Report of the Natura 2000 Management and Agri-Environmental Scheme and Natura 2000 Payments Workshops

3-5 October 2012, Dworek Gorce, Kamienica, Poland

The issues regarding management of Natura 2000 sites as well as the Agri-Environmental Schemes are high on the agenda due to the recent processes of biogeographic seminars, renewal of the CAP, the Prioritized Action Frameworks and the EC guidance documents. To show the update of these processes to our members active in the field of Natura 2000 and to share practical management experiences among CEE NGOs, CEEweb for Biodiversity and Naturalists Club Poland organized two workshops in Dworek Gorce, Poland on 3-6 October 2012. At the workshops, more than 25 participants (see Annex 1) from CEE NGOs and state agencies took part and provided valuable input.

The Natura 2000 management workshop aimed to introduce the recent updates in terms of SAC designation, wilderness and the biogeographical process, and provide in-depth knowledge and experience exchange opportunities about Natura 2000 management progress and some specific issues (large carnivores, bird requirements) at national and regional levels in CEE countries. The workshop also demonstrated the outcomes of the Polish pilot project on NGO involvement in Natura 2000 planning process and called for CEE NGO input in various issues.

Providing updates on recent EU policy developments

European Commission’s note on SAC designation and conservation objectives – Pawel Pawlaczyk, Naturalists Club Poland

The European Commission compiled a note on the designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), which purpose is to assist Member States (MSs) in fulfilling the duty of designating SACs under the Habitats Directive. SAC is a key measure in the implementation of the Habitats Directive, a legal act and has therefore a binding force implying the identification and application of necessary conservation measures for the site. SAC designation must be achieved in no longer than 6 years after adoption of SCIs, however in some MSs it is increasingly overdue.

MSs are responsible for providing SAC boundaries, purpose of designation and legal safeguards and are obliged to apply conservation measures – where management plans are strongly recommended. The ultimate conservation objective of the Habitats Directive (HD) is to ensure that the species and habitat types covered achieve favourable conservation status, which should be achieved by sufficient measures that are specific, clear and precise; this objective can be considered only at an appropriate level, such as national or biogeographical.

Conservation objectives are a set of specified targets to be met at the site level underlined by Article 4.4 and 6.1 of the HD with the ultimate aim to meet Favourable Conservation Status (FCS). Conservation objectives should be considered at an appropriate level at site level with specific conservation targets. MSs should identify the contribution of a site to the achievement of a FCS for the habitats and species concerned at the national biogeographical level providing the basis for setting of site level conservation objectives. MSs should also establish priorities in the light of the importance of the respective site for the maintenance or restoration at a favourable conservation status at the national biogeographical level of the habitat types and species, and in the light of the threats of degradation or destruction to which the site is exposed. Based on these, conservation objectives and conservation measures – the actual
mechanisms – should be set essentially at local level (but can be designed at regional/national levels also including non-Natura 2000 sites). Conservation measures should be established for all species and habitat types of the HD and Birds Directive (BD), which are significantly present at the site (category A, B, C according to the Standard Data Form). The Habitats Directive does not set a date for the attainment of favourable conservation status at the national level, nevertheless conservation measures need to include a credible timeline. There are several issues to consider when setting conservation objectives and priorities, including definition of the site contribution to reach FCS, the identification of dynamic nature of sites and of species and habitats, continuity and flexibility of measures in case of changes (e.g. newly arriving species) and monitoring issues. The take home message is however that apart from the legally binding Natura 2000 obligation, planned management also has clear legal bases.

Wilderness and Natura 2000 – how to use it in management planning – CEE experiences and needs – Ildikő Arany, CEEweb for Biodiversity

A wilderness is an area governed by natural processes, it is composed of native habitats and species and it is large enough for the ecological functioning of natural processes and the shaping of natural structures. It is untouched, and appears to be primarily affected by the forces of nature. It is undeveloped without settlements, roads or visual disturbance (EC Guidelines for the management of wilderness and wild areas in Natura 2000). At least 4% of Natura 2000 areas fall into IUCN 1a and 1b categories, which can be considered as wilderness areas. Wilderness and wild areas are not mentioned in the EU Birds and Habitats Directives, although the approach is compatible. Wilderness approach is applied in twelve EU Member States in their protected areas (as of IUCN 1a and 1b categories). The provisions for protection differ between the Member States, ranging from a total exclusion of all human presence, to scientific research, educational reasons, or hiking and subsistence use of indigenous people. However, the management of wilderness does not necessarily mean non-interaction. Management actions should consider spatial planning of surrounding areas, local residents and visitors, restoration targets. Besides, management measures should also take into account connectivity, zonation, non-intervention management after natural disturbances, re-introduction and eradication of species, minimalizing illegal and unwanted human intervention and forest fire prevention through native composition of species. The vital factors to be considered during preparation of management plan should be size and connectivity of the area, zonation, need for restoration, existence of natural processes, potential conflicts with other stakeholders, invasive species, climate change and access to site. Good communication and stakeholder cooperation play an important role when setting up and implementing management plans. There are however other challenges, which are especially typical for wilderness areas, such as forest fires or the bark beetle dilemma, which is especially important for the CEE. In Central and Eastern Europe, wilderness areas include for instance Sumava National Park (Czech Republic), Bialowieza National Park (Poland) and Central Balkan National Park (Bulgaria).

