

Final Report

DRAFT

GEF Biodiversity Project

Prepared by:

**Peter Hetz
Chief of Party
ARD, Inc.**

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Bulgaria Global Environmental Facility Biodiversity Project

is a collaborative initiative between the

United States Agency for International Development

and the

Government of the Republic of Bulgaria

implemented by

Associates in Rural Development, Inc.

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ACRONYMS

APM	Assistant Project Manager
ARD	Associates in Rural Development, Inc.
BAS	Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
BCEG	Biodiversity Conservation and Economic Growth Project
BIOFOR	Biodiversity and Forestry IQC
BSBCP	Bulgarian-Swiss Biodiversity Conservation Program
BSPB	Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds
CBNP	Central Balkan National Park
CoF	Committee of Forests
CoP	Chief of Party
COTR	Contract Officer's Technical Representative (USAID's "Project Officer")
CTO	Cognizant Technical Officer
EU	European Union
FY	Financial Year
GEF	Global Environment Facility (note the acronym "GEF" is also generically in Bulgaria for the USAID/GEF Biodiversity project)
GIS	Geographic Information System
GoB	Government of Bulgaria
HQ	Headquarters
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IQC	Indefinite Quantities Contract
IUCN	World Conservation Union
MAFAR	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Agrarian Reform (now Ministry of Agriculture and Forests)
MoE	Ministry of Environment (now MoEW)
MoEW	Ministry of Environment and Waters
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NNPS	National Nature Protection Service (of MoEW)
NTFP	Non-Timber Forest Products
PA	Protected Area(s)
PMU	Project Management Unit
PPF	Project Preparation Facility
PSC	Project Steering Committee
SRA	Senior Resident Advisor
STTA	Short-Term Technical Assistance
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

1. INTRODUCTION

This final report summarizes the accomplishments and lessons learned during the implementation of the USAID funded Global Environmental Facility (GEF) Biodiversity Project¹ - 1995-2000. The GEF Project is the culmination of collaboration between the Ministry of Environment and Waters (MoEW) in Bulgaria, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) that began in 1992 on matters related to biodiversity conservation.

The Project was implemented by Associates in Rural Development, (ARD) Inc., of Burlington, Vermont, USA.

Background

Early in the 90s, in a post-communist era of rapid political change, nature conservation in Bulgaria experienced an euphoric period of international attention and activity. Two large, new national parks – Central Balkan, and Rila – were declared, and the international community recognized Bulgaria as a hotspot of biological diversity importance. The combination of these events provided the incentive for USAID commitment and funding to “biodiversity” conservation in Bulgaria. Support commenced early in 1993, with a major workshop leading to the National Biological Diversity Conservation Strategy, 18 months later. This was the first strategy of its kind for Europe, and among the first of its kind for the world.

The Strategy was complemented by additional support activities with the US National Parks Service – and included development of a Visitors Center for Vitosha National Nature Park (on the outskirts of Sofia), and a management plan concept for Central Balkan National Park.

These efforts led to the World Bank providing a project preparation facility (PPF) to the Ministry of Environment under the GEF. The Project provided for an extensive and ambitious set of traditional protected area project activities, with an emphasis on support for new administrations for national nature protection. This project preparation served as the scope of work for the USAID-funded, GEF Biodiversity Project, and was the subject of this project’s procurement.

The original GEF project design made two critical assumptions: (1) the first was that the Government would have developed and made serious inroads on passage of supportive legislation for the nation’s protected areas. Protected areas would serve as the primary tools of biodiversity conservation. (2) That the institutional home for protected areas, and in particular national parks, would have been resolved.

Neither was the case at the commencement of the USAID-GEF Project in Bulgaria.

¹ In an international context, “GEF” refers to the multi-lateral Global Environment Facility administered by the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program, and the United Nations Environment Program. In Bulgaria, the term GEF has become synonymous with the USAID Biodiversity Project. GEF is used as the Project acronym throughout its history. USAID’s GEF activities result from a parallel bilateral funding option exercised by the Agency during the pilot phase of the mechanism, and after the 1992 Rio Environmental Conference.

Chronological History of Project

The Bulgarian (GEF) Biodiversity Project was implemented against a backdrop of political transition and a severe economic crisis. In essence, political, fiscal, and institutional change in Bulgaria did not happen as rapidly or successfully as many of Bulgaria's northern neighbors, nor as expected by European and U.S. governments.

Nature conservation efforts in Bulgaria are not without precedent. An independent Bulgaria, free from the occupation of the Ottomans, turned its attention to legal measure for protecting the mountains and specific species. The Bulgarian King in the 1920s and 30s made contributed to other conservation efforts in the country's traditional hunting reserves. This was also the time of the designation of Bulgaria's first strict nature reserves. In 1971, just before the first environmental conference in Stockholm (1972), Bulgaria's communist government appointed a Ministry of Forests and Nature Protection. In 1976, the Ministry split to become the Committee of Forests and the Committee of Environmental Protection. Only in 1989/90, with the demise of the Eastern Bloc and the Soviet Union, was the Ministry of Environment truly raised to the status of a Ministry.

In the mid-90s, Bulgaria experienced a resumption of a post-communist/socialist government control (1995), "hyper-inflation (96-97), constitutional crisis (with public demand for political and constitutional reform that resulted in a new government, 97), establishment of a currency control board (97), and the ascendancy of a relatively newly constituted Ministry of Environment and Waters (1998-onward).

At the outset of the Project, there was neither an institutional history of national park administration, nor a professional cadre of staff to implement activities in the nation's protected areas. In addition, in the absence of a contemporary institution for biodiversity management, certain forces within the Government sought to engage the more traditional "forest service" in control of the national parks. The Committee of Forests had a long history of traditional forestry and watershed management in the country, but little experience in managing for nature conservation. As a consequence, protected area administration and control was a political football in a dynamic process of national institutional rivalry, as well as territorial control, for the first two years of the Project. This made for challenging management and administration of the Project by the contractor, as well as USAID.

The GEF Project started as an 18-month project in July of 1995, with a contract awarded to Associates in Rural Development, Inc., after a competitive bidding process. The contract award included provisions for an 18-month option period. This option was exercised by a Contract Modification No. 1, dated, September 4, 1995. The Project completion date was therefore, expected in June 1998.

A stop-work order was issued late in 1995, pending the Government of Bulgaria's decision on their commitment to the Memorandum of Understanding supporting the Project. This stop work order reflected the political crisis and commitment associated with the new government of the same year. The Project commenced again however, after sufficient institutional commitment was perceived by USAID, in February of 1996.

The findings of a mid-term evaluation in June and July of 1997, resulted in a no-cost extension to the contract. The Project's delivery date was extended until December 1998, again due to delays in Bulgarian Government Support. This delay was characterized by an Interim Phase – and was addressed under Contract Modification No. 5.

Under Contract Modification No 6, the Project was altered again, and among other things, the variation extended the contract option period until December 1999. The total dollar commitment remained at 4 million U.S. dollars.

With the final Contract Modification (No. 7), the Project was granted an extension of 4 months (until April 30, 2000) and budget increase of \$230,513 USD, reflecting the original dollar amount pledged to the contract. Thus, a three-year project had increased in length from the original duration of 18 months, to 36 months, and finally to a total of 57 months, without an increase in the contract ceiling.

The history of the Project is supplied in summary chronological fashion in the following table:

Table 1. Major Events Affecting GEF Project; 1994 – April 2000

Italics indicate national political events affecting the project

PERIOD/DATE	EVENT/ACTIVITY
1994	
<i>May</i>	<i>Project design completed with financial assistance (PPF) from World Bank</i>
<i>September</i>	<i>USAID issues Request for Proposals</i>
<i>December</i>	<i>Proposals submitted</i>
1995	
<i>May</i>	<i>Clarifications requested of bidders</i>
<i>June</i>	<i>Best and Final offers of leading proposals requested</i>
July 11	Contract awarded to ARD, Inc.
July 26 – 28	<i>ARD's Chief of Party (CoP) consults with USAID's Contract Officer's Technical Representative (COTR) in Washington, DC</i>
August 13 – 31	CoP in Sofia; project start-up delayed
September 14	Contract Amendment No. 1 issued, exercising option period
November 30	Contract Amendment No. 2 issued, adding "Stop Work Order" clause, and 30 day Stop Work Order issued beginning of December
1996	
January 17	Minister of Environment requests that USAID restart project activities following GoB deliberations
January 17 – 18	ARD's CoP consults with USAID's COTR and Contract Specialist in Washington, DC
February 8	CoP arrives in Sofia permanently to start-up project activities
February 27	Committee of Forests (CoF) presentation of proposals for development of project for management of forested parts of Central Balkans National Park
March 3 – 9	COTR visit and hand-over (see text of report); donor meetings; preliminary development of OAR country-level indicators for GEF
April 3 – 10	Sub-contractor RESOLVE visit for Ministry of Environment (MoE) and CoF "Boyana Workshop" (6 – 8 April) to address conflict resolution between the two institutions.
April 28 – May 24	First "Parks Management and operations" consultancy
May 5 – 18	COTR visit; work plan workshop, project management issues, refinement of OAR indicators for GEF
May 13 – 17	First Annual Work Planning Workshop
May 17	Request by USAID to stop most project activities pending agreement over Government compliance with MoU and collaboration with CoF
June 1 – August	Drafting of 1st Year Work Plan; information dissemination; discussions over future of project
June 25	Meeting of Parliamentary Commission for informal discussions between MoE and CoF concerning project

PERIOD/DATE	EVENT/ACTIVITY
July 9	First formal meeting of Project Management Unit with CoF (at latter's invitation)
July 29 – August 3	COTR visit to Sofia with Contract Specialist; resolution of project future; management and contract issues.
August 1	Tripartite Letter of Agreement signed (MoE/CoF/USAID).
September	Park Inspectorates formed – National Park Directors appointed by MoE.
September 1	Period of First Annual Work Plan begins.
<i>October</i>	<i>Presidential Election (27th) indicates desire for political change.</i>
November 1	Project Steering Committee (PSC); First Meeting.
December	USAID COTR visit.
December 10	Second PSC Meeting; discussion of Work Plan.
<i>December 20</i>	<i>Socialist-led Government resigns with intention of reforming under new Prime Minister.</i>
1997	
<i>January & February</i>	<i>Political and constitutional crisis as socialist leadership fails to form new government. Economic decline throughout 1996 worsens with collapse of currency and hyperinflation.</i>
February 7	MoE Order RD 49 of outgoing government defines location of Park Inspectorate headquarters, and broadens their territorial jurisdiction.
<i>February</i>	<i>Interim “caretaker” government formed.</i>
March	New interim MoE Ministers and Deputy Ministers and new CoF leadership appointed.
March	Local bank used by project is closed for normal business – funds frozen.
<i>April</i>	<i>Parliamentary elections (19th) result in United Democratic Forces victory.</i>
April	Director of NNPS presents proposals for establishing unified, decentralized system in MoE for protected areas management.
May 14	MoE Order RD-155 changes Status of National Park Inspectorates to Departments of Regional Environmental Inspectorates
<i>May 21</i>	<i>Elected government takes office.</i>
June	New Minister of reorganized Ministry of Environment and Waters appoints ministerial team and new Director of NNPS.
June 18	GEF Mid-term Evaluation Team begins work in-country.
July	USAID, GEF Project and mid-term Evaluation Team have first meetings with new MoEW team. Decrees on main functions of MoEW and MAFAR published. COTR visit.
<i>July 1</i>	<i>Currency Board stabilizes Bulgarian currency and controls money supply enabling full resumption of IMF program.</i>
July 17	MoEW and MAFAR sign memo for joint work with GEF project.
July 19	Evaluation Team completes work in-country.
July 23	Letter from USAID Representative to MoEW expressing concerns about project viability raised in Evaluation.
July 24	MoEW/USAID meeting to discuss GEF future in light of Evaluation findings, and MoEW response.

