

GEF Biodiversity Conservation Project
End of Project Briefing Paper
and

New Project Introduction

Biodiversity Conservation &
Economic Growth
Project

June 21, 2000



ARD-Bulgaria
Biodiversity Conservation &
Economic Growth
Project
Sponsored by
USAID & Government of Bulgaria

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GEF Biodiversity Conservation Project – Briefing Paper

Duration of Contract	July 1995-April 2000
Amount of Support	4,230,000 USD
Funding Agency	USAID
Counterpart Agency	Bulgarian Ministry of Environment and Waters
Contract Type	<i>US contractor, Associates in Rural Development, Inc.</i>
Implementation	Project Management Unit – 2 full-time Bulgarian professional staff, 3 full-time support staff, and 1 full-time international Resident Advisor.
Focus	(A) Institutional Structures and Policies supportive of biodiversity conservation developed nationally and within select regions; (B) Protected Area Management Tools for two Category II Protected Areas in Bulgaria – Rila and Central Balkan National Parks
History	USAID provides support to biodiversity conservation in Bulgaria after 1992 Rio Convention in the form of (a) Europe’s first National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy, (b) Central Balkan National Park Management Concept, and (c) Vitosha Visitors Center.
1993-1994	World Bank GEF Project Preparation Technical Assistance for GEF Biodiversity Project.
1995	USAID funds GEF Biodiversity Project as part of United States contribution to the Global Environment Facility. Project Award, followed by stop work order because of political transition and corresponding breakdown in bilateral project negotiations.
1995	October – MOU with GOB reached; Project activities begin.

- 1996 Mid-term evaluation, followed by restricted activities in "Interim Phase"

Protected Areas Act drafting and National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy passed by Parliament.
- 1997 Interim Phase completed and PAA sent to Parliament
National Biological Diversity Conservation Strategy passed by Parliament.

National Parks – Rila, Central Balkan and Pirin Directorates legally constituted.

No-cost extension of GEF Project until December 1999.
- 1998 Public hearing on national park boundaries under supervision of MOEW commission; corresponding recommendations for maintenance of existing boundaries to the Council of Ministers.

First reading of PAA amendment in Committee.

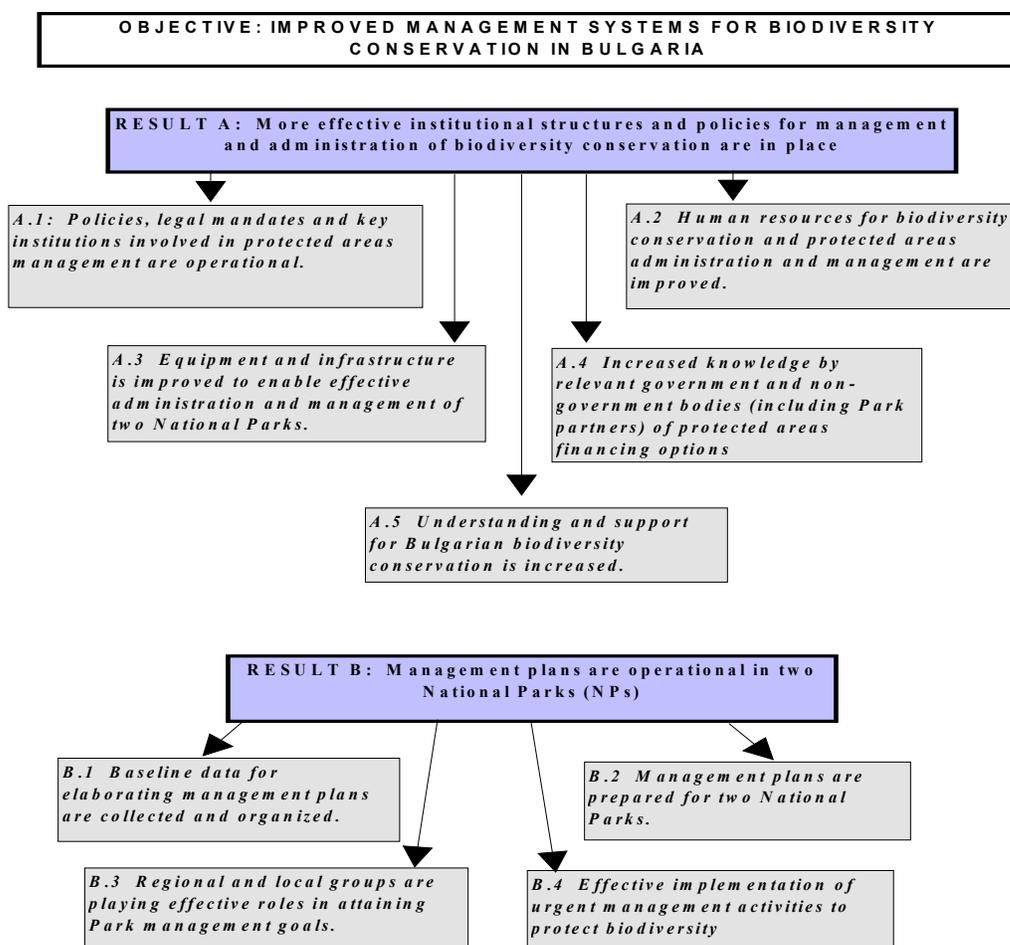
GEF Project funds supplemented and Project extended until April 2000.
- 1999 Park boundary reading in Parliament.