CALL FOR NGO ACTIONS
- Lobby for the UN international year of wilderness 2015 or 2016
- Collect best practice examples for the guidance document, both for wilderness management and restoration
- Collect threats and potential responds to them
The biogeographical process – Ildikó Arany, CEEweb for Biodiversity

The purpose of the biogeographical process is to assess whether the actual management of sites enables favourable conservation status, to enable expertise and experience exchange and to strengthen trans-boundary cooperation. The process starts with the pre-scoping phase to define species and habitat types to be considered, and continues with the scoping phase to combine a knowledge base on conservation status, threats, management and to provide recommendations mostly in the workshop (background) document. The following preparatory workshop focuses on particular groups of habitats (e.g. forests, wetlands, etc.) with the outcome in a draft seminar document, which discusses common problems, gaps, good practice and cooperation possibilities. The final Natura 2000 seminar compiles the outcomes of the process and results in tools, recommendations and concrete actions which can influence PAFs and future funding. The goal of the NGOs is to reach an agreement in identifying the most striking common management problems and to recommend clear tools and concrete actions to solve these problems. The main objective is to ensure that conservation objectives and favourable reference values are defined.

During the boreal biogeographical process, there was a great clarity among MSs on the main management challenges and priorities. Here, the main priority of discussing the crucial problems was achieved as well as the collection of good examples. On the other hand, the outcomes are often too general for providing good input to further policies. Additionally the seminar did not discuss biogeo level conservation objectives, species management and adaptation to climate change. Most of the commitments of the MSs are in relation to experience exchange rather than concrete actions.

The Alpine process had its 1st Steering Committee meeting on 3 June and the second on 4 October, 2012. Within this process the draft pre-scoping document is ready and NGOs can provide various inputs in terms of habitats and cross-cutting issues.

CALL FOR NGO ACTIONS
- Collect further best practice examples
- Fill out habitats sheets
- Think of potential experts
- Identify further cross-cutting issues

Progress and state of play of Natura 2000 management at national and regional levels

Natura 2000 site management planning in Poland – “Plans of conservation measures” NGO involvement in the process - Pawel Pawlaczyk, Naturalists Club Poland

Three approaches are at present for planning process in Poland: more detailed protection plans, simplified ‘plan of conservation measures’ and integration of the first 2 in the already
existing planning schemes (e.g. protected areas, forest management plans, etc.). There is a 6-year obligation for the plans and they are established as binding local legal act by the conservation authority. ‘Conservation measures plans’ for 400 Natura 2000 sites started in 2010 financed largely by EFRD with approximately 6 million EUR to be implemented by regional authorities. During the establishment of the measures plans, a participatory approach was applied with mandatory participation of stakeholders at each site.

There is a planning logframe, where conservation targets should be identified, conservation status should be assessed, conservation objectives, as well as the actions how to achieve them, should be planned and monitoring should be considered. Within the logframe, the local conservation status for each species and habitats should be assessed at site level, and the site level favourable conservation status for all species and habitats should be set as the conservation objective.

As the result of the participatory approach, NGOs had a good opportunity to actively participate in the process – Naturalists Club Poland participated in the preparation of 85 management plans. Within the plans, it is important to accent the EU obligations (Art. 6.1 and 6.2, precautionary principle, time expectations, etc.) and the local opportunities (benefits and possibilities such as ecotourism).

The target for Natura 2000 is to achieve favourable conservation status at a biogeographical level, while the site conservation objective is to achieve a feasible favourable conservation status for all protected features on the site. Deciding how ambitious the favourable status should be is the most important conservation dispute in Poland (especially in forest indicators such as deadwood volume or the “typical species” concept). It is important however to include and accept natural ecosystem dynamics within Local Favourable Conservation Status. Further details regarding the Polish pilot project in NGO participation in management planning can be found in the brochure of How to care for the Natura 2000 site during the conservation planning?

Practical problems of planning in the ‘lack of information’ – Pawel Pawlaczyk, Naturalists Club Poland

A basic problem at Natura 2000 sites is the assessment of protected features – what should be assessed as protected (A, B, C of the SDF) and what should be assessed as “D” – excluded from protection in the site? According to EC interpretation, “D” represents “rare guests” in terms of species. Regarding habitats, “D” signifies the representativity, not the quantity. Protected features are especially vague for birds and there are significant differences of approaches at national levels. Thus, the main problem is implementing effective planning with insufficient scientific data, which cannot guarantee that habitat deteriorations and significant species disturbances are avoided. Here, the precautionary principle should be used and some conservation measures should be applied for potential localities of species and habitats. Finally, there might be cases when site boundaries need to be changed and this should be taken into consideration at all times. In order to provide the best solutions for such difficulties, a thorough survey is inevitable if we are to achieve adequate conservation measures.