PERIOD/DATE	EVENT/ACTIVITY
August 4	CoP presentation of GEF Project in Washington DC at USAID.
September 97- February 98	INTERIM PHASE
October 9	Working Meeting of diverse “stakeholders” to discuss submission of “National Biological Diversity Conservation Strategy”, and supporting documents to Council of Ministers.
November 19	Workshop on MoEW institutional issues.
November 19 – 21	COTR visit.
December 16	Rila Park 5 th Anniversary presentation in Borovets, and first presentation of Protected Areas (PA) Law concept by MoEW.
December 19	Working meeting of PA Law “stakeholders” for discussion of draft; national level.
1998	
January 29	<i>MoEW presents international projects (including GEF) in parliament building.</i>
February 10	USAID/MoEW meeting on progress of Interim Phase.
March 9	<i>Draft PA Law approved by Council of Ministers.</i>
March 16 – 27	CoP on working visit to US in Vermont and Washington DC.
April 2	<i>First reading of PA Law in parliament completed.</i>
April 6	<i>National Biological Diversity Conservation Strategy approved by Council of Ministers.</i>
April 14	USAID/MoEW meeting on progress of Interim Phase. Sufficient progress is made for project implementation to resume.
April 21	Public Hearing of PA Law in Gabrovo.
April 24	Public Hearing of PA Law in Blagoevgrad.
May 18 – 21	Workshop on 1997 field season biodiversity research in Central Balkan and Rila National Parks.
June 9	Journalist training in conservation/PA issues - Rila.
June 11	Journalist training in conservation/PA issues - Central Balkan.
June 13 – 17	Workshop to develop GEF Conservation Education Program.
July 6 – 25	Visit of new COTR (Alicia Grimes) for orientation and government negotiations accompanied by (USAID/Washington Contract Advisor (Jerry Gold).
July 23	GEF Annual Workshop. Agreement between USAID and MoEW on text of revisions to MoU (subject to legal review).
August	Summer Biodiversity Inventory Field Work in Parks
September 2	Signing of Amended/Extended GEF Memorandum of Understanding
September 17	GEF Working Group Meeting
September 22	ARD’s GEF contract amendment/extension finalized – thru December ‘99.
September 25	<i>National Biodiversity Action Plan; “kick-off” meeting</i>
October 2 – 4	Conservation Education Curriculum Development Workshop
October 5	GEF Working Group Meeting
October 9 – 11	Journalist Field Trip; Rila
October 16 – 18	Journalist Field Trip; Central Balkan

PERIOD/DATE	EVENT/ACTIVITY
<i>October 30 – 31</i>	<i>National Biodiversity Action Plan; Borovets workshop</i>
November 5 – 8	Park-Level Public Information Workshop, Ribaritsa
November 11	Protected Areas Law published in State Gazette
November 24	Management Plan Terms of Reference (ToR) submitted to MoEW for approval
December 21 – 22	Management Plan ToR Workshop
<i>December 29</i>	<i>Three National Park Directorates (National Park Management Units -Pirin, Rila and Central Balkan National Parks) legally constituted</i>
1999	
January 6	Amended Management Plan ToR submitted to MoEW for approval
January 26	Approval of Management Plan ToR (Phase I) received from MoEW
February 4 – 5	Management Plan Orientation Workshop
<i>February 16</i>	<i>US -Bulgaria Bilateral Assistance Agreement published in State Gazette</i>
February 19	GEF Working Group Meeting
<i>February 24</i>	<i>Rila National Park, 7th Anniversary</i>
March 1	Contract signed with Architecture, Design and Supervision firm for Rila HQ reconstruction
<i>March 15</i>	<i>National Biodiversity Action Plan, Public Hearing</i>
March 25 – 26	Management Plan, First Evaluation Workshop
March 31	Park Section Heads identified and deployed to three national parks; 7 Sections Heads appointed to Central Balkan and 9 Section Heads appointed to Rila.
April 6	ToR for Management Plan - Phase II submitted to MoEW
April 12 – 18	1 st Directorate Formal Training Session – Biodiversity Conservation and Protected Areas
April 21 – 23	Management Plan, “Eurosite Workshop”
April 28 – 29	Conservation Education - National Meeting
May 3	Approval of Management Plan ToR (Phase II) received from MoEW
<i>May 26 – 27</i>	<i>European Union PHARE - Natura 2000 Project Orientation Workshop</i>
<i>May 26</i>	<i>MoEW Annual Donor’s Meeting</i>
June 12 – 19	2 nd Directorate Formal Training Session – Natural Resources Management
June 14 – 15	Protected Areas Financing Workshop
<i>June 30</i>	<i>Central Balkan - Recategorization/boundary Public Hearing</i>
July	Supply of seventeen vehicles (4WD Lada Nivas)
<i>July 6</i>	<i>Rila - Recategorization/boundary Public Hearing</i>
July 26 – August 1	3 rd Directorate Formal Training Session – Visitors Management and Community Partnerships
<i>August 5</i>	<i>Bulgarian Biodiversity Action Plan approved by the Council of Ministers</i>
August 12 - Sept 2	US National Parks Study Tour (15 persons)
August 31	First round of Ranger recruitment completed for all national parks. 55 new protected area staff added to employment rosters

PERIOD/DATE	EVENT/ACTIVITY
September 29	GEF Project Modification received from USAID – Washington D.C. Effective GEF Project completion date - April 30, 2000.
<i>October</i>	<i>USAID Biodiversity Assessment Team visits Bulgaria with CTO</i>
October 5	ARD Senior Associate P. Hetz assumes SRA/CoP responsibilities for GEF Project in Bulgaria
October	2 x Mitsubishi 4WD Pajero's delivered to new Park Directorates
October 15	CoP, Ian Deshmukh, departs Bulgaria for USAID Project in Uganda
<i>November 3</i>	<i>Vitosha Nature Park celebrates 65 years</i>
November 9	GEF Project Work Plan developed for project extension
<i>November 13</i>	<i>Central Balkan National Park (CBNP) 8th Anniversary – Karlovo Tourist Information Center opened by Swiss Ambassador and Minister Maneva.</i>
November 17-23	Post Card Campaign – Park boundary lobbying effort nears completion. More than 17,000 postcards received by MPs in Parliament as part of national campaign.
November 20	CBNP Directorate receive order for new office space
<i>November 22-24</i>	<i>US President Bill Clinton visits Bulgaria</i>
<i>December</i>	<i>USAID CTO in Bulgaria for preliminary design of follow-on to GEF</i>
December 2-3	Rila and Central Balkan Management Plan Meeting concerning - Park Zoning and zoning as park management tools.
December 2	Parliamentary Commission passes national park boundary provisions unchanged in first reading.
<i>December 14</i>	<i>Bulgaria invited to join the European Union</i>
December 13-19	1 st Ranger Training Theory Course, Borovetz, Rila National Park
December 22	Rila National Park HQ (in Blagoevgrad) construction finished.
<i>December 22</i>	<i>Major Bulgarian Cabinet changes made. Minister of Environment and Water is retained.</i>
<i>December 30</i>	<i>National Biodiversity Action Plan (produced with funding support from UNDP-GEF) approved by Council of Ministers</i>
December 29	Architectural Designs for CBNP renovation completed.
December 31	Management Plans Descriptive Phase completed
2000	
<i>January 2000</i>	<i>John Grant, USAID Mission Director, unexpectedly dies</i>
January 9-28	Three, one-week Ranger Training Courses in outdoor skills – Maliovitsa, Rila National Park
January 10	Central Balkan National Park new HQ renovation, Tender Evaluation
January 23-29	2 x 3-day introductory GIS Course offered.
January 21	Contract Officer's Approval (USAID) Received for HQ Renovation Contract for Central Balkan National Park
January 30	National Park logos for Pirin, Rila, and Central Balkan registered
<i>January 31</i>	<i>International UNDP GEF Projects Assessment Team visits GEF Project to determine follow-on support for biodiversity programming in Bulgaria.</i>
February 1	Central Balkan National Park HQ Renovation Contract commences
February 2-12	GIS Technical Training Course (10 days)
February 5-12	2 nd Ranger Training Theory Course

PERIOD/DATE	EVENT/ACTIVITY
<i>February 23-26</i>	<i>National Parks – Biodiversity Conservation and Partnership Exhibit - Parliament</i>
<i>Feb 23-March 3</i>	<i>- ditto – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences</i>
<i>March</i>	<i>CTO visit to review biodiversity programming and procurement options with Mission</i>
<i>March 13</i>	<i>Rila National Park Headquarters formal opening – US Ambassador R. Miles/Minister of Environment Maneva, and partners</i>
<i>March 17</i>	<i>CBNP HQ Construction completed one week ahead of schedule</i>
<i>March 22</i>	<i>Protected Area Act amendment adopted in Parliament, National Park boundaries established. Rila loses 27,000 hectares of land to Rila Monastery</i>
<i>March 30</i>	<i>All furniture and furnishings installed in both Park HQs</i>
<i>March 30</i>	<i>Protected Areas Act Amendment promulgated in State Gazette, and Rila Monastery Nature Park slated for recategorization.</i>
<i>April 5</i>	<i>BIOFOR IQC used to secure a Tier 1 Task Order. Task Order for Bulgaria Biodiversity Conservation and Economic Growth (BCEG) received for new, 2.5 year effort.</i>
<i>April 3-7</i>	<i>4th Directorate Formal Training – Protected Area Operations and Administration & National Park Management Plans</i>
<i>April 11</i>	<i>Task Order Proposal and Budget sent to USAID Washington</i>
<i>April 17-21</i>	<i>Final GIS Technical Training (5 days)</i>
<i>April 30</i>	<i>Final Draft of Management Plans for both National Parks completed</i>
	<i>GIS completed for both Parks and GIS stations installed in NNPS, Central Balkan and Rila National Parks</i>
	<i>All Computer installation finalized in both new, National Park Headquarters</i>
	<i>Green Gold – first popular national biodiversity conservation publication is published.</i>
	<i>Conservation Education Curriculum (K-12) supplemental materials published</i>
	<i>Ecotourism catalogs published</i>
	<i>Park Boundary Markers and Park Sign Concept produced</i>
	<i>Park private sector sponsorship report completed</i>
May 1	BIOFOR Task Order Award – BCEG, to ARD

