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Natura 2000 as a platform balancing socio-economic and environmental objectives – theory and practice

Natura 2000 jako platforma równoważenia celów
społeczno-gospodarczych i przyrodniczych – teoria i praktyka

ABSTRACT

This paper concerns problems of possible use of Natura 2000 areas in Poland for economic purposes. In this context creation and functioning of the Natura 2000 network are characterised as well as public participation in the process of development and management of Natura 2000 areas is presented. A special attention is paid to the possibility of forestry and tourism development on Natura 2000 areas taking into consideration formal requirements in this context. In conclusions matters of proper recognition of Natura 2000 areas are underlined and an importance of correlation of the Natura 2000 network with local land use plans is indicated. It is acknowledged that essential role in realisation of the Natura 2000 programme plays public involvement.

Key words: Natura 2000 areas, nature conservation, environmental impact assessment, forest management, ecological organizations, public participation

INTRODUCTION

The Natura 2000 Programme is a European Union initiative aimed at the preservation of the European natural heritage. The primary objective of the programme, functioning in Poland since 2004, is to establish a specific system of protected sites called the “Natura 2000 network”.

The period of several years of determining and approval of the network of Natura 2000 sites arouses both hopes and controversies. The hopes are related

to the effective and permanent protection of the most valuable national natural resources, the strengthening and preservation of biological diversity, and the reconstruction and improvement of the functions of ecosystems. The doubts and controversies mainly concern the limitations on economic activities, and restrictions of the rights to manage real estate located within Natura 2000 sites and in their direct vicinity.

This article describes the rules of establishment and functioning of Natura 2000 network sites. It also discusses the aspect of the society's participation in the process of establishment and functioning of the Natura 2000 network. It particularly emphasises the possibilities of the economic use of protected areas, presenting the related formal requirements. The issue of economic activity in Natura 2000 sites is still very controversial on the part of investors, and may lead to conflicts. Due to this, it is necessary to accurately propagate good practices in the scope of the undertaking and implementation of plans and enterprises in the Natura 2000 network sites. The article discusses the practical aspects of balancing socio-economic objectives and those related to environmental protection based on examples in the field of forestry. The summary emphasises the issues of accurate environmental recognition of Natura 2000 sites, the determination of rules of their functioning and protection in plans of protection tasks and in protection plans, as well as the correlation of the aspects of management of the Natura 2000 network with spatial management at the regional and local scale. The article also states that from the point of view of the implementation of protection tasks, it is necessary to provide the society with accurate information on the functioning of the Natura 2000 network.

THE BASIS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT AND FUNCTIONING OF NATURA 2000 SITES

The Natura 2000 site is the youngest form of environmental protection introduced to Polish legislation and practice in relation to the accession of Poland to the European Union. Natura 2000 sites are simultaneously elements of the European Ecological Network Natura 2000 binding in the territory of EU Member States, and prepared among the candidate countries. Natura 2000 is a manifestation of the idea of supranational environmental protection. The idea originated in Europe in 1868 during a convention of German farmers and foresters, when a proposal was issued to sign an international convention on the protection of birds useful for agriculture.

The objectives of the Natura 2000 network are the following:

- 1) preservation of specified habitats and species recognised in the continuously transformed environment as valuable and endangered at the European scale;
- 2) protection of biological diversity.

The legal basis of the Natura 2000 programme are two EU directives commonly called the Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive.

The former one, the Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds, was the first legal document of the European Community on environmental protection. It was subject to numerous modifications, and was superseded with a new Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds. The Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC on the preservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora was passed by the Council of Europe on 21 May 1992.

The Directives mentioned above oblige the Member States to provide conditions permitting the protection of natural habitats and species specified in the appendices, or recreation of their good state by among others covering the area of their occurrence with protection.

The Natura 2000 network includes two types of areas: Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). The establishment of both of the types of areas depend exclusively on environmental criteria. The socio-economic conditionings are only considered in the process of development of protection plans.

Special Protection Areas for birds (one or more species) are established by each Member State. The European Commission only verifies whether the national network of the areas includes all the significant havens in the country. It also verifies its coherence. A more complex procedure is involved in the establishment of Special Areas of Conservation. Based on works of experts and non-governmental organisations, each country develops a list of the most environmentally valuable areas meeting the requirements of the Habitats Directive, located in its territory. The list is submitted to the European Commission. The establishment of the areas considers the environmental diversity of Europe, divided into 9 biogeographical regions: Boreal, Continental, Atlantic, Alpine, Mediterranean, Pannonian, Steppe, Black Sea, and Macronesian, established based on climatic conditions and land relief and cover. Poland is located within two regions: the Continental (96%) and Alpine region (4%). For each of the regions, the Directive specifies habitats and species that should be under protection, with the consideration of priority species and habitats of special importance for the Community. The areas submitted to the Commission are evaluated in terms of environmental value, and then accepted as Sites of Community Importance (SCI). Member States are obliged to recognise the areas as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) based on a national legal document within 6 years. In contrast to the bird preservation areas, where simple and well-proven criteria of among others the international organisation BirdLife International are applied, the establishment of areas of conservation of habitats is a longer process. Its important stage involves Biogeographic Seminars. They constitute a panel of discussion and acceptance of the final list of areas meeting the requirements of the Directive.