Experiences from Natura 2000 sites management planning in Poland – Wojciech Lewandowski, URS Poland

In Poland, every Natura 2000 site must have its “plan of conservation measures”. The Regional Directorate in Environmental Protection commissions contractors for conservation plans for the sites – URS is working on 15 Natura 2000 sites.
Management plans preparation and related problems are showed through two examples. At Czarne Urwisko kolo Lutyni a small site is designated. Here, the main problems include close proximity of housing, road and ski resort construction, changes in agriculture practices and negative public attitude to Natura 2000. In order to solve the raising difficulties, trade-offs are somewhat necessary due to various stakeholders’ needs. For instance, conservation measures are only set on unused meadows and avoid high cost activities on degraded meadows. Instead of applying these measures, it was agreed to enlarge the site to include well preserved meadows. In addition, it was suggested that development plans should exclude housing and privatization of forests.

At Zbiornik Nyski and Zbiornik Otmuchowski, two Special Protection Areas for birds are located in reservoirs. Here, there are many interest groups using the area including fishermen, water sport users, birdwatchers, hunters, water authorities, mining sector, etc. The solution for the adequate site management included that certain parts of the reservoirs are closed for anglers and visitors, hunters cannot hunt in the reservoirs, a common approach with water management and flood works bodies were worked out to improve also food base of the reservoirs, and mining companies were involved to create new shallow waters through their activities.

As a general feedback, there are a lack of knowledge about the sites and often mistakes in the SDFs. Furthermore, there is sometimes an unrealistic rationale about what really can be achieved. It is best to remodel the existing activity in the site and avoid high-cost and time-consuming solutions with high level of inclusion of all stakeholders.

**Progress in Natura 2000 in Bulgaria** – Stefan Avramov, Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation

Ministry of Environment and Waters (MOEW) and its regional branches are responsible for Natura 2000, with a special department within the ministry, however with no management bodies on site level. Natura 2000 requirements are enforced through the Bulgarian Biodiversity Act. MOEW entrusted NGOs to prepare an initial list of sites, on which there was no public debate. MOEW was late with the overall process and there was no time and capacity to modify the final proposal. While first list proposed to the EU covered only 11.3% (SPA) respectively 13.4% (SCI) of Bulgaria, after pressure from civil society the proposal for Natura 2000 coverage reached 33.89% of Bulgaria’s area. During the designation process, the Ministry rejected or reduced the surface of some SPAs, but due to complaints from BirdLife Bulgaria, the EU started an infringement procedure. The biogeographical seminar also concluded that there is a need for additional sites, which resulted the total coverage of SPA and SCI to reach 34.3% of Bulgaria.

Even though a very significant area of the country is designated, there is a lack of effective management practice. There is no management body responsible, there is limited political will to prepare the management plans and also bureaucratic difficulties to utilize funding. Also, limited adequate application of EIAs (e.g. no independent expertise) exists. On the other hand, there is a modest progress: guidelines on forest habitat management are prepared as well as FCD guidelines – although not officially enforced. Besides, a few capacity building projects took place for state authorities about implementing Natura 2000, and a large project on habitat mapping is being implemented. National information strategy for Natura 2000 is under preparation, as well. River basin management plans and Bulgarian renewable energy plans consider SPAs at a significant level. Recently there are 6 management plans being prepared by 2013. However, there is a clear need for better cooperation between governments and NGOs and the preparation of management plans at Natura 2000 sites.
Natura 2000 in the Czech Republic, a case study on Sumava National Park – Tamara Faberova, Hnutí DUHA – Friends of the Earth Czech Republic

Over 1082 Natura 2000 sites were designated in the Czech Republic after a successful designation process in 2001-2003, although the quality of practical conservation varies. There are two categories of Natura 2000 sites: SPAs have management plans, other sites have a so-called sum of recommended measures, which are basic management plans. Theoretically, NGOs can have the opportunity to get actively involved in the Natura 2000 process (designation, management plan preparation and implementation), but in reality there are considerable limits to this.

Sumava National Park is the largest wilderness area in Central Europe and a UNESCO Biosphere reserve, with an IUCN category II but despite this, aggressive logging (against rules of Natura 2000) and new planned constructions for tourism are taking place. In 70% of the area, anthropogenic activity is being implemented, particularly tourism investments and logging because of bark beetle invasion. However, the experience showed that tree logging opens up new forest stands, which enable windfalls and bark beetle to attack the areas again. In 2011, people who protested against logging also asked for non-intervention management to be expanded to 50% of the national park. The protest blocked the logging activity, an action for which some activists were arrested. This was followed by demonstrations in front of the Ministry of Environment, petitions and celebrity involvement. Due to its Natura 2000 status, the part attracted the attention of the European Commission, who wrote to the Czech Prime Minister to halt large scale logging in the Natural Park. Nevertheless, this took a long time – over a year. One of the lessons learnt is that a lot of time is needed to enforce protection.