2. PROJECT RESULTS

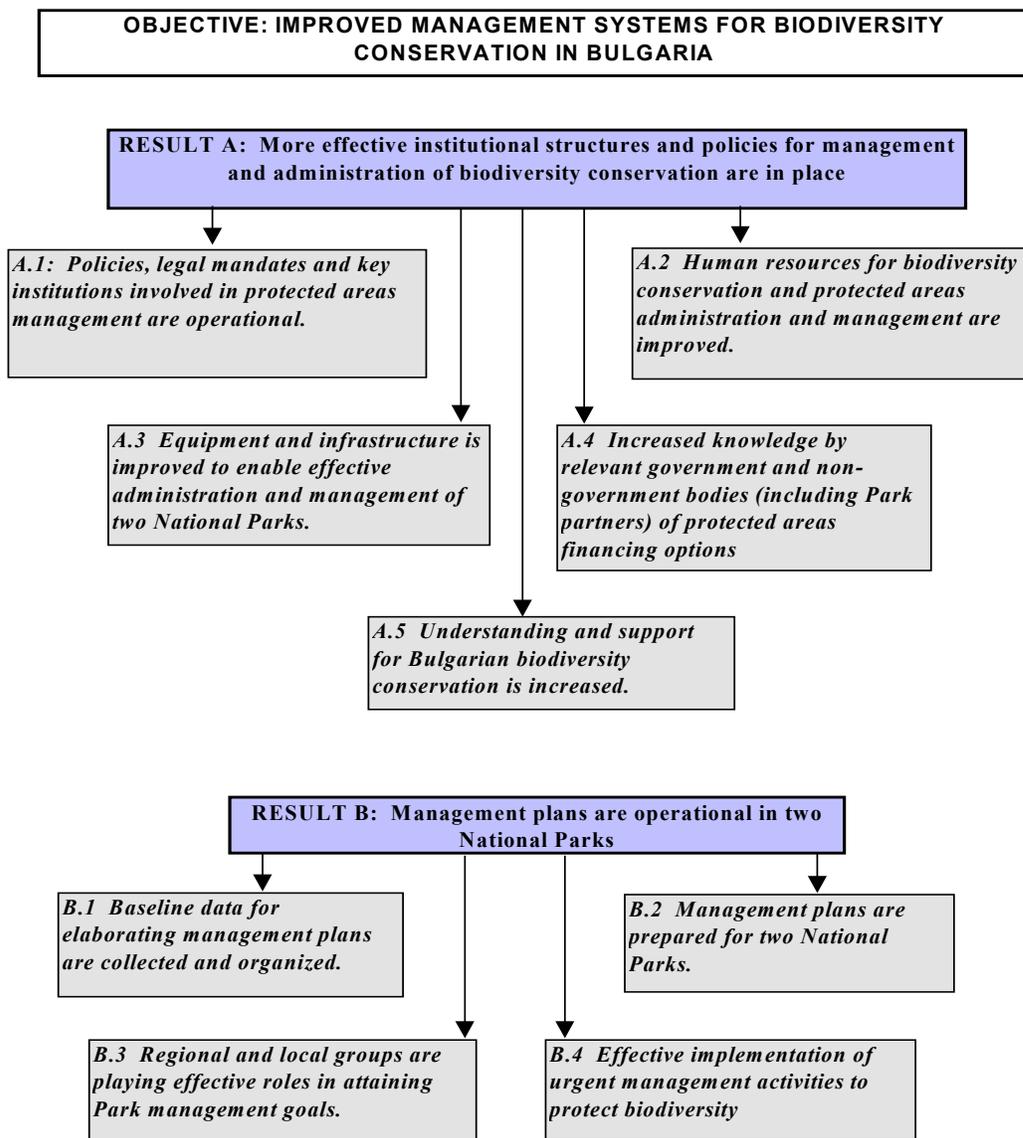
Bulgaria GEF Biodiversity Project operated under a USAID system of program management, goals and achievement known as a “results framework”. This final report is based on ARD’s submission on the extent to which these results are achieved.

The objective of the Project is:

Objective: To improve management systems for biodiversity conservation in Bulgaria.

Our results are framed within two “results packages”, and these are summarized in Figure 1:

Figure 1: GEF Project Results Framework



Result A More effective institutional structures and policies for management and administration of biodiversity conservation are in place

A.1 Policies, legal mandates and key institutions involved in protected areas management are operational

Background Institutional struggles for the control and management of state budgets, resources, and land were exhibited between the Ministry of Environment and the Committee of Forests, in Bulgaria, at the time of GEF Project award. This was accentuated by the appointment of the National Nature Protection Service within the MoE, in 1994.

This rivalry characterized Project start-up. A change in government in 1995 introduced serious doubts as to whether the Government of Bulgaria (GoB) could (and would) remain committed to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) governing this Project. This resulted in a stop work order for the Project. So serious was the friction between the two key institutions that the Project commenced with a conflict resolution specialist, and a workshop dedicated to resolving the official impediments to cooperation and collaboration between the two state institutions (April 1996).

A mid-term evaluation of the Project, and managed by ARD, was used to focus a set of key policy-level recommendations. These were captured by USAID in an “interim phase” – a period of 6 months (September 1997 – February 1998) during which time the GoB was expected to show its commitment to the MoU terms guiding the Project. During this Phase, the new Ministry of Environment leadership was expected to develop the supportive legislative framework and policies for protected areas and biodiversity conservation in the country. All Project activities during the Interim Phase were limited to advisory support for development of the new legal framework – the Protected Areas Act.

The new Protected Areas Act was prepared in final draft form in spring of 1998. Technical assistance of the GEF Project was provided to the Ministry, on request. The Act was reviewed and passed by Parliament in October 1998, and gazetted in November. Park Directorates became the legally mandated institutional body for national parks management and administration by Ministerial order, at the end of December, 1998.

The final boundaries for the three national parks, however, were left unconfirmed for a period of one year. This timeframe was allocated by Parliament, as mandated in the Protected Areas Law. One year was allocated to ensure sufficient time for public hearings on the national park boundaries.

The GEF Project supported a series of public hearings for the two parks – the subjects of GEF Project assistance. In both instances, there was strong public support for retention of existing national park boundaries, and in some instances, requests were made to increase the territory under national park jurisdiction. The public record of these hearings was filed by a special Commission formed for this purpose. The Ministry of Environment and Waters submitted the Commission’s recommendations to the Bulgarian Council of Ministers, and the Council commended the three park territories to Parliament, unchanged in October 1999. The Parliamentary Commission for Environment and Waters recommended these results to Parliament for discussion as the first order of business in the year 2000.

Stiff parliamentary opposition to confirmation of the Rila National Park Boundaries however, was experienced. Two opposing factions (liberal/democratic, and conservative/socialist) in Parliament contested the inclusion of more than 27,000 hectares of Rila Monastery land within the national park. The two parties formed an uneasy alliance. They were opposed to state control of territory, and chose both the Church (Eastern Orthodox) and private land ownership, as issues. Both believed that private land ownership should remain paramount as a sign of a new, national democratic process and reduced state interference in private/church matters.

The boundaries for Central Balkan and Rila National Park (with significant changes) were finally confirmed at the end of March 2000 – almost five years after Project award.

The GEF Project employed a series of strategic technical assistance consultancies throughout the evolution of new national park administrations. Using a combination of US technical assistance, combined with Bulgarian civil service and administrative technical expertise, the Project developed a new set of operational guidelines for national park administrative systems. The final product of more than 6 month of technical assistance resulted in the first operations manual for national park directorates. This manual governs the day-to-day operations of all major administrative systems in the new national parks. The operations manual was also an effective tool used to guide and synthesize the experience of the National Parks study tour participants to the United States. Its final development included park directorates and their staff in its review and final recommendation to the Ministry of Environment and Waters.

Project Outputs The GEF Project contributed technical advice and support to development of the Protected Areas Act, supporting legislation, and guidelines including:

- Ministry of Environment and Waters – Rules of Organization
- National Park Directorates - Structure and Activities
- Protected Area Management Planning
- Delegation of Activities within Protected Areas of Exclusive State Property
- Operations Manual and Administrative Guidelines for the Directorates of National Parks

Lessons

Policy - While the legislation goes a long way to filling the gap of an “institutional framework” for protected areas management and biodiversity conservation using a system of protected areas, the legal framework requires additional development and fine-tuning. The most significant challenges remaining are:

- The absence of any management planning and protected area management policies. At present, protected areas do not benefit from a uniform interpretation of the law, uses/activities within protected areas, and clear procedures in the event of natural or unforeseen calamities. The absence of policy interpretation guidelines leaves many biodiversity conservation management decisions to occur in an ad-hoc fashion. Protected area management planning efforts in the country are inconsistent in their interpretation of policy, leading to managerial and public confusion.
- At present, there is no framework for community and municipal interaction and benefit sharing. Local relations and partnerships are left to the individual wills of protected area

staff. The opportunities and costs related to protected area interaction with surrounding populations and special interest groups remains largely unexplored and experimental.

- At present there is little experience and no formal mechanism(s) for protected areas to interact on a regional planning and development basis. The Protected Area Act clearly confines the new administration of protected areas to within its borders, and no provision is made for addressing regional, landscape or ecological planning and development on an appropriate scale. Efforts to engage in regional dialog are largely experimental, and there are no policy guidelines to steer this relationship.

Decentralization and Institutional Reform – Decentralization and the devolution of planning, control, and authority; and greater public participation in local and regional government, are slowly becoming hallmarks of institutional and political reform in Bulgaria. Many of these reforms are occurring with international donor support. This is a marked change from a highly centralized, often authoritarian regime of only 11 years ago. Consequently, experience with decentralization and its management is still evolving.

The Ministry of Environment and Waters, with one of the smallest manpower of any ministry, is among the government agencies with the least experience in decentralization and public participation. The Ministry's size and inexperience has been both a boon as well as a hindrance.

On the one hand, the Ministry of Environment has historically evolved in the 90s as an institution with environmental control functions. Regional Environmental Inspectors were watchdogs of the State, expected to exercise regulatory functions on ministries, municipalities, and state industries that contravened environmental laws and safeguards. As a consequence, there was limited experience within the Ministry for territorial management, let alone protected area administrative systems. The Ministry also had limited experience with forging and managing partnerships with community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGO), and local government. Most of their work saw them engaged with line ministries, operating in regional capacities.

On the other hand, the Ministry's relatively small size and limited budget, have often forced staff to negotiate and interact with much larger line ministries in order to achieve compliance, change and/or action.

In the 90's, decentralized solid waste management programs at Municipal level, local environmental action planning, integrated river basin management planning, and citizen groups, increasingly became tools for environmental management. The Ministry's regional representatives began to gain experience with the tools of participation and public involvement in policy and institutional reform. The Ministry, particularly at central level however, remained with little experience at applying these lessons. Nowhere was this more evident than with the nation's protected areas network.