Each Natura 2000 site should have its documentation in the form of a Standard Data Form and a digital map, updated in accordance with the provisions of the European Commission. High importance for the protection concept adopted in the network is attributed to active protection, involving among others the development of protection plans and support for environmentally-friendly activities: extensive and ecological agriculture, agrotourism, ecotourism, and education. The implementation and financing of the network is supported by relevant funds, including LIFE+, the Structural Funds, and the Cohesion Fund.

The preparations for the introduction of the Natura 2000 network in Poland commenced already at the end of the 1990's. At that time, a preliminary analysis of habitat and species resources requiring protection was carried out. Negotiations were also conducted on the supplementation of EU provisions with those concerning habitats and species requiring protection in Poland and not occurring in the countries of the former European Union, and consequently not covered with EU legal protection.

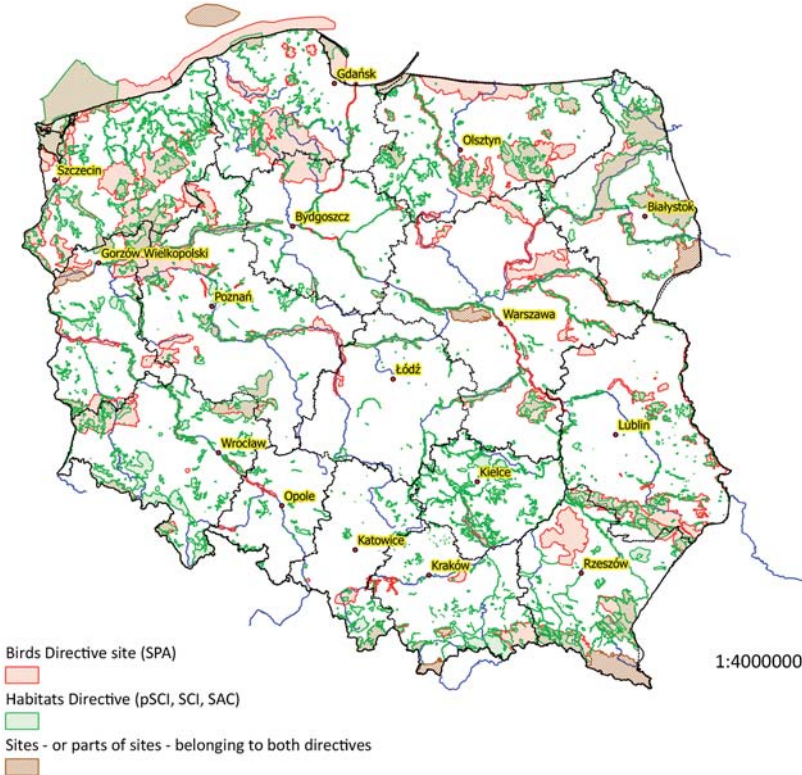
In 2004, social consultations were conducted. Self-governments commonly opposed the proposals issued. In May 2004, the Polish Government submitted a concept of the Natura 2000 network of habitat protection areas to the European Commission. In July 2004, a regulation establishing birds' havens was issued. The restriction of the Natura 2000 network met dissatisfaction on the part of experts and non-governmental organisations engaged in its development. This resulted in the publication in December 2004 of the so-called Shadow List of Natura 2000 sites. The paper included a critical review of the approved project, and proposals of the supplementation of the Natura 2000 network in accordance with the EU criteria.

Due to the insufficient level of implementation of the Natura 2000 network, The European Commission issued a warning to the Polish government. In December 2007, it submitted a complaint to the European Court of Justice regarding the establishment of an insufficient number of Special Protection Areas by Poland. The European Commission forced successive supplementation of the Natura 2000 network in our country in the following years.

According to the assessment of the General Directorate for Environmental Protection, the process of establishment of the Natura 2000 network in Poland is completed. During the last Biogeographic Seminar in Warsaw at the end of March 2011, however, the European Commission indicated the necessity of supplementation of the network for approx. a dozen species and habitats by establishing a relevant number of sites, and adjusting boundaries of the already existing ones. It also emphasised that the time of establishment of the areas is nearly completed. The time of their effective management is beginning (<http://www.gdos.gov.pl>, September 2011).

The Natura 2000 network currently occupies 19.8% of the terrestrial area of Poland. It includes 823 Sites of Community Importance (habitat protection areas – future Special Areas of Conservation) constituting 11% of the terrestrial area of

Poland, and 144 Special Protection Areas occupying 15.8% of the terrestrial area of Poland.