Natura 2000 forests in Hungary – Laszlo Galhidy, WWF Hungary

In Hungary, there are altogether more than 800.000 hectare Natura 2000 forest areas, which in 50% also protected by the national law. Currently, 200 management plans for Natura 2000 areas are being implemented also covering forest areas. In general, there are very generic conservation targets with the need for more scientific data. Forest management principles are inconsistent and there is an incoherency with management need and national law. For instance, national regulation describes that deadwood cannot reach more than 5% or residual stand cannot exceed 10%, therefore the management plan of the site cannot prescribe higher values. Agri-environmental issues in management plans can best managed if the land is purchased by the National Park. The purpose would be to increase the area of close-to-nature managed/non-managed forests from 110.000 ha to 200.000 and the natural state owned forest from 350.000 to 700.000 with special Natura 2000 purpose.

Natura 2000 sites in Hungary – Balazs Meszaros, Nimfea Association

21% of the total surface of Hungary is designated as Natura 2000, of which 39% is protected by national legislation. In the management process, there are problems in communication between stakeholders and with the limited capacity for data collection, which could be illustrated by the example that for 7-900 km² of Natura 2000, there is only one ranger. The current objective is to diminish threats and re-establish earlier methods of use for this land. Site conservation targets focus either on habitats or species - management should be rather holistic and concentrate on the whole ecosystem and not on specific species. Also, the EU economic policies are sometimes in conflict with Natura 2000 policies, such as it is the case of the M8 Highway and of the Audi factory built on a Natura 2000 site.
SCIs, SPAs and management planning in the Slovak Republic – Jan Cernecky, State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic

381 SCIs cover 11.7% of Slovakia, most of them already overlap with existing national network of protected areas. Additional 97 sites on 0.2% of Slovakia proposed in 2011. Negotiations with the owners have mostly been successful, with only less than 3% of landowners disagreeing. There are 9 management plans already prepared and approved – this is less than 1% of protected areas (PA). The process of proposing additional SCIs is still ongoing and the final proposal is expected by the end of 2013.

Analysis shows that ¾ of the MSs are using different, separate measures for SCIs and SPAs and are at a different stage of progress in all MSs. Significant achievement regarding finalization of management plans are only expected by 2020/2025 at the analysed MSs. Support of national legislation for management planning is essential and the management plans have to be comprehensive and have a similar structure. The specific analysis also demonstrates that a change from the traditional approach towards a more market-based approach is needed. Improved IT tools can also assist the preparation and implementation of management measures (see more info about the management plans’ analysis on various MSs in the master thesis dedicated to best practice guidelines for management planning in Natura 2000 on http://mpa.e-c-o.at/master-theses.html and practical example of IT tool for the management measures on http://maps.sopsr.sk/mapy/map_jc.html)

Gorce Mountain National Park and Babia Góra management plan experience – Jan Loch, Pracownia Naukowo-Edukacyjna GPN

In the presentation, the management planning of the Natura 2000 sites for birds was introduced. As the preparatory work for environmental planning for filling the gaps of existing knowledge will be conducted outside the Natura 2000 boundaries, the preparation of the management plan was contracted to the consultancy in Krakow. Meetings were organized with the relevant stakeholders and a team was set up for local cooperation for preparing management plans – here, NGOs also had the option to participate. The distribution map of species and territories were created with strict protection zones and conservation zones.

Within the national park, three main ecological groups of birds are existent. The alpine zone is national park managed, and a small part owned by a private community. The potential habitats of species were calculated based on occurrence and the conservation measures were defined according to biotopes and calculated borders of the features. Certain categories were created according to management zones and according to ownerships. During the planning process everything was built on these categories.

One problem during the management plan preparation was the potential habitats overlap as different parts required different protection regime because there are species, which are not related only one zone but have wide-spread distribution. Therefore, an analysis of present zonation was made in terms of the distribution of species, where the structure of the management regimes, which are presently applied, were established. Within the analysis the key areas for particular species were identified and based on this for each species a set of indicators were prepared. An additional problem raised in terms of the stakeholders – one site was about to be excluded from Natura 2000 sites as not relevant requested by private owners. Furthermore, the national park wants to have income of the woods, which may result in the transformation of spruce. This may be in conflict with birds’ needs as for instance woodpeckers and owls use the holes of the trees. Here, a proposition was made for zonation requirements and a consensus was created not to limit private owners’ interest. The result of the
negotiations, although difficult, yielded with numerous non-intervention zones, which are extremely beneficial for birds.

**Needs of large carnivores in Carpathian’s Natura 2000 sites management plans** – Monika Kotulak, Naturalists Club Poland

Wolves, brown bear and lynx are present in a significant number in the Carpathians and in southern Poland. Here, they face severe problems in their habitats, which are mainly driven by fragmentation through roads, buildings, households, ski-slopes or deforestation. To improve their habitats, connectivity between sites should be increased by passages over large roads, reduction of forest roads, improved ecological corridors and afforestation. Bears need at least 4km² of undisturbed habitat located at minimum 500m far from any roads/paths. For instance, only 103 km² out of 20,000 km² of the Polish Carpathians are favourable for bears. Other problems are related to the structure of the habitat, such as monocultures, dead wood or disturbances during forest works, which should be aided with heterogenization of forest understory with rock cavities, uprooted trees, deadwood, etc. as well as with the protection of wild berry areas. Additional problems are present in the forms of poaching, farming and hunting, which have negative impact on the population of large carnivores. Food availability is yet another concern, with hunting and berry picking as phenomena that affect the capacity of large carnivores to feed themselves and reproduce. For instance, a wolf needs 8.5 red dear and 49 roe deer per year, while a lynx eats 2 red dears and 58 roe dears per year. A further problem in effective conservation is the lack of transboundary cooperation. Introducing strict penalties for poaching and effective management plans for hunting as well as areal restrictions for berry picking and designation of ‘safe sites’ with transboundary cooperation could help improve large carnivores’ habitats.