The recent confirmation of national parks, the appointment of Park Directorates, and more than 130 staff, and recent policy developments are characteristic of dramatic developments in recent Bulgarian institutional history. We believe that the GEF Project has contributed to the speed with which these reforms have occurred. There are three explanations offered for the scope and speed of this change:

1. We believe that a strong institutional leader (Minister), backed by a political party of reform minded policy makers, has been instrumental in giving direction and content to the Ministry's new roles. Development of the protected areas network goes far beyond protected area politics. It reflects the change characterizing national and political management systems, efforts towards European Union (EU) accession, and attempts to consolidate reform by government. USAID provided strategic combinations of intervention, policy development, and technical assistance at opportune times in the evolving national role of the Ministry of Environment.
2. In the absence of a strong institutional framework and protected areas policy at national level during the first three years of the Project, USAID supported a Project strategy that chose to engage MoEW representatives at local and regional levels. This approach worked to good effect. By choosing a series of lower-level, strategic and consistent inputs, the GEF Project gave the eventual national park directorates strong groundings in basic organizational development and local partnership development skills. It was, in large part, due to this strategy that the GEF Project could maintain the consistency of support to regionally-focused biodiversity conservation and protected area issues, and keep local target groups engaged in the dialog of national parks.
3. Park-focused, public and private partnerships are, and will remain, key to the future success of the protected area system. The GEF Project contributed to this dialog. Each Park's ability to engage municipal governments surrounding the Park, to attract and engage the private sector, and to solicit partnerships with NGOs, will remain key to the future of biodiversity conservation in the country. These partnerships are key to political conservation agendas being heard at national level, and to long-term financial sustainability of these territories.

The Project has demonstrated the efficacy of this approach, and the Ministry of Environment and Waters is paying attention. With the most recent and rapid changes to the policy framework for protected areas and conservation, the nascent national park system *at park level* will remain the primary interpreters of protected area legislation and its application.

USAID support has been instrumental in constructing this model of decentralized, institutional reform

A.2 Human Resources for biodiversity conservation and protected areas administration and management are improved.

Background To date, there are no national or regional institutions that prepare new protected area managers for their responsibilities. While the academic preparation of many new protected area managers is exemplary in the fields of forestry, biology, engineering, or botany, there is no formal curriculum anywhere in the country that prepares managers in the fields pertinent to biological diversity conservation, ecosystem management, and protected area administration skills. There are also few examples of the interdisciplinary preparation that is necessary for protected area staff; and few examples of where to go to observe people in service already to nature conservation.

In addition, there is no precedent for the organization and functioning of new protected area management units. Each task, each order, and each function is largely without institutional

precedent. As a consequence, there is significant time spent in the development of new systems, new procedures, as well as in effective systems of communication and office organization. The National Parks Operational Manual, described under the previous result, contributed the administrative framework. This result provided the means for realizing new staff roles and functions within that framework.

As a consequence, training formed a significant part of this Project's efforts. Five elements characterized the GEF Project training activities.

1. Development of a training strategy based upon a rigorous training needs assessment, conducted in light of rapidly evolving institutional roles and responsibilities;
2. Development and deployment of a system of non-formal education training to develop skills in: group organization and communication, partnerships and public relations, office management systems, work planning, and teamwork. Professional facilitators were hired and deployed for six months, to assist both national park directorates prior to their official designation.
3. Development and delivery of an introductory training for Protected Area Management. This course consisted of 4, one-week introductory courses for national park technical staff and park section heads. Four major themes included:
 - a) *Protected Areas Management – systems and principles of contemporary protected area management;*
 - b) *Natural Resources Management – an introduction to elements of resource management in protected areas;*
 - c) *Tourist Management, Interpretation and Education;*
 - d) *Park Operations and Management Planning*
4. Development and delivery of an intensive training program for new, national park guards. This was preceded by a specifically tailored training needs assessment.
5. Course development and delivery of a basic introduction to Geographic Information System (GIS) and its application in Park data and data base management. In addition, a three-week technical training course for Park and MoEW GIS technicians was developed and offered.

In all but the case of GIS training, formal training management and delivery was conducted through a Bulgarian training management group. This group managed the development of course curricula under the supervision of the Project Management Unit (PMU), and core consultants. The training management group coordinated the technical inputs of international and local consultants into each course. They provided translation services as necessary. They (re)produced materials, provided all logistic arrangements, and facilitated the management and organization of daily and weekly events. They also conducted relevant course evaluations.

A study tour to the United States, the US National Park Service, USAID, and four eastern US national parks, was also conducted by the Project in August of 1999.

Geographic Information Systems training for Park Directorate and select National Nature Protection Service (NNPS) staff also figured prominently in the final phase of the Project. (GIS is dealt with in detail under result B.1). The Project's Environmental Information System strategy made provisions for technical support, equipment and data base development

to the NNPS, and the two national park directorates, as part of an effort to develop and maintain park-specific biodiversity and environmental data management. GIS tools and equipment are one of the cornerstones for an eventual protected areas network of data bases, a protected areas cadaster, and for protected area management planning and ecological monitoring.

Project Outputs

- 4 (four), week-long Foundation training courses developed and delivered for 38 new national park technical staff and Park Management section heads from Rila and Central Balkan National Parks.
- Two, week-long ranger training theory courses, and 3, one-week practical, winter survival courses developed and delivered for 54 new national park guards;
- Training Sourcebook – describing (with lesson plans and support materials) a foundation course for protected area managers.
- Protected Area Management Training team organized and familiar with development, delivery and evaluation of similar programs for future replication.
- Three week study tour to representative US National Parks conducted by (3) three technical staff from the Ministry of Environment and Waters, 5 technical experts from Rila National Park (including the Park Director), 4 technical experts from Central Balkan National Park (including the Park Director), the PMU Training Coordinator, and two PMU staff (15 individuals total).
- 42 protected area staff and two NGO/GIS technicians were afforded introductory courses on GIS.
- 6 technical staff (three from Central Balkan, including a Peace Corps Volunteer, two from Rila National Park, and one from the National Nature Protection Service), were given a detailed technical introduction to GIS. At the end of the course, they were able to manipulate each Park’s database, and to describe its applications to Park management and monitoring.

Lessons

Human resource development policy and practice still requires considerable effort. The PA system of employees is still fragile, with little career advancement possible, and almost no mobility. The latter is due primarily to the shortage of funds to support staff accommodation away from their respective villages or municipalities.

We believe that staff training and human resource development can best be achieved through four primary tools:

1. Greater advocacy efforts and financial support for linking protected area management needs to future areas of academic specialization in the Bulgarian university and specialty institute degrees.
2. Appointment of a Human Resources Development department within the Ministry of Environment and Waters to develop and implement staff development policy in support of career development; performance review criteria and systems; wages, incentives and benefits reform; and performance based incentives.

3. Greater exposure to regional, European and international models through cross visits, exchange visits and study tours. (Bulgarian experience with the US Study Tour of 1999 is paying dividends repeatedly during the implementation of the Project after participants returned.)
4. Introduction and regular use of a system of mentoring, apprenticeship and frequent technical supervision on matters related to national park management plan implementation. Frequent opportunities exist for short courses, practical in nature, to be led by professional authorities from various Bulgarian institutes. Costs for instructors fees, field work and maintenance costs are extremely small. This style of learning lends itself to more effective and more immediately applied on the job training.

In addition, language will remain an issue for further staff development and training. If Bulgarians are to benefit from literature and experiences outside of Bulgaria, they will have to become fluent in at least one major European language. The Foundation Training Sourcebook, produced under the supervision and guidance of this Project, will serve as a useful future reference training tool, but it does not yet provide for the career growth and development required by most staff.

A.3 Equipment and infrastructure is improved to enable effective administration and management of two national Parks.

Background After significant delay, the GoB appointed (end 1998) national park directorates for Rila and Central Balkan National Parks. They also allocated appropriate (but in poor condition) facilities (April 99 in the case of Rila National Park and November 99 in the case of Central Balkan National Park). These two conditions were a prerequisite for USAID equipment and infrastructure assistance to the Ministry.

As a consequence, the Project began a procurement that was almost entirely initiated and finalized during the last year of the Project. A more detailed procurement list of equipment is outlined in the section on Project inputs. Prior to GEF Project support, the national park directorates had no office equipment, vehicles, and only minimal office space within other institutions.

In the case of new HQ construction and renovation, the GEF Project employed architectural design and supervision services in order to prepare and evaluate local, competitive procurement. These same firms provided supervision of contractor activities after award, and served as a liaison between the contractor, Park Directorate, and the Project.

Construction bids were collected only from the host-city of the new national park headquarters for each park. The Parks and the Project developed this policy in an effort to demonstrate local financial benefits associated with the new national park service.

Both construction contracts resulted in new National Park Headquarters for Central Balkan and Rila National Parks – in Gabrovo and Blagoevgrad, respectively. Both facilities were officially opened by the Ministry of Environment and Waters in 2000, with the U.S. Ambassador as special guest.

Project Outputs

Sufficient capital costs (equipment and infrastructure) for the two national parks – Rila and Central Balkan – were provided by the Project to ensure:

- That new national park staff were housed and operating in clean, comfortable and functional office surroundings;
- Park management staff were mobile and could conduct routine park management functions where travel and transport were necessary;
- Park Directorates had sufficient equipment to allow them to communicate effectively between field offices and each Park's Headquarters (HQ);
- Information and data were effectively managed and shared between technical experts at each Park Headquarters, using contemporary technology and a networked operating system.
- Basic audio/visual materials could be produced and demonstrated in support of national parks' activities – training, public awareness, public relations, education, and exhibitions

In addition, the Project supported the procurement, installation and training of three GIS labs – one for Central Balkan National Park, one for Rila and one for the National Nature Protection Service. These three GIS stations are augmented by 6 GPS units that will be used for further data base development and park monitoring.

Lessons

There was considerable amount of procurement under this Project. While procurement of this scale is often considered the responsibility of the host government or is the subject of a World Bank loan, this level of efforts was essential to new protected area establishment, operations, staff morale and identity.

Since the remaining protected areas in the country continue to fall under the supervision and guidance of other administrative and technical units, with their own identities and institutional cultures, the new national parks service lacked a similar culture. In order to demonstrate a legitimate operational capacity, the parks required immediate hardware and operating identity. Consequently, the GEF Project procurement has been essential to establishing the new park entities. It has also been essential for moving parks quickly into an operational state.

Impacts to recurrent expenditure for such large amounts of equipment and facilities are often profound; and yet the MoEW has demonstrated their commitment by providing funds for recurrent expenditure in FY 2000. This money has been secured from the State budget, an unprecedented development for protected areas in Bulgaria.

A.4 Increased knowledge by relevant government and non-government bodies (including Park partners) of protected areas financing options.

Background

Perhaps the most complex and challenging elements of the GEF Project (and biodiversity conservation) were addressed by this result. Three distinctive stages were conducted to increase national understanding of financing options for protected areas.

- The first stage included a scoping mission by an expert international consultant. This mission was used to review the mechanisms, institutions and options employed by the

Government for protected area financing during 1997. (This was a time of unprecedented hyperinflation in the country)

- The second phase was used to set the terms of reference for a series of studies that could contribute to an improved understanding of financing options among key PA stakeholders. This second mission was split into two activities (1) setting the ToR for these specific studies, and (2) reviewing the results and recommendations of these studies with a view towards a national forum on PA financing. The results of this study would be the focus of the third and final stage of this result – a Conservation Financing Workshop.