Map 1. Natura 2000 network in Poland

In the context of the network’s functioning, it is worth paying attention to its coherence. A coherent ecological network enables migration of individuals, and the functioning of populations of various species over extensive areas, making them healthier and more stable. It also provides exchange of genetic material and preservation of genetic diversity. The best tool ensuring coherence among environmentally valuable areas are ecological corridors. They can be protected in a variety of ways, and particularly by means of spatial planning, both at the local level and more extensively, at the scale of the entire voivodship, country, or even continent.

Ecological corridors are not well covered by provisions on environmental protection, either in the EU or Polish legislation. Art. 10 of the Habitats Directive encourages Member States to manage and protect “linear or continuous landscape elements important for the migration, expansion, and genetic exchange of wild species”. The act on environmental protection of 16 April 2004 includes a provision

describing an ecological corridor as “an area enabling migration of plants, animals, or fungi”. Lack of effective legal recognition of ecological corridors in provisions on spatial planning results in a number of problems in maintaining their passability, and in the functioning of the Natura 2000 network (Kozieł et al. 2010).

RULES OF THE ECONOMIC USE OF THE NATURA 2000 NETWORK SITES

The protection and economic use of Natura 2000 sites are implemented by means of several tools. These include plans of protection tasks developed for a period of 10 years, and protection plans for a period of 20 years. Currently, mainly plans of protection tasks are prepared. Another important tool is the procedure of environmental impact assessment (EIA) in the strategic context (drafts of policies, plans, programmes) and for specific planned undertakings. These tools are supported by the third one, constituting the provisions of the act of 13 April 2007 on counteracting environmental damage and its repair (Journal of Laws No. 75, item 493). The liability for the occurrence of a direct threat of environmental damage or the occurrence of such damage lies with the entity using the environment. The assessment of damage in the context of a protected species or habitat is conducted in accordance with the Regulation of the Minister of the Environment of 30 April 2008 on the criteria of assessment of the occurrence of environmental damage (Journal of Laws No. 82, item 501).

The participation of the society in the process of establishment and functioning of the Natura 2000 network is ensured by the act of 16 April 2004 on nature protection (Journal of Laws of 2004 No. 92, item 880 with amendments, hereinafter referred to as the act on nature protection) and the act of 3 October 2008 on the disclosure of information on the environment and its protection, participation of the society in environmental protection, and environmental impact assessments (Journal of Laws of 2008 No. 199, item 1227 with amendments, hereinafter referred to as the act on the disclosure of environmental information).

The draft of the list of Natura 2000 sites is prepared by the General Director for Environmental Protection. According to art. 27.2 of the act on nature protection, the draft requires consultation with the relevant commune councils.

It should be emphasised that the entity preparing the draft of the plan of protection tasks should enable the interested parties providing activity within the natural habitats and species habitats for the protection of which a Natura 2000 site was established to participate in works related to the preparation of such a draft (art. 28.3 of the act on environmental protection). Moreover, pursuant to art. 28.4 of the afore-mentioned act, the entity preparing a draft of the plan of protection tasks should ensure the possibility of the society’s participation based on the rules and in the course specified in the same act.

During the development of the draft of the protection plan, any interested parties providing activity within the natural habitats and species habitats for the protection of which a Natura 2000 site was established should be provided with the possibility of participation in works related to the development of such a draft (art. 29.5 of the act on nature protection). The development of a protection plan is preceded by proceedings with participation of the society based on rules specified in the act on nature protection (art. 29.6 of the act).

In general, environmental protection in the scope of the Natura 2000 network does not exclude the implementation of an economic investment in such areas. The implementation of the planned investments, as well as drafts of plans and programmes, should be confirmed not to have a significant negative impact on the Natura 2000 sites. The relevant procedure is the environmental impact assessment for undertakings, regulated by art. 59–120 of the act on nature protection.

According to the act on environmental protection, significant negative impact on a Natura 2000 site means impact on the objectives of the protection of such a Natura 2000 site, particularly including activities which could:

- a) lead to the deterioration of the state of natural habitats or habitats of plant or animal species for the protection of which a Natura 2000 site was established, or
- b) negatively affect the conditions for the protection of which a Natura 2000 site was established, or
- c) lead to the deterioration of the integrity of a Natura 2000 site or its connection to other areas.

Pursuant to art. 6 (3) of the Habitats Directive, the assessment of the environmental impact of an undertaking on a Natura 2000 site should also consider accumulated negative effects resulting from the common impact of the said undertaking with the existing and/or proposed plans or undertakings in a given area.

After conducting the assessment of the environmental impact of an undertaking on a Natura 2000 site, the regional director for environmental protection issues a decision on the arrangement of the conditions of the implementation of the undertaking in the scope of its impact on the Natura 2000 site. The conditions of the implementation of the undertaking can be arranged, if according to the environmental impact assessment for the Natura 2000 site:

- the undertaking will not significantly negatively affect the site;
- the undertaking can significantly negatively affect the site, and simultaneously premises mentioned in art. 34 of the act of 16 April 2004 on nature protection occur.