**Birds requirements for Natura 2000 site management plans in the Carpathians** – Tomasz Wilk, Polish Society for the Protection of Birds

Conservation planning for birds in Natura 2000 sites seem to be straightforward, however there are many questions to consider. The difficulties occur with some fundamental questions, such as what to protect, what should be the outcome of the protection, where are the to be protected species, what are their exact habitat requirements and whether conservation measures are in fact appropriate. The major problems are lack of information (lack of standardized data collection), setting up favourable reference values, conflicting conservation objectives (temporal demands, spatial demands, predator vs. prey), in-depth knowledge on species habitat requirements, landscape-level conservation and active protection. Lack of knowledge on species distribution can be solved by sampling and usage of existing databases – with more data required for rare species. Based on these data, a population size estimation and modelling of species distribution can be created. In the case of white-backed woodpecker in Polish Carpathians, a proper fieldwork, forestry databases and some data analysis provided a good base for the potential habitats for the species, which resulted in implementing conservation measures and detailed inventories. In terms of FCS additional questions arise: what is the time scale and how to define Favourable Reference Values? These issues are particularly difficult to set for widespread species and for dynamic ecosystems. Also, experience shows that it is not feasible to set up FCS at a site for the whole bird assemblage – prioritization of species is inevitable. Furthermore, one conservation measure for one species may not be adequate for the other as there are different temporal and spatial needs. An example of this is the case of corncrake and lesser spotted eagle in the Beskid Niski mountains, where the two species require different time of mowing periods. Habitat requirements knowledge should also be improved. In the case of rare woodpeckers, we know that dead trees
are essentials, however not only quantity, but quality matters as well (deadwood’ age, size, composition, etc.).

To overcome the above mentioned difficulties, there is a need for a long-term holistic approach to conservation and planning at a landscape level as well as the application of ecosystem management approach. The planning process should also involve experts from the very beginning and be based on scientific ideas.

The Agri-Environmental Scheme and Natura 2000 payments workshop had the objective to provide update on national implementation of the schemes and the payments and to compile CEE NGO recommendations for the future CAP.

**Future Agri-environmental schemes, Natura 2000 payments and current state of play – Polish approach** – Marek Jobda, Polish Society for the Protection of Birds

For 2004-2006, the Agri-environmental Schemes (AES) in Poland had seven main packages: sustainable farming, organic farming, water and soil protection, buffer zones, maintenance of extensive meadows, maintenance of extensive pastures and protection of local farm animal breeds. The main constraints of the implementations included insufficient information and number of advisors, several disadvantages related to poor payment, discrepancy, bureaucracy and not covered important natural habitats. For instance, within the extensive management on meadows and pastures package, the payment for one hectare was 500 PLN and needed no evidence for valuable habitats or species.

While the 2007-2013 AES brought improvements in terms of payment and information, constraints related to low flexibility of schemes and a very low uptake of AES by small farmers still remained. Within this scheme, the farmers had the choice to be qualified for three different variants (e.g. variant 1 - protection of bird breeding habitats, variant 2 - tall sedge swamps, etc.). Altogether in Poland, the grassland schemes implementation was realized in approximately 250,000 hectare, among which the bird package was the most widely used.

There is a need for more regional flexibility, a stronger link of AES with natural constraints and nature value of the farm, a payment level to correspond to regional differences in farming activities, more regional approach and a simplification of the application procedure. The strength of the current Polish scheme is the good advisory and expert group. In order to have a better-tailored AES scheme, the future AES on one hand needs to be more simple to be implemented, but also more complicated to match specific conservation needs. According to the Polish Ministry of Agriculture, the future AES will allow more regional flexibility, will be simplified and more package oriented, apply the present procedures and focus on areas of specific natural constraints. Poland wants to continue with the Natura 2000 payments after 2013 with few levels of compensation.

**Forest-Environmental Schemes – a forgotten opportunity?** – Pawel Pawlaczyk, Naturalists Club Poland

According to the European Rural Development Programme, within the frame of the forest-environmental and climate services and forest conservation’s article, forest owners can be entitled to a certain amount if they carry out certain forest-environment commitments on a voluntary base under the condition of forest management plan or equivalent instrument. Payments shall cover those commitments undertaken for 5-7 years (or longer), which are not mandatorily prescribed by the national forestry act. Payments shall compensate beneficiaries
for all additional costs and even for transaction costs up to 20%. There is also a similar mechanism in the Natura 2000 and Water Framework Directive related article in relation to forest and forest owners. Based on the above, a Polish proposal was worked out in 2005, but finally not introduced. However, in the light of the new budget 2014-2020, maybe the mechanism can be re-introduced under the following commitments.

