The US National Parks Service (US NPS) and Ministry of Environment and Waters (MoEW) signed a bilateral agreement in 1994–1995. As part of this, the first protected area visitors centre in the country was constructed at Vitosha Nature Park. The first protected area management concept for a national protected area was developed with USNPS technical assistance and an interdisciplinary Bulgarian team.

Over 1996–2000 a Global Environment Facility Biodiversity Conservation Project for the country started, based on the first inter-governmental MoU with USAID. The project was implemented by ARD Inc., a US Government contractor. Among the main results of this project were the adoption of the Protected Areas Act (1998), based on international standards; institutionalisation and capacity building for the administrations of the two largest National Parks in Bulgaria (Rila and Central Balkan); development of the 10-year management plans for Rila and Central Balkan National Parks; the first socio-economic and resource based inventories and community engagement programmes around the Parks; elaboration of Rila Monastery Nature Park Management Plan (conducted with the Bulgarian Orthodox Church as the principle land owner) and a pioneer cooperative protected area management agreement negotiated between the Bulgarian State and the Orthodox Church. Last but not least, the USAID funded partnership laid the basis for ecotourism development in Bulgaria and supported the adoption of a *National Ecotourism Development Strategy* and a number of local initiatives.

The Bulgarian – Swiss Biodiversity Conservation Programme (BSBCP) started in 1994 with financial support from the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SADC). Technical assistance was provided by the Swiss NGOs – ProNatura and Schweizer Vogelschutz (SVS/BirdLife Switzerland). The BSBCP supported the implementation of the *National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and Action Plan* by the Bulgarian government (MoEW) and contributed to fulfilling obligations under the Ramsar Convention, CBD and other international agreements. The significant participation of NGOs in the implementation resulted in the opening of two Nature Conservation Centres 'Poda' and 'Eastern Rhodopes', and the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB)/BirdLife Bulgaria, another first for the country. The BSBCP supported nature conservation in several key regions of Bulgaria – Eastern Rhodopes, Central Balkan, Burgas wetlands, Coastal Dobrudzha, Pirin, Ropotamo, Strandzha, Osogovo and Belasitsa. Under the programme a number of direct conservation activities took place, and the preparation and adoption of 13 management plans for protected areas and 12 Species Action Plans were other important achievements.

Following the end of the BSBCP, the programme was transformed into a self-sustaining Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation (BBF). Since then, BBF has developed a wide range of projects with partners including Norway, Northern Macedonia, Greece, Ukraine, Turkey, Georgia and Romania.

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