If according to the environmental impact assessment, the undertaking can significantly negatively affect the site, and if no premises mentioned in art. 34 of the act of 16 April 2004 on nature protection occur, the regional director for environmental protection refuses to arrange the conditions of the implementation of the undertaking.

Art. 34.1 of the act of 16 April 2004 on nature protection stipulates that relevant authorities can permit the implementation of a plan or activities which can significantly negatively affect the objectives of the protection of the Natura 2000 site, if:

- 1) the implementation is supported by necessary requirements of the superior public interest, including social or economic requirements, and
- 2) no alternative solutions exist, and
- 3) environmental compensation necessary for ensuring the coherence and accurate functioning of the Natura 2000 network is provided.

It should be emphasised that environmental compensation should be performed not later than at the moment of commencement of activities causing negative impact.

Should the significant negative impact concern habitats and priority species, the permission for the implementation of planned activities can be granted exclusively for the purpose of:

- 1) protection of human health and life;
- 2) ensuring common safety;
- 3) obtaining positive results of paramount importance for the natural environment;
- 4) for the purpose resulting from the necessary requirements of the superior public interest, after consultation with the European Commission.

In the context of assessment of the environmental impact of undertakings on Natura 2000 sites, special attention should be paid to planned activities which:

- are proposed to be implemented directly in Natura 2000 sites;
- can significantly affect Natura 2000 sites in spite of their location outside the areas' boundaries;
- can result in disturbance of the functional relationships of the area subject to the implementation of the undertaking with a Natura 2000 site;
- can have an accumulated impact as a result of the simultaneous implementation of other undertakings.

The procedure of environmental impact assessment (EIA) in the context of issuing building permits for undertakings which can significantly affect a Natura 2000 site is presented in Figure 1. Information on EIA in accordance with the requirements of the Habitats Directive can be found in European Commission documents (2000, 2001) translated into Polish. The latest guidelines concerning this issue are included in the publication by J. Engel (2009).

A number of examples of Natura 2000 sites exist, particularly in the field of tourism and recreation. The initiative of the Institute for Sustainable Development is worth attention. It developed an informative website “Natura 2000 and tourism” (<http://natura2000.org.pl>), successively collecting information and examples concerning the development of tourism within the Natura 2000 network in Poland. Also a publication was issued in the context (Kamieniecka, Wójcik 2010). Much

less information is available on forest management in the areas covered by the Natura 2000 network. The issue is presented more extensively further in this article.

The website of the European Commission includes examples of good practices in the scope of management of selected Natura 2000 sites (<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/gp/index.html>).

Within the last several years, a number of problems related to restrictions of rights of owners of real estate located within the areas of the Natura 2000 network appeared. The Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Poland submitted the letter of 12 September 2011 (Ref. No.: RPO-286012-IV/98/ZA) regarding those issues to the Minister of the Environment. These are generally restrictions on real estate management, frequently making it impossible to use it in accordance with the owner's intention. This reduces the market value of such real estate, and makes its sale in the free market or its encumbrance with tangible rights or obligations difficult. Based on the complaints received, the Human Rights Defender emphasised that demands for repurchase or compensation, stipulated in the act on nature protection of 16 April 2004, do not sufficiently protect the owners' rights, and cannot be recognised as effective means guaranteeing the observance of the constitutional rule of protection of property rights, stipulated in art. 21 of the Constitution. Moreover, they do not provide equal protection of all proprietary rights resulting from art. 64 par. 1 and 2 of the Constitution.

FOREST MANAGEMENT IN NATURA 2000 SITES

In our climatic zone, forests are the least transformed natural formations. They are of key importance for the functioning of the natural environment. They constitute a necessary factor of ecological balance the weakening of which threatens all modern species. It is estimated that approx. 65% of the biological resources of Poland are concentrated in forest ecosystems. On the other hand, forests are a general social good, influencing the quality of human life, and constituting a form of social land use providing biological production with a market value. Environmental protection and forest management have both partially common and contradictory interests. The multifunctional forestry model existing in Poland makes the distinction between "economic forests" and "protected forests" very vague. Therefore, it is necessary to reconcile the needs of forest economy with the needs of protection of unique species and natural habitats. This requires modifications of plans of forest management and detailed provisions in protection plans.

In our country, forest ecosystems constitute the most valuable and the most numerous represented component of the environment covered with protection in all the occurring forms. Forests occur in more than 37% of areas under legal protection (DGLP 2011). After conducting the general inventory of natural habitats and selected plant and animal species by the State Forests National Forest Hol-

ding, areas requiring protection in the form of Natura 2000 sites were established. They occupy approx. 20% of the area of the country, whereas more than half of them (53%) is located in forest areas with varied forms of ownership (Boltromiuk, Zagórski 2011). Natura 2000 sites occupy approx. 40% of the total forest area managed by the State Forests National Forest Holding. A major part of the area is a result of including large forest complexes in the boundaries of Special Protection Areas. The State Forests include 122 Special Protection Areas (SPA) occupying 2,063 k ha (29.2% of the area of the State Forests) and 662 Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) occupying 1,511 k ha (21.4%) (DGLP 2011).