In case of natural regeneration in Natura 2000 forest habitats, where stand cutting in forest management plan (FMP) is accepted, payments would be paid if 70% of stand area with natural regeneration is at present and on 20% of stand area, planting is allowed. Payment would be for 20 years. Another commitment would be connected to retention tree groups. If stand cutting is accepted in the FMP, 5% of clear cutting should be left for retention tree groups. Also, a minimum cutting age should be established. Regarding deadwood, payment would be proportional to the number of trees exceeding 20 cm diameter with the maximum limit of 20 trees/ha. Additional payment can be issued for standing dead trees. In the forest edge habitats, buffer zones can be created with shrub belts. Artificial stands transformation can be a further payment option, if deciduous trees are planted under coniferous stands and the natural understory may be included with 30%.

Such a scheme would be important to apply in the light of the Natura 2000 management plans, as well, therefore, its consideration may be necessary in the review of the CAP.

**Implementation of Measure 214 ‘Agro-ecological payments’ in Bulgaria** – Vladimir Milushev, *Future Now*

Agro-ecological payments offer financial support for environment-friendly agricultural practices. 82% of the agro-ecological payments are derived from the EU and 18% is covered from the state budget. Obligations under the scheme is voluntary and must be taken for 5 years by farmers, who need to fill out an application to the Ministry of Agriculture and Foods every year and take part in agro-eco education programmes or provide proof of experience. Applications rose from 1464 in 2008 to 1972 in 2011 and 2630 in 2012. The most popular among the submeasures is the recovery and maintenance of grass areas with High Conservation Value.

However, there are several issues with the AESs, including technical problems (such as software with the database) or a late start in the check of submitted applications which meant no time for correcting mistakes, although there have been reports of usage of wrong submeasure codes in the applications and several other significant irregularities.

**Agro-environmental schemes in the Czech Republic** - Tamara Faberová, *Hnutí DUHA – Friends of the Earth Czech Republic*

Agricultural landscape covers approximately 30% of the Czech Republic’s area, where 43% of the land is endangered with the risk of erosion. Besides, a significant decrease in biodiversity can be detected, partly due to high percentage of arable land and disappearance of hedgerows, individual trees, animal and tree species. Natura 2000 sites cover 13.5% of the country covering 67% of forest and 25.6% of agricultural land on 2900 km².

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, AES payments can be entitled to landscape friendly agriculture. AES Payments vary between 80-849 EUR/ha. Natura 2000 areas must have at least 1ha and are only for grasslands. Natura 2000 payment is 112 EUR/ha. In total over 1 billion CZK (40.000 EUR) was issued for more sustainable agriculture in 2011. AES sources were almost fully used and now only limited number of applications under the measure “creating new grasslands from arable land” are accepted. Also, it is difficult to prolong current
AES contracts, and the monitoring level of AES impacts at country level is in an initial phase. The presented case studies also underline these problems: in certain cases, there is no real information on the actual quality of development, which calls for better indicator system. Furthermore, Natura 2000 implementation process is demanding for all stakeholders, which indicates the need for better preparation and social capital development. In other cases, it is clear that there is a lack of knowledge about Natura 2000 among farmers and municipalities. In the National Agricultural Strategy, a key document defining also biodiversity and landscape protection goals that should be achieved by the Czech agricultural policy, the proposed goals are too general and hard to measure – indicators are not clearly set. Also, AES results may not be straightforward and AES distribution is based on only eligibility to apply for subsidies, not on tenders that would be focused on achieving biodiversity protection targets.

Agri-environmental subsidies and forest-environmental payments in Hungary - Zsofia Fabian, Nimfea Association and Gabor Fígeczky and Laszlo Galhidy, WWF Hungary

In general, AES are only applicable for certain sites and are independent from the status of the site. Additionally, a problem with AES is that they are not solely for nature protection but they come as a complementary subsidy. For receiving Natura 2000 payments for grasslands, there are numerous instructions (e.g. no heavy machinery, no unnatural fertilizers, mowing under strict conditions, etc.) to be fulfilled by the farmers.

For Natura 2000, it would be useful to have differentiated payment, maximize the size of plots, press for more eco-activities that would restore ecological corridor functions and provide subsidy for the rare or local species (e.g. wheat, barley, sunflower, etc.).

Forest-environmental measures have a late and poor implementation in Hungary. There is very limited information available and there is lack of knowledge among forest owners due to the poor communications. So far this resulted in that, 50% of the amount was taken out and was allocated to other measures. In terms of Natura 2000 forest payments, there are elevated stakeholder meetings on how to elaborate the scheme in Natura 2000 payments. Farmers and forest owners want to have a simple system, whereas NGOs lobby for a more complex one including measures on native and non-native forest types.