Several studies were undertaken by the Project as a consequence: (1) preliminary study of the net economic benefits associated with the National Parks; (2) Non Timber Forest Product (NTFP) collection survey; (3) visitor survey including a willingness to pay survey; (4) survey of tourism facilities; and (5) private sector marketing and sponsorship assessment.

- Conservation Financing Workshop was held in Sofia on the 14th and 15th of June 1999. A series of recommendations resulted from this workshop, with some preliminary legal analysis of the constraints and impediments to their implementation.

The major aspects of these sets of activities focused on:

- National Funds for Environmental Protection
- Donor Financing for Biodiversity Conservation
- Conservation Financing Options related to:
 - Protected Area Budgets;
 - “Local” National Park Conservation Funds and Foundations;
 - User Fees, Concessions and Environmental Taxes;
 - Park Entry Fees;
 - Commercial Enterprises;
 - Private Sector sponsorship;

Project Outputs

The Project provided a set of recommendations framed in the context of the Financial Mechanisms Workshop, June, 1999. Five major categories of recommendations stem from the increased knowledge and awareness of government authorities, parks, and individuals:

- (1) CORE FUNDING - MoEW seek to both ensure **core funding** for national parks from the state budget, and move towards a system of earmarking funds for national parks within the NEPF.
- (2) EXTRA-GOVERNMENTAL FUNDING - MoEW to further evaluate options and adopt **mechanisms** for protected areas to generate and retain revenues so as to reduce the dependence of parks on central government budgetary support.
- (3) PARK ENTERPRISE and INCOME - **income generation** opportunities are to be examined and experimented wherein parks generate income from concessions, fees, and marketing of products, associated with resource collectors, visitors, tourism and park-focused services.
- (4) ECOTOURISM – **regional fora** aimed at developing **pilot activities** to encourage the development of sustainable, small-scale cultural and nature tourism. Such efforts are of

benefit to the Park, surrounding communities, and help establish models for consideration as part of a national strategy for nature tourism in the country.

- (5) **MARKETING and the PRIVATE SECTOR** – MoEW to develop a program of **marketing and private sector linkages** in an effort to increase the profile of parks; national and international visitation to national parks; and to engage the private sector in support of national park events and projects.

Four project outputs augment these recommendations. These include:

- (1) **Assessment of private sector sponsorship opportunities in the country**. A 6-month evaluation of opportunities and options was conducted by the Project. The major findings include:
 - that the private sector in Bulgaria is still evolving in a business sense, and presently has few incentives to engage with government in sponsorship activities;
 - an appreciation of the private sector’s annual and five year business cycle is crucial to selecting and approaching the private sector for commercial support;
 - national parks present an attractive option for limited private sector sponsorship, especially when both brand and company name can be promoted as advertisement;
 - companies best respond to sponsorship options that are presented as projects;
 - the MoEW and/or parks must establish a mechanism for contacting and engaging the private sector on a consistent basis; and that a program of commercial marketing become a regular feature of the MoEW public relations department.
 - 5-6 project activities were identified for follow-up by the Parks and MoEW with select, private sector companies in Bulgaria.
- (2) **Ecotourism Surveys** – 12 months of work were carried out by a Bulgarian tourism consultant in 12 municipalities surrounding both national parks. The survey focused on ecotourism features, services and facilities that could be developed and promoted in conjunction with each of the two national parks. This exhaustive survey resulted in the development of “ecotourism” publication for municipalities, produced as an attractive full-color catalog, and on Compact Disc. These catalogs become tools for the national park directorates to use in support of the formation of regional forums for ecotourism. In addition, the catalogs offer existing municipal tourist centers with immediate information promoting small-scale hotels, crafts, tourism services and local nature destinations, to a nascent nature tourism industry.
- (3) **Tourist Profile Surveys and Willingness to Pay Surveys** – As part of the socio-economic survey work conducted in and around the two national parks, a tourism survey was conducted. The results of these surveys are published under separate cover, but are the first such survey work conducted in Bulgaria in support of protected areas. The analysis of this information has been used to support development of the park management plans, zoning, tourist management, and interpretation and education programming. The information has been used to identify special services for tourist development, both in and around the national parks. Finally, the information indicates a clear set of recommendations for Parks regarding entrance fees, visitor access and fee collection.
- (4) **NTFP resource collection sites** – Another survey conducted in support of the broader socio-economic profiles developed around both national parks, included collection of information on local communities and NTFP collection sites. While far from conclusive,

the results of this survey indicate several important pieces of information regarding key natural resource collection sites and ideas concerning natural resource tenure, collection patterns, and collectors profiles. The most important distinction discovered is between people who harvest NTFPs for personal use, and those who harvest for commercial purposes.

Given prevailing economic difficulties, particularly in areas surrounding the national parks, there is a growing tendency towards NTFP collection for sale, and not for personal use. This information has been critical to the development of national park management plans, law enforcement strategies, the future of NTFP collection, fee collection and structures, and future natural resource tenure and co-management opportunities.

Lessons

There are still impediments to financial mechanisms developed in support of protected areas. These will continue to be:

- Impediments arising from legal constraints associated with decentralized revenue generation and retention, and earmarked funds.
- The absence of enabling environments for ecotourism development; local non-timber resource products collection and processing; and private sector sponsorship in and around national parks, etc.

Many of these are linked to the economic reforms of the country, “black market” interests, import and export cartels, private banking, savings and loan programs, and tax incentives. However, the investigation of financial mechanisms for protected area conservation can be served by pilot development of some innovative and provocative models. There are four examples noted above that could be assisted with future USAID commitment and programmatic support.

Out of necessity, these models can be divided in two – (1) models related to park income generation, and (2) models related to community/municipal enterprise development.

In the case of the former, Park’s have already demonstrated the potential viability of income generation with local private sector partnerships. In addition, they are capable of generating income from concessions, licensing fees, and fines – all within the legal framework of the law - but using a system they are unfamiliar with, and that is still open to interpretation. All parks have demonstrated the potential to attract private sponsorship for projects, events, or campaigns, yet lack the relevant experience, full-time staff, and supportive ministerial functions.

In the second case, lesson learned to date suggest that enterprise development and economic growth opportunities (developed in conjunction with surrounding target groups) need to start small and focused. Efforts that are too large are unwieldy for new park personnel. Large-scale efforts attract expectations and manipulation far outstripping the capacity of protected area management staff to deal with the issues. Lessons learned from existing Park partnerships with mayors, NGOs, school groups, and others are illustrative of this. Parks have learned that they:

- need to be clear with potential partners about their intentions, objectives, and expectations. When activities are conducted in the Park, leadership, responsibility and accountability must be clear from outset. When outside the Park boundary, the Park must learn a different role.
- must learn to develop and organize a strategy wherein the Park is a broker and facilitator in group organization and development, not a director or implementing agency;
- must learn the skills of negotiation on conservation and management issues and objectives of common concern. Parks can ill-afford to engage in and support community activities that have little or no bearing on their priorities and objectives;
- need to relate their assistance and partnerships to the objectives and program of their national park management plans. These plans must be the primary tool interpreting park policy, administration and collaborative management opportunities.

In the absence of any institutional models, as well as any precedents for these financial mechanisms and approaches, the next phase of Park development must proceed cautiously. Exemplary efforts, demonstrating the innovations in the used of financial mechanisms, could have huge rewards as Bulgaria continues to change.

A.5 Understanding and support for Bulgarian Biodiversity Conservation is increased.

Background Bulgaria is generally a nation of avid, outdoor enthusiasts. Many Bulgarian's still have direct contact with the earth, either through gardening, hiking, plant collection, fishing and hunting. Many rural Bulgarian's survive the winter based on the products of their summer gardens, giving rise to a what is known as the "jar economy" – the unofficial side of Bulgarian primary production. In addition, tons of medicinal plants, herbs, snails, mushrooms and berries are annually collected from a Bulgaria's mountains and forests, making Bulgaria the 4th largest gross produced of medicinal plants and Non-Timber Forest Products in the world. Bulgaria's wetlands, in particular along the Black Sea coast and Danube flood plain, harbor rich diversity of nature, and are stop-over points for one of the most significant annual bird migrations in the world.

Bulgarians are largely aware of their nature. They tend to live in close association with it, its products and find solace in its surroundings. Ironically, Bulgaria is also among the most polluted of the eastern-European states – with an unfortunate list of environmental errors and disasters. And while Bulgarians remains largely aware of their nature, they are not aware of contemporary conservation issues, institutions, or legal requirements that frame national policy and actions.

Many of the issues concerning the Project's understanding of public awareness of Bulgaria's biodiversity conservation stem from:

- (a) series of social surveys and opinion polls conducted by the Project,
- (b) a review and analysis of the printed media also conducted by the Project, and
- (c) the conspicuous absence of any precedent for informing the Bulgarian public about the institutions, laws and issues affecting nature in Bulgaria.

Public awareness regarding the importance of biological diversity and the institutions responsible for its conservation were hardly addressed in Bulgaria, until the 90s. With the

advent of conservation NGO formation and development in the last decade, a new breed of nature conservation activists started to appear. They began to take public awareness of nature conservation issues beyond the traditional realm of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. They began to engage the public in discussion of the issues surrounding nature, biological diversity, the State's role, and the future of conservation. They began to popularize the issues. Many younger Bulgarians (some eventual politicians), made ecology a forum for political campaigning. They used it as a springboard for party development, activism, and change.

Apart from the USAID supported National Biological Diversity Conservation Strategy, there had never been a focused effort aimed at recruiting public support for nature conservation in the country. The National Strategy called for a multi-disciplinary approach to public awareness and education – and urged greater use of mass media, NGOs and formal education system is an effort to engage people in national and local nature conservation decision making.

Addressing nature conservation and the development of nature conservation institutions however, is problematic during a major shift in social, political and economic order. This was particularly true for Bulgaria.

At the outset of the GEF Project, there was an active, but limited public culture of awareness and engagement in biodiversity conservation issues, among its relevant institutions. A few environmental NGOs were engaged in public information activities, but there was no cogent national plan or strategy for biodiversity conservation public awareness and little coordination between them. There was no real program for engaging the mass media in environmental issues, and only the most limited institutional capacity for mounting public relations and public information efforts. The Bulgarian public remained largely unaware of both the issues in nature conservation in the country, and more importantly, about the institutions that would address it.

The GEF Project became engaged in public awareness effort on three different levels –

1. A strong, decentralized, regionally focused campaign of public awareness activities and campaigns in support of the development of new national park administrations responsible for biodiversity conservation in mountain ecosystems.
2. Support for conservation education curriculum development and teacher training materials in support of long-term efforts to integrate biodiversity conservation themes within the K-12 formal education system.
3. A select and focused set of products and activities designed to augment fragile and poorly-defined institutional roles in public awareness at national level – primarily through and with NGOs.

The last two points are focused on here. The first point is addressed with Result B.3.

Project Outputs

The GEF Project conducted a series of public awareness activities with a national focus. Each of these activities had several steps that were important to development of both a concept and materials for public awareness.