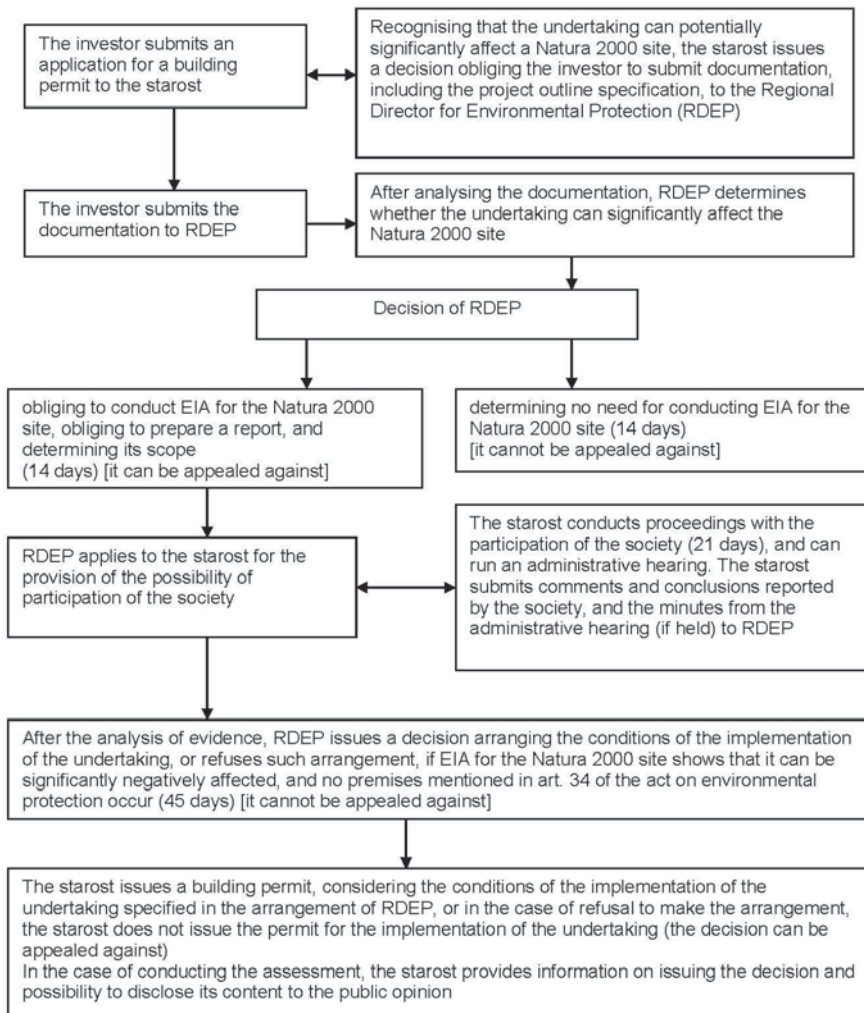


Fig. 1. Issuing of a building permit for undertakings that can significantly affect a Natura 2000 site (Florkiewicz, Kawicki 2009)

There is generally no significant discrepancy between the idea of the Natura 2000 network and the balanced multifunctional forest economy. It is necessary to reconcile forest management with the requirements of the Natura 2000 network (i.e. with the preservation of species and habitats in the relevant state of nature). Art. 33 of the act on natura protection specifies the activities banned in Natura 2000 sites, even if they result from the forest management plan. This leads to disputes between foresters and other groups of environmentalists. The scale of obligations towards foresters related to the protection of species and their habitats in the Natura 2000 network has been and still is problematic. One of the solutions is as follows: “The protection of natural habitats and species established in the Habitats and Birds Directives is the primary objective, and any type of activity allowing for meeting this objective is acceptable” (Rutkowski 2009). It largely changes the current requirements towards forestry, aiming at meeting the demand of the national economy for wood and its derivatives. Although within the last several years more and more attention has been paid to functions of forests other than production, and they are frequently set as a priority, it is difficult for forestry to escape the predominance of obtaining wood. Therefore, it is necessary to review the objectives of forest management, mainly by the State Forests, with special importance attributed to the implementation of the assumptions of Natura 2000.

Unfortunately, some activities undertaken in the scope of forest management still turn out to be harmful for species and habitats. Due to this, certain modifications are required, concerning the adjustment of among others:

- the species composition of tree stands to natural habitats;
- type of felling (e.g. elimination of clearcutting in marshy coniferous forests and riverside carrs);
- spatial-temporal distribution of cuttings (provision of a relevant number of old tree stands of key importance for biological diversity);
- exclusion of the representative part of tree stands from use, and leaving them for natural processes, e.g. reserve protection;
- ensuring relevant, from the point of view of biological diversity, mass of decomposing wood (Pawlaczyk 2008, Rutkowski 2009).