Fieldtrips during the workshops

During the two workshops the participants also had the opportunity to see how Natura 2000 management and CAP implementations take place in practice. After presentations on local experience, fieldtrips with local experts and guides were organized to the Gorce National Park and Orawa-Nowy Targ bogs. In Gorce National Park, the participants could learn about active vs. non-active management options in forest ecosystems, the bark beetle outbreaks in spruce forests and their potential solutions, mountain meadows conservation problems and measures, amphibian conservation and the conservation problems of the Kamienica river. During the fieldtrip to the bogs, active conservation of the raised bog as well as river management and river habitat conservation of the Bialka river were presented. Besides, ecological connectivity of Natura 2000 through the example of the Pieniny Gorce corridor was demonstrated.

Peatland area Orawsko-Nowotarskie is a complex of valuable natural habitats, which include raised, transitional and low bogs, from which the area takes its name, and bog woodland, riparian forests, huge stone, wet and fresh and Nardus grasslands. Although the same bog stands out particularly poor species composition, its uniqueness, as well as a mosaic of all habitats of the region make the local flora and fauna significantly enrich the biodiversity of the
Polish Carpathians.
The Natura 2000 "Valley Bialka" includes typical Carpathian river valley, the bed and a narrow strip of floodplain. Fast current of water, the sudden and abundant water flooding, especially in the first half of the year, causing permanent restoration of habitats.

Gorce National Park was established in 1981. It includes the central and north-east parts of the Gorce Range. The total coverage of the national park is 7,030 hectares and roughly a half of this area is under a strict nature conservation regime. The national park protects not only the Gorce Range’s nature but also a rich cultural heritage. The Carpathian forest is the most important treasure of the park. Lower elevations are covered with mixed forest called the Carpathian Beech Forest. It is only slightly affected by human activities in the past. The highest areas are occupied by sub-alpine spruce forests. The forest dynamics is mostly of natural character.
Outcomes of the workshop

NGOs and CEEweb role in management planning

After sharing the outcomes of the Polish pilot study, the participants got into smaller groups to discuss what role national level NGOs and CEEweb at the regional level can have in terms of Natura 2000 management. Each group reported back after the small group discussions with the below outcomes:

What should NGOs focus on?

- Ensure proper management measures in the management plans
- Compile inventories of species and habitats and assessment of threats
- Create a set of conservation measures
- Elaborate monitoring plans
- Be directly involved in the planning and also act as mediators
- Provide ecological education, raise public awareness
- Lobby for sufficient funding mostly at national level
- Be catalysts for political decision-making process
- Provide support for national authorities and initiate stakeholder co-operations

What should CEEweb focus on?

- Compare measures and experiences of different MSs for same species and habitats (begin with some selected ones)
- Identify general threats for CEE problems and provide recommendations
- Lobby for more funding for Natura 2000 at EU level
- Raise public awareness in the CEE region
- Provide input to management guidance
- Collect information and get involved in management planning in order to ensure proper measures (collect info, get involved)
- Provide opportunity for experience exchange among CEE countries
- Have a watchdog role
- Build capacity and provide networking opportunities

CEE NGOs contribution to the Alpine biogeographical process

As providing input to the Alpine biogeographical process, the participants collected some good examples as well as numerous examples for cross-cutting issues, which are relevant in CEE alpine regions.

Good management examples:

- Poland: non-intervention management in Gorce National Park and Beskid Zywiecki: beech forests, spruce forests and capercaillie
- Poland: conservation and management of raised bogs in Bor na Czerwonem
- Poland: restoring rivers and complex stone sediment habitats as migration corridors in Biala Tarnowska
• Czech Republic: management of beech forests and habitats of lynx and wolves Beskidy mountains
• Czech Republic: White Carpathians meadows and other non-forested habitats
• Czech Republic: management of semi-natural dry grasslands in Pouzdranska steppe
• Bulgarian Guidelines on forests on FCS – habitats information and criteria
• Bulgaria: non-intervention management in national parks core zones for beech and spruce forests
• Slovakia: restoration of wetlands in Zahorie area
• Romania: alluvial forests restoration in the Calimani Mountains
• Romania: ensuring connectivity for large carnivores between Southern and Western Carpathians
• Romania: management of Nardus grasslands in Sovata
• German approach of spruce forest management

Cross cutting issues:
• Connectivity and large carnivores
• Wilderness management, in connection to large carnivores and birds, emphasizing the importance of roadless areas and deadwood
• Management of landscape dependent species requiring a complex of habitats
• Invasive species
• Areas outside Natura 2000 network (example: reference forests in Polish state forestry)

Problems related to habitats:
• Birds (requiring complex habitats)
• Invertebrates and especially butterflies on grasslands
• deadwood dependent species in forests
• Extend the discussion on non-Natura 2000 species

CEE recommendations on the future Agri-Environmental Scheme and Natura 2000 payments
• There would be a need for larger flexibility of the scheme, especially in terms of larger countries as in the case of Poland
• In order to increase the current low uptake for small farmers, it would be essential to raise awareness and communication on the measures with large focus on Natura 2000 payments
• The application procedure should be simple in order to increase willingness of participation from the farmers’ side
• The AES should be more simple in order to be more understandable for farmers, but should be complex enough to contain all necessary conservation measures
• Implementation should be linked to natural constrains and nature values
• Payment level should correspond to regional differences
• Certain schemes (such as the fores-environmental measures) should be introduced also in the light of integration to Natura 2000 management plans
• Increased capacities of authorities to communicate, handle applications and monitor the implementation
• Within Natura 2000 payments, it would be important to have preconditions related to environmental friendly activities including for instance, constructing eco-corridors or stepping stones

• Payments related to improved indicator system for actual quality development may be beneficial
# Annex I.