1. *Development of a Public Awareness and Education Strategy* – The Project conducted a survey of existing institutional, mass media, and civil societies active in public information development and awareness.
2. *Selection of Strategic Target Groups* – The Project largely chose to work through journalists and mass media outlets whose mediums could be used to reach wider public audiences. Given the historical power of journalists during time of political change, the Project worked with journalists and Bulgarian media experts in attempt to develop and maintain a “friends of biodiversity conservation - mass-media group”.
3. *Development of Multi-disciplinary Groups* – The GEF Project used a strategy to engage a multitude of people with diverse talents and backgrounds in the conceptual development of public awareness materials and campaign efforts.

The products that resulted from this approach included:

A. Public Awareness and Public Education Materials

The Green Gold of Bulgaria - This is the first public text on contemporary biological diversity conservation values, issues, and institutions. This popular, full-color book is part of a larger public awareness campaign aimed at national institutions, the national assembly, the Bulgarian foreign service, donors, and regional, municipal partners of the national parks. It’s an attempt to popularize basic information on the country’s nature resources, as well as the new institutions and laws responsible for governing conservation actions in a system of protected areas. Produced in both Bulgarian and English, this a major illustrated text that supplements other public awareness events.

Video Library – In order to popularize the images and themes of nature and its conservation, the Project supported the production of a video library and catalog of 101 films to be used in public information and education efforts. These were selected based on a survey of film materials and information needs in Bulgaria. The selection was assembled by Borrowed Nature – a Sofia-based, NGO focusing on public awareness information and film materials. Distributed through national television, regional mass media, cable and government television stations and the National Parks, the Video Library was a tool for developing a culture of greater public awareness of nature’s wonders and contemporary challenges.

Almanac - a simple tool for engaging teachers, journalist, mayors, and other key target audiences. The Nature Conservation Almanac is a perpetual planning agenda, with key dates and facts regarding Bulgaria’s nature conservation efforts. It’s meant to serve as both a practical planning, as well as easy reference, tool year after year.

National Journalists Group – A team of nationally active journalists – papers, radio, and television - was developed and supported with the assistance of a Bulgarian media and public relations specialist appointed by the Project. The team became the focal point for a series of orientation and discussion groups with the Project. They also worked in service of regular information exchange and information development for appropriate articles. They were an important forum for the discussion of issues, and easy to mobilize in support of biodiversity conservation issues, etc. The team provided an easy vehicle to various newspapers and magazines, and supported the development of a “nature conservation cadre of media professionals”.

B. Conservation Education Curriculum Development with the Central Teachers Training College

Conservation Education support from the Project had four major steps prior to the publication of 7 volumes of conservation education curricula support materials for teachers.

1. Scoping missions using combinations of international expertise, and Bulgarian curriculum development specialists. These missions reviewed existing curricula development mechanisms, other environmental education efforts, examined options for addressing conservation education in formal education. Consultants introduced international examples of curriculum support ideas and materials that could supplement existing curricula in Bulgaria's formal schooling system.
2. A series of seminars and workshops with target schools, teachers, and curriculum developers to review and test conservation education materials in target schools surrounding the national parks. These would eventually supplement existing curricula topics for K-12 grades;
3. Review and analysis of the field work/field testing by a curriculum development and teacher training team to prepare materials for review and approval for use by teachers and teacher trainers by the Ministry of Education;
4. Presentation and defense of the final materials to a teacher training and curriculum review board.

7 volumes of approved conservation education texts are now distributed by the Ministry of Education to Teacher Training facilities in the country, and supplement preparatory and in-service training for the nation's teachers. In addition, the materials are distributed to pilot schools surrounding the national parks for further use, testing and development.

C. Biodiversity Conservation and Public Participation – Postcard Campaign and National Exhibition – National Parks and Partnerships.

Public hearings on the national park boundaries in 1999 launched a series of public awareness efforts supervised and maintained by Bulgarian NGOs (primarily the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds) with assistance from the GEF Project and other international projects (specifically the Swiss and the EU). NGOs mounted a public awareness campaign in support of national park integrity, biodiversity conservation, and boundary retention, over a six month period. Their efforts culminated in more than 17,000 post-cards, part of a direct mail campaign, aimed at members of parliament. MPs from municipalities surrounding the national parks of Pirin, Rila and Central Balkan, were targeted. This campaign and its techniques were unprecedented in the history of the Bulgarian National Assembly, and drew national media attention.

As a follow-up, and at the invitation of the Parliamentary Commission on Environment and Waters, the NGOs were invited to present an exhibition of contemporary biodiversity conservation issues at the National Assembly, in February 2000. This exhibit became the focal point for an exhibition opening, (an activity covered by the national media), and a simultaneous public opening of a parallel exhibition at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

(BAS). The exhibition, lobbying, and series of public events accompanied debate in the national assembly concerning national protected areas, state property, land restitution and the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Three mobile versions of this national exhibit then began traveling the country – to the regional constituents of relevant NGOs, and exhibition centers surrounding the national parks.

Lessons

Public awareness is a cross-cutting theme that clearly draws its lessons from applications in support of other Project results. However, the GEF Project feels that the following lessons apply to experience gained from implementing this result:

1. The Bulgarian public is largely aware of nature, likes it, and wants to ensure its perpetuation. What they fail to be aware of is the status of biological diversity in the country, its importance in a global context, who is responsible for its administration and management, and what rules and regulations govern its conservation. Many people believe that the quality of nature in Bulgaria is victim to the same ills that characterize government and the national economy. Many see their personal reduction in buying power and economic misfortune in close association with a deteriorating natural environment. There is evidence to suggest that increasing unemployment and a general lawlessness associated with corruption is taking its toll on the natural resources of the Parks.
2. Public awareness requires access to timely, accurate, and regular sources of information. At present, there are few, if any sources of information, that meet this criteria. If the public is to become more engaged in biological diversity support, advocacy, and co-management, then they will need this access, and reliable sources.
3. There are distinctly different target groups, and information needs in the public awareness biodiversity conservation efforts in Bulgaria. These can be broadly divided between Sofia based institutions and national authorities, including the national assembly; And local target groups – the most important among them being local government/municipalities, natural resource collectors, tourists in and immediately around the Parks, and local law enforcement agencies.
4. Park administrations, as well as the MoEW can ill-afford to waste time, energy, and finances on ill-conceived public awareness efforts nationally, regionally and internationally. At present, however the Ministry lacks a public relations and public awareness strategy for biodiversity conservation. These gaps occur despite the National Biological Diversity Conservation Strategy, Action Plan, and supporting legislation. Clearly, there are opportunities for donor and NGOs to step into this gap, and to support a better definition of access to public information, public relations, and the best vehicles for supporting these.
5. 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 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, led by the MoEW, are needed to overcome this isolation.

6. MoEW demonstrates a model for recent institutional development and growth with respect to environmental management, and particularly, protected area - biodiversity conservation. As the MoEW develops policy, regulations, mechanisms, and models for protected area management, and biodiversity conservation, the Ministry must share these more widely. The MoEW is in a good position within the region to encourage the participation of others more broadly in the European biodiversity conservation network.

Result B Management Plans are operational in two National Parks

B.1 Baseline data for elaborating management plans are collected and organized.

Background Preparation of the management plans for Central Balkan and Rila National Parks began long before their official confirmation by law. The GEF Project chose a management planning strategy that can be characterized by four phases. This is the first of these phases, and consists of three important sets of activities:

- Literature review – an extensive literature and data base review was carried out by teams of consultants. With the help of experts from the Bulgarian Academy of Science, the Project was able to compile references for all known data from both national parks, to review it, and to synthesize it as a major source of information for the future database for the Park.
- Field Work – Data Collection – BAS scientists and social development specialists were contracted to form multi-disciplinary teams for data collection during two summer seasons in both national parks – flora and fauna teams were organized and deployed to known biodiversity hotspots outside of existing, strict nature reserves. Hotspots were identified from previous experience in these high mountain ecosystems, and from the literature. Sociologists focused on areas outside of park boundaries, within a 20-25 km catchment area.
- GIS – A geographic information system data base was compiled by a Bulgarian GIS consulting company, and supervised by two GIS experts for the Project – an international consultant and a Bulgarian. The GIS consisted of (a) digitization of the topographic maps for both parks; (b) digitization of the literature references and field work; (c) incorporation of data bases of additional source secured by the Project.

Three important sources of additional data contributed to the GIS for both Parks. The Project purchased (1) *Agrolesproject* forestry data for all the tree cover within the national parks, after efforts to secure this information through inter-ministerial agreement failed. The Project was also given access to (2) *OMII* project data from the hydrological development program of the MoEW, for Rila National Park. The (3) *Bulgarian-Swiss Biodiversity Conservation Program* also assisted with the development of the database. They provided all the data collected on high-mountain pastures from the Central Balkan as part of their project efforts there. In return, the GEF Project assisted the Bulgarian-Swiss Biodiversity Conservation Program with the publication of their data sets for the Central Balkan Treeless Meadows.

Project Outputs The Project successfully equipped and installed GIS stations in Rila and Central Balkan National Parks, as well as the National Nature Protection Service of the Ministry of Environment and Waters. These stations are supported by meta-databases for the two national parks. Each meta-database is the most comprehensive assembly of biological diversity information for any protected area in the country. The database includes source and origin parameters for each class of data presented in the database, as well as the corresponding parameters that accompanied its collection. Databases are installed on all three GIS work stations, as well as on CD.

Three volumes of biodiversity inventory and research were published by this Project. These include: (1) *Biological Diversity of the Rila National Park*, February 2000, (616 pp.) (2) *Biological Diversity of the Central Balkan National Park*, February 2000, (616 pp.) and *the High Mountain Treeless Zone of the Central Balkan National Park – Biological Diversity and Problems of its Conservation*, March 2000, (562 pp.). These volumes are among the first collections of protected areas' literature, and a direct follow-on to the efforts and recommendations National Biological Diversity Conservation Strategy, 1994, also sponsored by USAID.

A volume of socio-economic survey and research results was also produced. This information represents the first use of contemporary socio-economic, and opinion poll, survey work in support of national parks management planning. Four information categories were collected. In addition to the (a) tourism profiles and willingness to pay surveys, and the (b) ecotourism surveys, (c) a national and regional public attitudes and knowledge survey was conducted concerning national parks twice during the course of the Project, and (d) socio-economic profile of surrounding municipalities was conducted.

These social surveys and inventories help shape public awareness, park-community partnerships, small enterprise, ecotourism, and NTFP collaborative management programs and projects for both Park's future management activities.

Lessons

- The number of protected area management innovations, planning models, and management activities require 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. There is a distinct need to assist national parks and the National Nature Protection Service with the further development of a protected areas information management system that effectively includes:
 - A protected areas network cadaster
 - Indicators for biodiversity conservation/ecological monitoring program inside and outside of the protected areas network;
 - Management Information System with integrated information sharing databases, software, protocols, procedures and appropriate security systems;
- 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). These matters also clearly relate to issues raised under the central government's role in public awareness and public access to information.

B.2 Management plans are prepared for two National Parks

Background

The three additional phases of management plan preparation were followed:

(1) The GEF Project provided international **technical assistance** for a comparison and analysis of **protected area management planning processes** used internationally.

Based on a technical review of management planning options and formats, the Project and MoEW agreed on management planning process developed and promoted by the Eurosite Network – groups of organizations managing Europe’s natural heritage, and broadly formed into a coalition. The membership’s secretariat has produced a management planning toolkit that is expected to provide a common set of guidelines for protected areas planning in the European Community.