In the case of certain forest habitats and species, it is necessary to provide support in the form of active protection, e.g.: saving many marshy coniferous forests requires blocking of water outflow, and thermophilous oak forests require removal of the undergrowth and understory. Forests also contain valuable non-forest ecosystems for which active protection measures are necessary. The obligation of the state in such situations is to undertake the necessary protection. The State Forests National Forest Holding managing forests on behalf of the state is directly responsible for fulfilling those obligations.

The state of protection of a number of natural habitats and species in Polish forests is inaccurate or bad (Pawlaczyk 2008). Efforts for their protection are

needed. The occurrence of valuable natural habitats or species is quite frequent, but their state is not satisfactory. Some valuable and marginal habitats, such as e.g. marshy coniferous forests or birch forests, sycamore forests on steep slopes, orchid beech forests, or Baltic dune Scots pine woods, are not of high importance for the economy, but they are extremely valuable for nature. Such fragments of forests should be entirely excluded from economic use, and it is the case in modern forest management plans irrespective of Natura 2000. Forest economy in a number of forest habitats, e.g. beech forests, dry-ground forests, riverside carrs, and fir forests, is not at variance with the requirements of Natura 2000, if its provision does not exclude the accurate state of the natural forest habitat. The necessary condition is to ensure the preservation of all the elements of the “structure and function” of a given ecosystem. In order to maintain full biological diversity and natural forest habitats, places excluded from economic use need to be established, like e.g. the dry ground forests in the Białowiecki National Park left to natural processes.

A number of activities and decisions already currently taken by the State Forests aims at the preservation of Natura 2000 sites (Pawlaczyk 2008). They include among others the exclusion from economic use of marshy coniferous forests and beech forests, the driest lichen scots pine forests, and forests on steep slopes, as well as the execution of “small retention” measures in forests. An example is the construction in the years 2005–2007 in 11 forest divisions in Pomerania, in cooperation with the Environmentalists Club, of more than 700 small dams blocking drainage ditches. This permitted restoring the accurate state of protection of raised bogs and marshy coniferous forests. The Drygały Forest Division (SPA Poligon Orzysz) is implementing a project aimed at the improvement of the state of black grouse habitats by means of small retention and mowing of mating arenas, as well as the reconstruction of moors.

Activities at variance with Natura 2000 are still encountered. Examples of activities infringing the rules of Natura 2000 that should not take place include: the destruction of riverside carrs and moors due to faulty planning of “small retention” measures, the application of clearcutting, or the reconstruction of ditches in marshy coniferous forests. Investments in forests, e.g. the renovation and modernisation of a ditch, the construction or modernisation of a forest road or a small retention object, if they can affect a Natura 2000 site (and they frequently can), require the assessment of the environmental impact on a Natura 2000 site based on general rules. If the forest management plan can significantly affect a Natura 2000 site (e.g. it concerns forests in a Natura 2000 site), it is necessary to perform a strategic assessment of environmental impact in the scope.

SOCIAL ASPECTS OF THE FUNCTIONING OF THE NATURA 2000 NETWORK

One of the assumptions of the establishment of the Natura 2000 network is sustainable development, i.e. balancing socio-economic and environmental objectives. The implementation of the assumption must involve among others the participation of the society in the process of establishing and functioning of the Natura 2000 network, and particularly:

- 1) in the process of proposing new sites,
- 2) in the process of consultations regarding new sites before their formal approval,
- 3) in the process of development and execution of plans of protection tasks and protection plans for the sites.

An important element of balancing the afore-mentioned objectives is also the development of social support for the new form of environmental protection in our country, by both authorities managing the network and social organisations, particularly ecological ones. The support is necessary for the development and accurate functioning of the network. Unfortunately, current studies confirm the “negative approach of self-government authorities and majority of local communities to Natura 2000” (Bołtromiuk, Zagórski 2011). It is commonly believed that in Poland the establishment of protected areas only takes into account the environmental aspect with no consideration of socio-economic factors.

One of the conclusions of the report reads as follows: “The Natura 2000 network in Poland has the chance of proper functioning only if it combines the interests of all groups related to the established Natura 2000 sites in a holistic and integrated manner...”

Natura 2000 encouraged more intensive activity of ecological organisations in the country. The national associations: WWF Polska, the Environmentalists Club, the Polish Society for Nature Protection Salamandra, and the Polish Society for the Protection of Birds, together with local organisations, participated in the establishment of sites for the network, submitting their proposals for consecutive Shadow Lists. Part of the organisations also got engaged in educational campaigns aimed at the development of social support for new protected areas – Natura 2000 havens.