**Participant list of the Natura 2000 Management and Agri-Environmental Scheme and Natura 2000 Payments Workshops**

3-5 October 2012, Dworek Gorce, Kamienic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Contact details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vladimir Milushev</td>
<td>Future now</td>
<td><a href="mailto:home@gudevica.org">home@gudevica.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elina Ivanova</td>
<td>Future now</td>
<td><a href="mailto:home@gudevica.org">home@gudevica.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinka Topalova-Rzerzycha</td>
<td>Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation</td>
<td><a href="mailto:latinka@biodiversity.bg">latinka@biodiversity.bg</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stefan Avramov</td>
<td>Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation</td>
<td><a href="mailto:stefanavranov@gmail.com">stefanavranov@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janis Reihmanis</td>
<td>Latvian Fund for Natura</td>
<td><a href="mailto:janis.reihmanis@ldf.lv">janis.reihmanis@ldf.lv</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan Cernecky</td>
<td>State Nature Conservancy of Slovak Republic</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jan.cernecky@sopsr.sk">jan.cernecky@sopsr.sk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lubomira Vavrova</td>
<td>BROZ</td>
<td><a href="mailto:vavrova@broz.sk">vavrova@broz.sk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emil Vaklinov</td>
<td>Rhodope</td>
<td><a href="mailto:emil_vaklinov@yahoo.com">emil_vaklinov@yahoo.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balázs Mészáros</td>
<td>Nimfea Association</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zsófia Fábián</td>
<td>Nimfea Association</td>
<td><a href="mailto:zsofi@nimfea.hu">zsofi@nimfea.hu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ildikó Arany</td>
<td>CEEweb for Biodiversity</td>
<td><a href="mailto:arany@ceeweb.org">arany@ceeweb.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agnes Zolyomi</td>
<td>CEEweb for Biodiversity</td>
<td><a href="mailto:zolyomi@ceeweb.org">zolyomi@ceeweb.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamás Papp</td>
<td>Milvus Group</td>
<td><a href="mailto:tamas.papp@milvus.ro">tamas.papp@milvus.ro</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tibor Sós</td>
<td>Milvus Group</td>
<td><a href="mailto:tibor.sos@milvus.ro">tibor.sos@milvus.ro</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bogdan Tomozii</td>
<td>Ecosilvex</td>
<td><a href="mailto:bogdantomozei@yahoo.com">bogdantomozei@yahoo.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toma Victor</td>
<td>Ecosilvex</td>
<td><a href="mailto:toma.victorcatalin@gmail.com">toma.victorcatalin@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pawel Pawlaczyk</td>
<td>Naturalists Club Poland</td>
<td><a href="mailto:pawpawla@wp.pl">pawpawla@wp.pl</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monika Kotulak</td>
<td>Naturalists Club Poland</td>
<td><a href="mailto:kotulak.m@gmail.com">kotulak.m@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laszlo Galhidy</td>
<td>WWF Hungary</td>
<td><a href="mailto:laszlo.galhidy@wwf.hu">laszlo.galhidy@wwf.hu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabor Figeczky</td>
<td>WWF Hungary</td>
<td><a href="mailto:gabor.figeczky@wwf.hu">gabor.figeczky@wwf.hu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marek Jobda</td>
<td>Polish Society for the Protection of Birds</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Marek.jobda@otop.org.pl">Marek.jobda@otop.org.pl</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomasz Wilk</td>
<td>Polish Society for the Protection of Birds</td>
<td><a href="mailto:tomasz.wilk@otop.org.pl">tomasz.wilk@otop.org.pl</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamara Faberová</td>
<td>Hnuti Duha - Friends of the Earth Czech Republic</td>
<td><a href="mailto:tamara.faberova@hnutiduha.cz">tamara.faberova@hnutiduha.cz</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milena Šijan</td>
<td>Sunce</td>
<td><a href="mailto:milena.sijan@sunce-st.org">milena.sijan@sunce-st.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wojciech Lewandowski</td>
<td>URS - Environmental Protection Consultant</td>
<td><a href="mailto:wojciech.lewandowski@urs.com">wojciech.lewandowski@urs.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zbigniew Zurek</td>
<td>Gorczanski Park Narodowy</td>
<td><a href="mailto:zbzurek@gmail.com">zbzurek@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan Loch</td>
<td>Gorczanski Park Narodowy</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jan.loch@gorcepn.pl">jan.loch@gorcepn.pl</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krisztof Przybyla</td>
<td>Nadlesnictwo Nowy Targ</td>
<td><a href="mailto:krosztf.przybyla@krakow.lasy.gov.pl">krosztf.przybyla@krakow.lasy.gov.pl</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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