This format has subsequently been selected as the most appropriate by the MoEW to guide the management planning of the country’s protected areas. The format has been incorporated into the Management Planning Regulation, a subset of the Protected Areas Act.

(2) Formation of **expert teams for the development of the management plan’s descriptive phase**. Each national park management planning team was lead by a Bulgarian team leader. This team leader was responsible for working with and supervising expert contributions of scientists for the descriptive part of the two management plans. This information was a combination of the flora and fauna inventory and research work that had been completed under the previous result, as well as physical descriptions of territories, abiotic factors, cultural values, and historical practices.

With the assistance of international technical expertise, the teams, (joined by the national park staff and MoEW) conducted a review of the significance of each national park in terms of its relative role in supporting the goals of biodiversity conservation. This stage constituted the first evaluation of the information, and the development of ideal objectives.

(3) The **final phase of management planning was analytical and engaged national park staff**. During this phase, each park directorate and management planning team re-evaluated the ideal objectives of each park in light of the Protected Areas Act, the legislation ordering the designation of the Park, and their interpretation of protected area policy. Ideal objectives were reviewed using an analysis of contemporary threats to these ideal objectives. This analysis constitutes the second evaluation of the Park’s purpose.

From the second evaluation stems a set of Park Management Objectives that guide management decisions and actions for a 10-year period. These objectives are first used to guide the application of a park zone scheme for park management. Zones are supplemented by regimes and norms (what can and can not happen in each zone, and “how much”. Regimes and norms are developed using Environmental Impact Assessment techniques). A description of programs and projects completes the management planning draft. They are then reviewed by the National Nature Protection Service. GEF Project management plans were completed to this stage. Management plan finalization steps are still evolving.

Remaining Procedures for Management Plan Approval

With promulgation of the Management Planning regulation in February 2000, the approval process for management plans was described. The regulation specifies the following additional steps:

With the completion of the technical review of the Management Plan by NNPS, the final stages of management plan preparation require prioritization of projects, and scoping of the financial requirements needed for plan implementation.

The Plan is then readied for public hearings.

Public hearings are required by law, and any protected area management plan must be submitted with a record of public commentary.

This public record is then submitted to an Expert Council, accompanied by a explanation and rationale for how public commentary is included in the management plan or not.

Final technical comment on the management plan is provided by the Expert Council.

Revision of the plan is completed accordingly, and the final document submitted to the Council of Ministers for approval.

Project Outputs

The GEF Project produced two management plans – one for each of the IUCN Category II national parks – Rila (89,000 hectares) and Central Balkan (76,000 hectares). These are the first national park management plans produced in Bulgaria. They are the first plans produced for protected areas under the new Protected Areas Act (1998), and the first to be produced following the management planning regulation (2000). They are the first plans to be produced by new national park directorates, and by staff who have never contributed to a national park management planning effort before.

These management plans were authored by Bulgarians. These Bulgarians form the nucleus of a group of technical experts that will become Bulgaria's protected area management planning and management experts. The GEF Project provided technical assistance, guidance and financing to the process and product.

These plans are among the first plans to be produced using interdisciplinary teams, workshops, and a participatory process. These approaches are new to Bulgaria, and new enough to the world of protected area management planning. While still imperfect, these plans have been praised by the Ministry of Environment and Waters as setting important precedents for future protected area management planning, and for presenting management decisions in a consistent and logical framework.

Lessons

Despite the development and eventual approval of management plans, Park's 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 continue successfully to engage local partners in the management and protection of the PA.
- (4) Success of partnerships and joint efforts is demonstrated early in the Plan implementation cycle;

B.3 Regional and local groups are playing effective roles in attaining Park management goals.

Background In the absence of a strong, central institution during many stages of this Project, the GEF Project was forced to consider alternative strategies for supporting protected areas biodiversity conservation in Bulgaria. Institutional rivalries at national level were not as strongly reflected at local levels. And, in general, regional and local partnerships were easier to form than among national institutional counterparts.

Decentralization is also another of the cornerstones promoted by the GEF Project. Local partnerships demonstrated energy and momentum in the absence of any commitment among central institutions. With this in mind, the GEF Project supported the national park administrative units through their various stages of institutional evolution – from regional environmental inspectorates (2-5 people 1997), to fully-constituted park directorates (with 133 full-time staff, April 2000) – as well as the development of strategic, local partnerships with:

- Local NGOs
- Local Municipal Leadership
- Regional Authorities
- Local Primary and Secondary Education Centers
- Regional Mass Media

These local linkages have proved invaluable. They are a source of local moral support, volunteer services, products and programs, the source of inspiration for new initiatives, and increasingly strong, local lobby groups.

In addition, the GEF Project was able to assist parks and their partners with successful application for USAID Democracy Network Grants, as part of AID's synergy in programming and support to civil society development.

Project Outputs Training and local study tours for regional journalists and mass media representatives to the Parks

These were a mirror of similar efforts at national level. The regional mass media and public awareness efforts in support of biodiversity conservation however, were more effective than similar national efforts. Mass media partnerships helped each Park to establish and cultivate regional public awareness mechanisms. These efforts were sustained by local issues, with local journalists who could speak to issues "closer to home". Access to Parks staff for journalists was easier. There were numerous opportunities to "speak to the issues" with target groups surrounding each park. Regional mass media and journalist orientation campaigns were augmented by field trip to sites and issues of importance within each of the national parks – providing direct access to specialists and issues affecting the Park.

Park publications in conjunction with local private sector partnerships and NGO groups including Park brochures, stickers, postcards, posters, education leaflets for the traveling herbarium.

Park's embarked on a intensive set of activities designed to publicize their image, their name, their new institutional roles and their purpose within a regional context. They were able to achieve significant success through an intensive program of "meetings with mayors", joint ventures with the private sector for the publication of public awareness materials (calendars, posters, and leaflets), and a set of new park brochures, stickers and imagery. Capitalizing on their new status, their new imagery, and the registration of patented logos, the Park are examining ways in which these private sector partnerships can be expanded to the mutual benefit of the park and the private sector.

Establishment, development and outfitting of two information centers – one with the NGO group in Central Balkan/Ribaritsa, and one with the Regional Natural and Ethnographic Museum in Blagoevgrad.

In a cash stricken economy, and with limited infrastructure, staff, and experience, Park's have become more engaged in developing partnerships with local NGOs and municipal resource centers for the purpose of :

- Orienting Park visitors
- Providing venues for public awareness and education
- Market outlets for park promotion, education and information materials

Two such centers have been developed to date, with 6 more scheduled for development and opening within the next year. In each case, each Park has developed a special relationship with municipally-based facilities that can meet the objectives noted above.

The GEF Project assisted both national parks with the development of these relationships, the development of the public information component, and some hardware. After that, the National Parks and their partners have taken the program further by developing joint conservation education programs, public displays, learning centers, and public awareness campaigns.

Conservation Education partnerships with local schools and museums of Rozino, Kazanluk, Cherni Ossam and Teteven – Central Balkan National Park.

Early park partnerships with local conservation education facilities have yielded some positive results. These partnerships were constructed as part of the field testing of the conservation education curriculum development and teacher training materials. Since then, the partnerships have grown along several different tracks.

The Rozino school has become a model of a "resource substitution model" for schools and municipalities. A small conservation education project that began with medicinal and herbal plant identification grew into a herb cultivation project at the school. So impressed was the town's mayor with the school project, that he dedicated increased land for cultivation of herbs with commercial value. Two successive crops have been harvested, dried, processed, packaged and marketed in conjunction with a private sector initiative producing herbal teas for a Bulgarian market.

The Kazanluk Art School model is another successful public awareness effort that started as an art competition with a prestigious regional art school, and has grown into a traveling regional exhibit of students art work celebrating the natural values of Central Balkan National Park. The student artwork has become the subject of commercially produced poster, postcards, and calendars in partnership with the Parks. While Park's are still not legally allowed to generate and retain revenues at local levels, the partnership with private entrepreneur provides in kind services and goods.

The Teteven Forestry School – This school is located on the north slopes of Central Balkan National Park, in a strongly traditional forestry enterprise municipality. A partnership with the school has yielded a productive set of projects producing a traveling exhibit on medicinal plants and herbs of the Central Balkan, a series of park-subsidized theses on forest conservation and biological diversity, and the beginnings of a joint ecological monitoring program.

The Democracy Network partnership grants. These grants: (1) one to the Children of the Earth NGO – helped to strengthen the NGOs programming in support of conservation education, parent/teacher/student conservation activities with Rila National Park, and the development of a nature conservation manual of activities, and a board game, being considered for commercial production. The second (2) was given to the Initiative for Sustainable Development – an NGO created for sustainable agricultural development and organic farming, supported by a park partnership with Central Balkan National Park. The grants was used to help with the production and distribution of extension materials and training services.

Lessons

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.

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.

B.4 Effective implementation of urgent management activities to protect biodiversity.

Background For many years, the GEF Project foresaw the need to provide new national parks with access to emergency funds for urgent management activities. Urgent management activities arose in two separate instances – and are all associated with the establishment of the new national parks:

- (1) public hearings conducted in review of national park boundaries
- (2) park boundary markings

Project Outputs

(1) The new Protected Areas Act, promulgated in late 1998, provided for a hiatus of one year prior to the confirmation of national park boundaries for Pirin, Rila and Central Balkan National Parks. The year was used for public hearings on the national park boundaries with municipalities and communities surrounding the Parks. The GEF Project provided:

- Expert consultant advice to develop a set of public information materials
- Printing and distribution of public information materials
- Financial support to national parks for hosting public meetings

The Ministry of Environment and Waters organized a special Boundary Hearing Commission to make a record of these public hearings. The public record recommended positive changes to national park boundaries in almost all instances. Local, popular support for national parks and in general, their boundaries, was generally clear and positive.

(2) Confirmation of park boundaries in March of 2000, calls for a new system of national park boundary demarcation. The GEF Project provided the design and production costs for a national parks sign concept, as well as the production of 100,000 boundary markers.

Boundary markers will be installed by teams of community volunteers, NGOs and park section staff during the summer season of 2000.

3. PROJECT COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION

Project coordination has been essential in a country where resources for national and local biodiversity conservation efforts are at a premium. Project coordination therefore, took place at different levels:

US Government Programs – While potential existed for synergy between GEF Project objectives and several USAID programs, few of these were realized. Most were not realized because of the institutional and policy level delays experienced in the GEF Project at national level.

Several small successes are however, noteworthy.

Democracy Network Program, and Civil Society Development Grants – DemNet and the GEF joined heads and helped to create a special designation for environmental NGOs as potential grant recipients for USAID DemNet grants. Children of the Earth, Blagoevgrad, Rila National Park, and the Initiative for Sustainable Development, Gabrovo, Central Balkan National Park, were both grant recipients.

In addition, DemNet also supports environmental NGOs in ensuring information public scrutiny of biodiversity policy and legislative developments. The next round of DemNet grants is expected to continue this trend.

Peace Corps – Six volunteers provided positive links between the objectives of the GEF Project and the establishment of national parks. Five of the six volunteers operated in support of the Central Balkan National Park, and one volunteer operated in support of Rila National Park.