The balancing of socio-economic and environmental objectives in Natura 2000 sites must be supported by educational and promotional campaigns. Although studies reveal a low level of knowledge on the Natura 2000 network, resulting among others from insufficient popularisation of the knowledge (Bołtromiuk, Zagórski 2011), an increase in the number of actions and educational campaigns has been observed during the last several years at the national, regional, and local level. The campaigns and projects can be managed by the General Directorate

for Environmental Protection (GDEP), Regional Directorates for Environmental Protection (RDEP), or local social, mainly ecological organisations.

GDEP is currently implementing or intends to commence implementation of the following large projects directed at various social groups (http://www.gdos.gov.pl/ProjectCategories/viewNews/2/Projekty_krajowe):

- *Catch Balance, Discover Nature* – the objective is to increase the level of knowledge and ecological awareness, particularly in the scope of the Natura 2000 network among young people – among others at least 500 thousand students in Poland (2010–2012). The framework of the project includes among others the national campaign “*Natura 2000 – Feel It!*”;

- *Natura 2000 Network – the Way to Development* – the objective is to increase the level of knowledge of representatives of self-government units regarding the Natura 2000 network, and to prepare the basis of communication of local administration with the society in the scope of the 2000 network (2010–2011);

- *Nature and Economy – Basis for Dialogue* – the objective is to increase the level of knowledge and ecological awareness of entrepreneurs providing economic activity in 16 selected Natura 2000 sites in Poland (2011–2013);

- National Seminars for journalists – aimed at increasing the level of knowledge on the Natura 2000 network of protected areas and sustainable development among approx. 130 journalists (2010);

- National informational-promotional campaign *Know Your Nature* – the objective is to increase the awareness in the scope of the protection of the natural environment and biodiversity within the framework of the Natura 2000 Programme among local communities inhabiting such areas, and to strengthen the cooperation of representatives of various circles in favour of the Natura 2000 network (2012–2015).

Informational-educational campaigns are also run by other institutions, e.g. social organisations, self-governments, regional education authorities, individual schools, directorates of national parks, etc. Examples of such activities include:

- Project *Nature Leaders – national campaign promoting good practices of protection of Natura 2000 sites* – the “Green Action” Ecological Foundation, Foundation for Sustainable Development, Wrocław (www.zielonaakcja.pl, September 2011);

- Project *Guardians of Nature – monitoring of environmental infringements of the state of habitats and species* – Foundation for Sustainable Development, Wrocław (straznicy.natura2000.pl, September 2011);

- *Natura 2000 – a motor of sustainable development* – the Institute for Sustainable Development, Warsaw (www.ine-isd.org.pl, September 2011);

- *Natura pays off/back* – promotion of the European Ecological Network Natura 2000 in the Kotlina Oświęcimska Basin (www.nso.info.pl, September 2011).

Members of among others the Lublin Ornithological Society, National Society for the Protection of Birds – Zamość Group, and the Zamość Environmental Society actively participated in the establishment of Natura 2000 sites in the Lublin Region. Some organisations got engaged in educational campaigns aimed at the development of social support for the protected areas (among others the Society for Nature and Man, Society for the Protection of Birds, Lublin Ornithological Society, Zamość Environmental Society).

The largest organisation in Lublin, the Society for Nature and Man, implements projects in the scope of the development of social support and engagement in environmental protection in Natura 2000 sites in the Lublin Region in cooperation with the Management of Landscape Parks of Polesie, Management of Landscape Parks of the Lublin Upland, Regional Directorate for Environmental Protection, Delegation of the Lublin Voivodship Office in Biała Podlaska, Czemierniki Regional Society, Lublin Ornithological Society, and a number of commune offices from the area of the Lower Wieprz River and the Tyśmienica River Valley. In 2008, the Society commenced the implementation of the *Natura pays off/back* campaign. The project is directed at communities inhabiting Natura 2000 sites located in the catchments of the Wieprz and Bug Rivers. The project involves education of local communities regarding the environmental values of individual areas by means of classes at schools, teacher training, publications (folders, posters, meetings with the inhabitants, information boards), touristic promotion of the areas (posters, postcards, leaflets), promotion of good practices of sustainable development, seminars, and study visit. The objective of the project is to “propagate pro-ecological forms of management, inspiring commune authorities and inhabitants for the sustainable use of the region’s values, popularisation of information, promotion through placing information boards in Natura 2000 sites, publications, a website on the Natura 2000 network in the Lublin Region, etc.

