Transboundary management plan for the Lower Neretva Valley

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Croatia and Bosnia & Herzegovina: "Preparation of the project Transboundary Management Plan for the Lower Neretva Valley " (Ramsar Small Grants Fund project, 2000)

This transboundary project was submitted to the SGF 2000 cycle and received a grant of 25,000 CHF, and was executed by two counterpart institutions - the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Physical Planning (MEPPP), and from Bosnia & Herzegovina's side - the Ministry of Civil Engineering, Physical Planning and Environmental Protection of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton through its authorized institution the Faculty of Civil Engineering (FCE) in Mostar. Two major sites were targeted under this project, both Ramsar sites - the Neretva Delta in Croatia, and Hutovo Blato in Bosnia & Herzegovina.

The project’s specific objectives were 1) to provide the most comprehensive inventory data base for the Lower Neretva Valley using the new MedWet Database 2000; 2) to prepare a project aiming at elaboration of a comprehensive transboundary management plan for both Ramsar sites; and 3) to involve local communities in the process of wetland evaluation, planning and decision making.

Compilation of the inventory data base for Lower Neretva Valley, following prescriptions of the MedWet inventory manuals, consisted of intensive work and analysis of existing documents, maps, studies, published materials, meteorological data (provided by the State Hydro-meteorological Institute in Zagreb). Activities were performed in parallel in Zagreb (for Neretva Delta) and in Mostar (for Hutovo Blato). A two-day working meeting was held in Zagreb to organize and divide tasks. After having had several "bugs" while testing the MedWet database 2000 (elaborated at the Institute for Nature Conservation, Portugal), the technical work went well and all data were successfully filled in and processed.

A draft paper (project proposal) on elaboration of a transboundary management plan for the Lower Neretva Valley resulted from the close collaboration between MEPPP and FCE. The work process was based upon the Ramsar Guidelines for the preparation of management plans for Ramsar sites. The draft proposal was discussed during a workshop held in Mostar / Metkovic (cf. para below) and the final version was produced following important comments received from several contributors.

A two-day workshop, split between Mostar (Bosnia & Herzegovina) and Metkovic (Croatia), was held on 7-8 March 2002. It was attended by a large number of international organizations and participants: among the 135 participants were representatives of the Ramsar Convention Bureau, MedWet, SDC, UNDP, REC, Euronatur Germany, DOPSS/BirdLife Slovenia, and RAC/SPA Tunis. The workshop had an intensive agenda with several key points:
· presentation of the project's results achieved by the time of the workshop, i.e. the inventory database and the draft project proposal "Preparation of the transboundary management plan for the Lower Neretva Valley";
· discussion of possibilities for international financial and technical support for future project implementation;
· presentation of a proposal for protection of Neretva Valley under the category on nature park (according to the Croatian Nature Protection Act); launching officially procedure on park establishment with broad public participation as an activity under the Aarhus Convention;
· presentation of results of other international projects in the Lower Neretva Valley (MedWet 2 LIFE Third Countries - Hutovo Blato, ReREP/Stability Pact - Lower Neretva, RIZA/WATC - Croatian waters) and agreement over future cooperation and coordination.

A concise report on the workshop can be seen here, contributed by the Ramsar's Regional Coordinator for Europe, Dr. Tobias Salathé. More background information on Lower Neretva Valley Transboundary Wetlands is available here.

In the framework of the SGF project, a fascinating booklet has been printed in Croatian and English versions -- Lower Neretva Valley: transboundary wetland (left) -- which offers brief information on the wetland and history of the region, its nature and cultural heritage, as well as ongoing international cooperation and activities, and future outlooks.

The completed Ramsar SGF 2000 project is only one action of the broad range of successful initiatives in the area of Lower Neretva Valley. As a MedWet target site, certainly the Ramsar Convention through its regional MedWet Initiative is going to have a long-term prominent involvement in the future activities aiming at the sustainable development of this internationally important wetland.

-- reported by Sergei Dereliev, Ramsar.
Kuti lake

Neretva lada
The Krupa river, main artery of Ramsar site Hutovo Blato

From the booklet

Transboundary cooperation

In the framework of the implementation of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, each country applies for registration on the so-called Ramsar List of those of its wetland sites which meet the international importance criteria. The Lower Neretva valley is the Ramsar site located partly in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Hutovo blato) and partly in the Republic of Croatia (the Neretva Delta). In terms of the Ramsar Convention, this is a unique transboundary Ramsar site, which requires a coordinated management.

In 2001, in cooperation between the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Physical Planning of the Republic of Croatia and the Ministry of Construction, Physical Planning and Environmental Protection of the Hercegovina-Neretva County in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and with the financial support from the Ramsar Convention Small Grant Fund, the project entitled Preparation of the Transboundary Management Plan for the Lower Neretva Valley was completed.

The purpose of activities performed was to make the proposal of project for the preparation of a transboundary management plan as the basis for the beginning of cooperation and its farther realisation, as well as for finding necessary financial resources. As a part of the project, an extensive documentation on the Lower Neretva valley was prepared, which will serve for farther assessment and conservation of this area. Moreover, the concept of the future transboundary management plan was made, which should be implemented by the nature park managements in both countries, in cooperation with local people and all users of this area.

The management plan should be based on the thorough knowledge of the existing situation, that includes inventory-making of flora and fauna and detailed mapping of habitats. By the analysis of existing activities, of anthropogenetic impacts and of the level of endangering of natural values, the detailed management guidelines and their implementation programmes will be made. Division into zones according to various conservation levels and methods, as well as the tourism development plan, are necessary components of such management plan.

Only after the transboundary management plan has been prepared and has become operative, the obligations in terms of the Ramsar Convention will be fulfilled.
Typical lower Neretva landscape

Ramsar site Hutovo Blato

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