Passage of PAA amendment promulgated, with corresponding confirmation and changes to national park boundaries.
Rila National Park loses in excess of 27,000 hectares with new Rila Monastery Nature Park mandated to manage de-gazetted area.

GEF Project ends, April 28, 2000.

Measuring Project Progress

Under USAID's system of program management, goals and achievements are presented in a "Results Framework". Progress is measured by the extent to which the results are achieved. The objective and expected results of the GEF project are as follows.



To achieve these results the GEF Project works with central institutions, and with the park administrations and the surrounding communities of the Central Balkan and Rila National Parks.

Results

Result A *Institutions, Policies and Human Resource Development*

- A.1 Passage of Protected Areas Act and associated secondary legislation.
Appointment of Park Directorates and associated staff for Rila (73 staff) and Central Balkan (61 staff) National Parks.
- A.2 Foundation Training Program for National Park Managers and Rangers developed and implemented.
GIS Training developed and delivered at introductory and technical levels.
- A.3 Two new national park directorate headquarters built and outfitted with computers, A-V equipment, GIS stations/GPS, furniture, and vehicles for central HQ and all sub-offices.
GIS station established within NNPS.
- A.4 Identification of financial mechanisms and opportunities to support biodiversity conservation at national and protected area levels.
Identification of corporate sponsor and private sector conditions and requirements for support to national parks.
- A.5 National and regional public awareness, public relations, and mass media campaigns, exhibitions, and supporting materials developed and implemented.
National Conservation Education Curriculum supplement developed and promoted through Central Teachers Training College and Ministry of Education, Grades 1-12.

Result B *Management Tools*

- B.1 Extensive and intensive biodiversity assessment field studies conducted with corresponding development of the first Park-based Geographic Information System data-base.
- B.2 Management Plans prepared for Rila and Central Balkan National Parks.
- B.3 Regional NGO and Municipal cooperation programs launched that include ecotourism assessment, conservation education projects, resource substitution and small enterprise projects.
- B.4 Park boundary markings, park imagery developed and promoted, and National Park symbols and signage concept developed for implementation.

N.B. Results presented here, and subsequent lessons learned, are largely based on brand new institutions at Park level. Park Directorates only assumed full responsibility for these territories with promulgation of the Protected Areas Act (PAA) at end of 1998. Park boundaries were only confirmed in March of 2000. Field-based staffing to present levels, was only completed in March of 2000. Prior to the official designation of national parks and a national parks service, "park management" functions were largely the responsibility of Forestry Enterprise staff, with the MOEW providing control functions. There was no "national park agency" in the field prior to the passage of the PAA, and the appointment of its Directorates.