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STRESZCZENIE

Ochrona przyrody i środowiska jest zadaniem na tyle złożonym, że opracowane wcześniej jej koncepcje się wyczerpują. Rodzi to potrzebę tworzenia nowych pomysłów. Najnowszą ideą jest europejski program Natura 2000, mający na celu utrzymanie dziedzictwa przyrodniczego Europy. Podstawę prawną programu stanowią dyrektywy unijne potocznie określane jako Dyrektywa Ptasia (z 1979 r.) oraz Dyrektywa Siedliskowa (opracowana w 1992 r.). Ochrona realizowana jest poprzez zachowanie określonych siedlisk i gatunków, które w stale przekształcanym środowisku uznane zostały za cenne i zagrożone w skali europejskiej oraz przez ochronę różnorodności biologicznej. Środkiem ku temu jest stworzenie systemu obszarów chronionych pod nazwą „sieć Natura 2000”, który obejmuje dwa typy obszarów: Obszary Specjalnej Ochrony Ptaków (OSO) i Specjalne Obszary Ochrony Siedlisk (SOO). O ich utworzeniu decydują wyłącznie kryteria przyrodnicze, uwarunkowania społeczno-ekonomiczne uwzględniane są później – na etapie tworzenia planów ochrony, choć zobowiązanie do zachowania walorów środowiskowych w stanie nie pogorszonym nie wyklucza gospodarczego wykorzystania.

W Polsce pierwsze prace nad wprowadzeniem programu Natura 2000 podjęto pod koniec lat 90. XX w.; podstawy prawne znalazły się w ogłoszonej 16 kwietnia 2004 r. ustawie o ochronie przyrody. Efektem dotychczas przeprowadzonych prac jest objęcie ochroną w sieci Natura 2000 19,8% powierzchni lądowej kraju. Składają się na to 823 SOO (11% powierzchni Polski) oraz 144 OSO (15,8%), częściowo nakładające się na siebie. Gwarantem poprawnego funkcjonowania sieci jest łączność między poszczególnymi obszarami poprzez korytarze ekologiczne.

Zasady gospodarczego wykorzystywania obszarów sieci Natura 2000 regulowane są przede wszystkim przez plany zadań ochronnych (opracowywane na okres 10 lat) oraz plany ochrony (w perspektywie 20 lat), a także oceny oddziaływania na środowisko w kontekście strategicznym (projekty polityk, planów i programów) dla planowanych konkretnych przedsięwzięć. Na wielu etapach powoływania i gospodarowania obszarami Natura 2000 zagwarantowany jest udział społeczeństwa.

Inwestycje o charakterze gospodarczym na terenach objętych siecią Natura 2000 są dopuszczalne, nie mogą jednakże znacząco negatywnie wpływać na środowisko, to jest pogorszyć stanu siedlisk przyrodniczych lub siedlisk gatunków roślin i zwierząt, albo wpłynąć negatywnie na gatunki, dla których ochrony został wyznaczony obszar Natura 2000 bądź też pogorszyć integralność obszaru lub jego powiązań z innymi obszarami (konieczność realizacji nadrzędnego interesu publicznego umożliwia, pod pewnymi warunkami, odstępianie od wymienionych kryteriów).

Najbardziej oczywistym sposobem gospodarczego wykorzystania obszarów Natura 2000 jest użytkowanie turystyczne i rekreacyjne. Wiele dobrych praktyk prowadzonych jest także przez Lasy Państwowe, co jest tym istotniejsze, że ponad połowa (53%) obszarów Natura 2000 w Polsce położona jest na obszarach leśnych (ok. 40% powierzchni leśnej zarządzanej przez Państwowe Gospodarstwo Leśne „Lasy Państwowe” objęte jest ochroną w sieci Natura 2000). Niestety, ciągle niektóre działania podejmowane w ramach gospodarki leśnej są szkodliwe dla gatunków i siedlisk. Wprowadzenie modyfikacji w gospodarowaniu lasem przez: dostosowanie składu gatunkowego drzewostanów do siedlisk przyrodniczych; zoptymalizowanie typu rębni i przestrzenno-czasowego rozkładu cięć; wyłączenie części drzewostanów z użytkowania i pozostawienie ich naturalnym procesom oraz

zapewnienie odpowiedniej z punktu widzenia różnorodności biologicznej masy rozkładającego się drewna pozwoli na pogodzenie interesów środowiska i społeczeństwa oraz gospodarki.

Innym sposobem równoważenia celów społeczno-gospodarczych i przyrodniczych jest włączenie społeczeństwa w proces wyznaczania i funkcjonowania obszarów Natura 2000 na etapie proponowania nowych obszarów, konsultacji obszarów przed ich formalnym zatwierdzeniem, wreszcie w proces opracowywania i realizacji planów ochrony. W Polsce realizuje się ponadto wiele projektów mających na celu zwiększenie świadomości ekologicznej społeczeństwa i aprobaty dla obejmowania ochroną kolejnych obszarów.

Wzrost akceptacji społeczeństwa dla tworzenia sieci Natura 2000 związany jest w dużej mierze z gospodarczym wykorzystaniem obszarów będących składnikami tej sieci. Optymalne wydaje się realizowanie na terenach chronionych celów z zakresu turystyki i rekreacji, leśnictwa oraz rolnictwa.

Słowa kluczowe: obszary Natura 2000, ochrona przyrody, oceny oddziaływania na środowisko, gospodarka leśna, organizacje ekologiczne, udział społeczeństwa