Table 2. Peace Corps Volunteers Activities with the National Parks

Central Balkan National Park	Activities	Dates
Stara Zagora	Field Guide to Trees	1995-1996
Ribaritsa	Ribaritsa Information Center	1996-1998
Gabrovo	Kazanluk Art School Postcards	1997-1999
	Traveling Herbarium	-“-
	Web Site Design	
Gabrovo	Ecotourism	1999-present
	GIS	1999- present

Rila National Park	Activity	Dates
Blagoevgrad	Web Site Design	1998

Multi-lateral Agencies/Donors – The Project engaged in regular coordination, participation with, and support of two major multi-lateral agencies during the course of the Project:

1. *UNDP-GEF – National Biodiversity Action Plan* – The Project participated in workshops leading to the content for the action plan, as well as contributing information, and materials for Plan publication.

2. *European Union/PHARE - Nature 2000* – The GEF Project and the EU PHARE program conducted regular discussion on matters related to: (a) trans-boundary protected area issues, (b) multi-country environmental programming, (c) NGO support and development, and (d) concrete matters related to the future of the Panichishte Visitor Center, constructed by the EU, at Rila National Park.

As part of the campaign in support of Park boundary integrity, the EU and the GEF Project conducted regular meetings. We coordinated on the development of materials and strategies aimed at promoting integrated regional planning and sustainable economic growth in areas surrounding the national parks.

Bilateral Donors – GEF’s closest collaboration with a bilateral donor is with the Bulgaria Swiss Biodiversity Conservation Program (BSBCP). The closest geographic and programmatic ties were with the High Mountain project of the BSBCP, which focused on the conservation values and management of the high mountain meadows of the Central Balkan National Park. Our collaboration included: information sharing and frequent meetings on matters related to project activities, exchange of data, and cooperation of outreach, public relations, and extension activities. The most significant collaboration was realized on the development of the database and objectives for the Central Balkan National Park Management Plan. The BSBCP Central Balkan Project provided data sets related to three years of research. In exchange, the GEF Project published this data in hard copy and CD format for distribution in Bulgaria and internationally.

BSBCP was also a partner in the national exhibit and public awareness effort at the National Assembly, and the Bulgarian Academy of Science, in February of 2000.

4. WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT

In most societies, social and professional standing, and opportunities for women are generally inferior to those of men. This situation is recognized as an important factor in development projects, where promotion of women and other disadvantaged groups is emphasized. The position of women in general in Bulgaria is generally typical of Central and Eastern Europe. Many women have responsible professional positions, but are less well represented at executive level. They also are primarily responsible for most domestic activities. This is different for the Ministry of Environment and Waters, where the Minister is a woman, the deputy minister in charge of nature protection is a woman, and women fill 45% of the senior administrative positions in the Ministry.

The GEF project is also fortunate to work with women in all activities, and at all levels of responsibility. Both national park Directors are women, supported by women in at least three of 10 technical expert positions in each park.

The following table is a brief statistical digest of the number and proportion of women in different aspects of the project. Data refer to the period of April 2000.

Table 3. Involvement of Women in the GEF Project

Activity	Number of Women	% of all
Full time staff in the PMU	4	67% ²
Bulgarian consultants of the GEF Project	32	41%
OTHERS formally involved in the Project	34	59%
Central Balkan and Rila Directorate Staff	14	16%
Women as a % of total NGO membership around the Parks		58%
Women as a % of total formal education partnerships		80%
Women providing legal services and technical support on financial mechanisms	5	72%
Women as a % of park guards	1	1%
Women participating in formal Directorate training program	12	28%

² % applies to both professional and support staff.

5. CIVIL SOCIETY AT NATIONAL LEVEL

Four national, Environmental NGOs have been partners throughout the GEF Project. The Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds, the Wilderness Fund, Borrowed Nature, and Green Balkan have all worked together with the Project on themes of common concern. Some of these NGO activities have been financed by the GEF Project.

These partnerships reflect several important lessons learned regarding environmental NGOs in the country. Each of these partnerships reflects different levels of growth, change and development among national, environmental NGOs. Perhaps the most noteworthy is the fragile, popular base enjoyed by each of these NGOs. Most environmental NGOs are dependent on the strength of individuals and are strongly personality driven. There is, as yet, very little experience with democratic processes, roles and responsibilities associated with membership, constituencies and constitutions.

Perhaps the most successful partnership at national level was with the *Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds* (BSPB). They represent a well-organized, nation-wide constituency (almost 3000 subscribers), with good regional organization, and effective local program management. They organize and operate under standard reporting, administrative and accounting systems, and are capable of managing international project support. They have actively recruited project and secretariat staff with a view towards career development as NGO professionals. They have successfully managed national subscriptions and international project funds. They were effective partners in mounting a national campaign for Park boundaries, and hosts of Bulgaria's first exhibition on biodiversity organized within the National Assembly.

Unfortunately, at end of the GEF Project, BSPB was experiencing a crisis of leadership, with an executive director operating in direct contradiction to the bylaws and constitution of the organization.

Borrowed Nature is a Sofia based NGO with funding support from the British Know How Fund, and the Dutch Government. Their primary agenda continues to focus on the media and materials, as well as information management, that is important to effective nature conservation cultural development.

The *Wilderness Fund* have been effective co-hosts of many joint activities with GEF, and their secretariat and leadership have been sources of important political support, and key information. They have largely supported efforts in conjunction with the development of the Central Balkan National Park management plan, and associated national park activities.

Green Balkans has organized itself along the lines of a federated system of regional NGO offices, each with their own program, agenda, executive and constituency. They are loosely joined by a set of common advocacy goals, and have worked with the GEF Project on both thematic advocacy issues, as well as research in conjunction with protected areas.

Lessons

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 in the last two years in the areas of:

- protected areas,
- medicinal plants law,
- the biodiversity law addressing biodiversity outside protected areas,
- the hunting law,
- forest restitution, and
- increased private land ownership, and the
- NGO law

the roles of national NGOs will demand corresponding development and greater self-definition. We believe that national 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, 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.

6. PROJECT INPUTS

Biodiversity and protected areas (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. Experience with the GEF Project (and earlier USAID efforts) demonstrates that this support required a minimum of 10 years of consistent, low key, but persistent technical and financial 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 further donor coordination is essential. Further programmatic and funding support needs to be driven by thematic and critical geographic biodiversity conservation issues to be most effective.

6.1 PMU and Project Management

The GEF Biodiversity Project was implemented using a six-person project team - Project Management Unit.

- (a) A Senior Resident Advisor (international, Dr. Ian Deshmukh - 50 months; Mr. Peter Hetz - 7 months),

was complemented by a full-time, Bulgarian team of:

- (b) Biodiversity Specialist (Dr. Marieta Sakalian),
- (c) Education and Training specialist (Ms. Kamelia Geogieva),
- (d) Logistics Specialist (Krassimir Kostov),
- (e) Accountant and Computer Specialist (Mary Nikolova - 31 months; Mary Yourukova -16 months); and,
- (f) Administrative Assistant (Vessela Gendurova).

Bulgaria GEF Project management was conducted from offices leased in the center of Sofia, Bulgaria – and in close proximity to host institutions, counterparts, and partners.

Both Dr. Deshmukh, and Mr. Hetz, are full-time, ARD employees. Mr. Hetz, ARD Home Office Project Manager for the GEF Project, replaced Dr. Deshmukh in October of 1999. This transition was successful because of Mr. Hetz's familiarity with the Project stemming from several short-term technical assistance (STTA) assignments to Bulgaria, in addition to his Home Office responsibilities.

ARD also uses a system of home-office assistant project managers (APM). "APMs" provide consistency of administrative support services, communication and backstopping from ARD's headquarters in Burlington, Vermont. Mr. Brian Guse, and Ms. Daphne Hewitt provided such services during the life of this Project.

6.2 USAID Project Management

The GEF Project provided for an unusual combination of USAID Bulgarian-based and Washington DC-based involvement, support and management.

The project manager (Cognizant Technical Officer/CTO) was based in Washington DC, within the former (ENI, now E&E) Bureau, the EEST department, and served as Environment and Natural Resources officer for this project, as well as other ENR projects in the Bureau. This Project had 3 (three) CTOs during the life of the Project:

Ms. Laurie Freer (until February 1996)
Ms. Linda Lind (until approx. March 1998)
Ms. Alicia Grimes (until project completion)

This Project (the final 24 months) was completed under the technical direction and supervision of Alicia Grimes, E&E/EEST/ENR – Forestry and Biodiversity Specialist.

USAID-Bulgaria links for this Project were managed through the Mission’s Special Initiatives Strategic Objective. During the Project’s implementation, the USAID presence in Bulgaria grew from an Office of USAID (OAR) to a full-blown USAID Mission, supported by a results framework and graduation schedule. This graduation schedule was extended by four years (from 2001 until 2005). The present graduation dates for USAID in Bulgaria will re-evaluated again in 2002.

The Bulgaria GEF Project was one of several USAID, in-kind contributions to the Global Environmental Facility (established by international agreement at the Rio de Janeiro, World Environmental Conference in 1992). The unusual nature of this support within USAID’s international portfolio of bilateral assistance, and the nature of Bulgaria’s dramatic political and economic transition in the early 90’s, provided the rationale for the Washington-based project management strategy of USAID. The nature of this project management strategy did not change during the life of the Project.

Two Mission Directors, two program offices, and two program assistants at USAID were closely involved in support of this Project, often as a consequence of the rapidly changing political, institutional and economic order of the day in Bulgaria. Messrs. John Tenant, and John Grant (Mission Directors), John Babylon and Ivanka Tsankova (Program Officers), and Peter Pojarski and Assya Alexieva (Program Assistants), all gave strategic support and local guidance to the Project – often during very demanding and difficult circumstances.

6.3 Short Term Technical Assistance – Local and International

4,931 days of local consulting services were provided during the life of the Project. Almost 900 days of international STTA were also provided. These included ARD home office support and technical staff, as well as independent consultants, and sub-contractors.

6.4 Equipment/Materials

Major procurement was conducted during this project. While significant procurement was expected at the outset of this Project, it was delayed due to insufficient institutional readiness, and the absence of supportive policy and legal framework for the national parks system. This issue was only successfully resolved at the end of 1998, when national park administrative units were officially designated. Difficulties in acquiring legal title to new national park HQ buildings, resulted in additional delays to procurement.

The bulk of procurement did occur, however, during the last 15 months of the Project, and included the following:

- Renovation and refurbishment of two, national park headquarters – one in Blagoevgrad, (Rila National Park) and one in Gabrovo, (Central Balkan National Park) Bulgaria.
- Furniture, photocopiers, telephone systems, electronic security systems, and furnishings for these two National Park Headquarters.
- 25 Computers, 5 Printers, and inclusive of networks, software licenses, and service contracts
- 19 Vehicles
- Audio-visual equipment for both Park and NGO partners.
- 100,000 Park boundary markers, selective field equipment, and faxes for each of the 16 Park section offices

Total procurement amounted to almost \$555,000 USD. A detailed project accounting follows, per contract requirements.