Lessons Learned

Policy

- Legislation and policy remain essential tools for biodiversity conservation. The Protected Areas Act provides an important framework for national protected area management and administration. However there are important elements of policy interpretation and secondary legislation for protected areas that require attention, as they have an impact on biodiversity conservation:
 - (1) Protected Area Management Policy Guidelines;
 - (2) Policy framework for community and municipal interaction and benefit sharing;
 - (3) Fundraising mechanisms for protected area sustainability;
 - (4) Protected Areas in a regional planning and development framework;
 - (5) Hunting Act;
 - (6) Medicinal Plants Law;
 - (7) Forest restitution;
 - (8) Private land restitution.

Further primary policy development and interpretation is essential. A complete institutional framework that includes biodiversity conservation outside protected areas is forthcoming. Both the PAA and the Biodiversity Law are complementary. The future of protected areas are untenable if left in isolation from their surroundings.

- Policy and institutional development requires regular dialog, interdisciplinary teamwork, forums, and focused technical assistance in the absence of precedents for many of these. The National Biological Diversity Conservation Strategy, and its Action Plan, the PAA, and supportive regulations are all examples of the value of this approach.

Institutional Reform and Development

- There are no institutional models for protected area operations, management and oversight in Bulgaria. Each new measure, new responsibility, and new set of activities has no precedent within the Ministry of Environment and Waters. Therefore, the challenge still remains to develop an institutional culture that:
 - (1) solicits advice, experience, support from the “field” and from among the arena of Bulgarian experts;
 - (2) engages such groups in an interdisciplinary approach to problem solving and management systems development;
 - (3) establishes a regular and transparent directives and reporting systems;
 - (4) provides for a series of pilot efforts that are appropriately supported by managerial and technical staff with a vested interest in their success.

- We can not build capacity, skills, and activities at local levels in a manner that outstrips the capacity of the central institution to provide timely and knowledgeable institutional support and coordination. In the same measure, we can not expect the Park Directorates to function effectively until decision-making, accountability, and planning are effectively decentralized to Park levels.

- The Bulgarian protected areas’ model is largely a paradigm for the evolving political and economic model of which it is a part. Biodiversity and protected areas management can not outstrip the same needs for institutional reform, transparency, accountability and citizen participation that characterize the country as a whole. Each institutional change, each reform, resonates clearly among wider government reforms and challenges.

- Bulgaria remains largely isolated and unknown for its significance and accomplishments in biodiversity conservation. This is evident from the limited information available about biodiversity conservation actions and legislative progress known from the country. Nowhere is this fact more striking than in a European context. More consistent and frequent events and activities, targeted information, subscription to regional networks, and attendance at appropriate meetings, are needed to overcome this isolation.

- MOEW demonstrates a model for recent institutional development and growth with respect to environmental management, and particularly, biodiversity conservation. As it develops further policy, regulations, mechanisms, and models for protected area management, and biodiversity conservation, the Ministry must develop mechanisms to share these more widely.

The MOEW is also in a good position within the region to encourage the participation of others more broadly in the European biodiversity conservation network.

Protected Area Management

- Despite the development and eventual approval of management plans, Parks are still without precedent for implementing them. Plans will only become effective tools if:
 - (1) The management plan approval process is successfully demonstrated as a working model, and is conducted in a timely and efficient manner;
 - (2) Park's are given the resources, technical assistance, and skills to implement priority projects;
 - (3) Park's successfully engage local partners in the management and protection of the PA;
 - (4) The Success of partnerships and joint efforts is demonstrated early in the Management Plan implementation cycle.
- Practically speaking, it is more important for national parks to thrive immediately in a local context. Protected area conservation understanding and support is most effective when local municipalities, local government agencies, and communities are engaged in the welfare of the area. This has been clearly demonstrated at the national park level in Bulgaria. Here, public attitudes are largely supportive of national parks.

There is however, a weaker conviction and level of awareness at national level. There is a need to engage national decision-makers, the national legislature, and national enterprise in nature conservation. National level mechanisms are needed to establish the same dialog to engender informed decision-making concerning the country's biologically diverse heritage.

Human Resource Development

- There is no singular Bulgarian institution to prepare protected area managers for their tasks. As a consequence, existing protected area management experience and skills are at a premium. Bulgaria's protected area human resource capacity is generally strong in the biological and natural resource sciences. There are fewer skills and experience as regards the Protected Area planning, social sciences, law enforcement, and the operations of a Park in a regional and local community context. Continued emphasis on development of these skills, exposure to their applications elsewhere, and the development of appropriately tailored courses and certification within existing institutions, is critical.

- There is no human resource development strategy or policy for protected area management staff. In the absence of guidelines and strategies for staff development, it is difficult to expect the development of a professional cadre of staff with strong skills in the wide variety of fields demanded by protected areas management. It is also difficult to expect strong affinity and loyalty without a well-defined career structure and opportunities for professional growth.

Financial Mechanisms

- There are presently a number of significant constraints to the financing of protected areas and their conservation. Even with recent Project supported success, protected area annual budgeting and allocation will remain problematic. A number of financial mechanisms are available to Bulgaria, but they require changes to policy, legal reform, and new mechanisms to be adopted at the central level. Without these reforms, protected area conservation and management could remain severely restricted, and will be subject to the same constraints of national government budgeting as other government agencies.

While the National Environment Protection Fund remains an important source of funds for both operational and capital costs, its future support to Parks and other protected areas is uncertain.

- There are presently no mechanisms available to protected area managers to create or broker innovative opportunities for income generation at local levels. Local income generation opportunities, derived from supportive attitudes and practices between protected areas and local communities, are seen as essential tools in the future success of protected areas worldwide.

Civil Society

- Civil society has been an effective partner in new park establishment, promotion, education, and management planning. NGOs remain essential partners for the future. Implementation of management plans calls for additional support and participation, both to meet the practical demands of plan implementation, as well as to continue to engender popular support for the National Parks. These relationships, mechanisms for interaction, and information sharing will continue to require regular review and renewal.

- Our work with NGOs suggests that national, environmental NGO development is at a critical juncture. With Bulgaria now invited to join the EU, and with significant legislative development over the last two years, the roles of national NGOs will demand corresponding development and greater self-definition. We believe that national environment organizations will be forced to consider their role in this quickly evolving framework of government legislation. We believe that the next five years of donor support is essential and that NGOs should focus on the following aspects to good effect:
 1. **Information access, management and distribution.** In keeping with the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, the Aarhus Convention, and the growing rights of citizens to have access to timely and accurate government information, Bulgarian NGOs must soon have a chance to define their role in the context of a “clearing house mechanism”.
 2. **Advocacy and lobbying.** We think that there will be a growing need to bridge the gap between citizens and their elected representatives regarding the environment. We suspect that biodiversity conservation and the environment will continue to be important electoral issues. We believe that the next elections will be critical to the national advances made in environmental legislation, and we believe that NGOs can play a critical role in advocacy, lobbying, and keeping the public informed of voting issues and voting records.
 3. **NGO management of protected areas.** In a national environment of fiscal austerity and currency board control, we believe that the Government will be forced to examine innovative ways of protected area management. We believe that NGOs will be encouraged, and/or will react to this management vacuum with proposals to manage biodiversity and protected areas. The criteria, the standards, and corresponding accountability for protected area management will become critical issues in this discussion.
 4. **NGO financing.** NGOs will undergo severe financial crises until the Bulgarian economic environment and general public can begin to support their operations with annual subscriptions/donations. This will make NGOs increasingly dependent on external financing of projects, and on the terms and conditions of these grants. We believe that it is very important for the donor community to engage NGOs in dialog at three critical levels as a consequence – (1) at the level of strategic planning and programming; (2) at the level of financial mechanisms for sustainability; (3) at the desirability and need for closer cooperation and communication between environmental NGOs at national level.

Project Approach and Operational Matters

- Biodiversity and protected areas (including their establishment and management) - are most vulnerable during times of political uncertainty and economic difficulty. As a consequence, donor support, project components and scheduling must provide for flexible inputs, activities and, most importantly, constancy of support. International experience demonstrates that this requires a minimum of 10 years of consistent financial and technical support.
- Despite the superlative features of biodiversity in Bulgaria and its potential, donor support for its conservation is disproportionately small. Given the limited time and money available to biodiversity conservation, protected areas and associated activities, renewed support and donor coordination is essential. Coordination needs to be driven by thematic **and** critical geographic biodiversity issues to be most effective. Financial support continues to be necessary.

Information Management, Access and Exchange

- The number of protected area management innovations, planning models, and management activities requires disciplined and regular information collection and sharing. This includes everything from Geographic Information System data bases, to reports, to training programs, small project approaches, to management tools and techniques, etc.
- In addition, the Ministry of Environment and Waters needs mechanism(s) for improved dissemination of achievements, problems, and lessons learned – internally, as well as externally. This is an ideal role for the National Nature Protection Service, augmented by the activities of an appropriate NGO(s).

Biodiversity Conservation & Economic Growth Project

Duration of Contract	May 2000 – October 2002
Amount of Support	2,500,000 USD
Funding Agency	USAID-Bulgaria
Counterpart Agency	Ministry of Environment and Waters
Contract Type	US Contractor – Associates in Rural Development, Inc
Implementation	Project Management Unit – 3 full time Bulgarian professional staff: <i>Biodiversity Conservation and Management Planning;</i> <i>Public Awareness and Training;</i> <i>Eco-Enterprise;</i> <i>3 full-time support staff;</i> <i>1 full-time international resident advisor,</i> supplemented by short-term international and national technical assistance.

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| Focus | (1) Capturing and Generating Biodiversity Conservation Funding |
| | (2) Eco Enterprise Development through Ecotourism and Non-timber Forest Products – Small Enterprise Development supporting Biodiversity Conservation |
| | (3) Management Plan approval and implementation for Rila and Central Balkan National Parks |
| | (4) Management Plan for Rila Monastery Nature Park |
| | (5) Public Awareness |

These Project themes have been developed in response to the priorities and programs evolving from USAID/GEF Project support, biodiversity action planning, national park management plans, and lessons learned.

BCEG Project Themes

Biodiversity Conservation Financing

Numerous opportunities are open to the GOB and the MOEW for financing protected areas and their management. This Project will work with others to develop and introduce mechanisms for revenue generation and capture from:

- Improvements to the structure and use of financial and revenue generation policy and the National Environment Protection Fund;
- National Park licensing and concessions policy and practice;
- Services and products linked to Park-based tourism;
- Commercial and private sector sponsorship, and enterprise partnerships;
- Fees linked to visitors, natural resources collection and tourists;
- Development of local trusts and foundations.

Eco-Enterprise and Biodiversity Conservation

Contemporary Park management consists of two important elements linked to local communities, income generation, and local resource users:

- Partnerships with local municipalities, communities, and tourist service providers to support appropriate models of nature-friendly tourism inside and outside the Parks;
- Sustainable natural resources management that includes the collection, management, monitoring of NTFPs and support for harvesting, processing, production, marketing and distribution of "pure products from nature".

Management Plan Approval and Implementation for Rila and Central Balkan National Parks

The *first national park management plans* for the country, produced as a product of *new legislation* and developed in *a new institutional context* are ready for technical review, public scrutiny and approval. The Project will assist this process.

In addition, the management plans have identified program and projects of importance. For these new initiatives to work most effectively, they need active support, financing, technical assistance, and early examples of success.

Management Plan for Rila Monastery Nature Park

One of the most significant challenges to contemporary national park territory and management was the restitution argument used to remove more than 27,000 hectares from Rila National Park. This project aims at working in partnership, (and through an interdisciplinary team of stakeholders and technical professionals) to develop a management plan for the new Nature Park. There are at least five major institutional stakeholders who expect to be engaged in the future of this area.

Public Awareness

Despite strong public support from local communities surrounding the Park (and demonstrated through GEF Project surveys), contemporary nature conservation, and all its elements, are still largely unknown to the Bulgarian public. This Project will focus on the development and delivery of biological diversity conservation and protected area management messages. Select target groups at international, national and regional levels will be the recipients of social marketing, public awareness, and regular information up-dates on issues related to Bulgaria's natural heritage.