

**United Nations Development Program  
UNDP Regional Environmental Governance Program**

**Environmentally Sustainable Development in the  
Belavezhskaia Pushcha Belarus-Poland Region:  
combining protected area management with rural  
sustainability**

**Brief Description**

*The project represents the Belarusian component of the transborder Belarus-Poland project of UNDP on Environmentally Sustainable Development in the Belavezhskaia Pushcha. The key goal of the project (Belarusian component) is to develop basic legal, economic and awareness-raising prerequisites for development of environmentally friendly alternative sustainable livelihoods in the Belavezhskaia Pushcha region in Belarus building on the cross-border experience and focusing on agrotourism.*

Minsk, October 2003

## **PART 1. SITUATION ANALYSIS**

### 1.1 Introduction

In summer of 2002 Regional UNDP Mission took note of the wiliness of Belarus and Poland to cooperate in the area of rural development and protected area management. Subsequent discussion of concrete activities through correspondence, as well as through a mission to Poland, resulted in agreement of the Regional Program and the two country offices to:

- Develop a project in the Belavezhskaja Pushcha Region, building on the past and present cooperation both UNDP and non-UNDP specific. The project will have specific Belarus and Polish elements, as well as an overarching element. Funding granted by the Regional Program will serve as a short-term seed capital, enabling development and implementation of larger initiatives in the future.
- In order to finalize project idea key stakeholders on both sides were consulted through a regional 1.5-day workshop 21 November in Belavezhskaja Pushcha National Park, Belarus.

Below is the project proposal developed as a follow up to the named events.

### 1.2 Strategy

The Belavezhskaja Pushcha National Park (87 464 ha) is the last remnant of the vast lowland mixed primeval forest in Europe. This primeval forest has been under protection since the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The forest contains a number of unique species of flora and fauna. The overall number of animal species exceeds 10,000. With around 900 vascular plant species the forest is thus considered to be one of the most diverse in Europe. The National Park is a biospheric reserve; its core zone is a World Heritage Site.

Since the start of economic and political reforms in Eastern Europe nature reserves have been receiving ever increasing attention as places where economic and nature-protection activities could be combined in a balanced and sustainable manner to obtain synergetic effect for the sake of both biodiversity and people. Development of alternative economic mechanisms benefiting the environment, such as agro- and ecotourism, nature interpretation, informational and educational services at the premises of nature protected sites was going (and is still going) very slowly.

The Polish part of the Belavezhskaja Pushcha region benefited greatly from the international investments into the environmentally friendly alternative livelihoods sector, such as agrotourism. In the context of the generally positive business environment combined with the initiatives of the local administration and population, the Polish Belavezhskaja Pushcha managed to make the best use of its investments and construct an integrated and environmentally and economically beneficial schemes of sustainable livelihoods.

The Belavezhskaja Pushcha region, at the same time has so far received little outside technical support for further development of environmentally friendly alternative economic schemes based on private business development. The Park itself has many basic prerequisites for servicing its visitors, such as nature museum, animal enclosures, hotels, a restaurant, as well as a number of other facilities. At the same time the region surrounding the Park is significantly underdeveloped.

The idea of developing the Belavezhskaja Pushcha national park broader than just the national park itself, was worked out during implementation of GEF – World Bank project *Forest Biodiversity Protection* which was initiated in September 1992 (grant GEF 05/28621-BY) (described in more detail below). It was also the driving force behind establishment of the Belavezhskaja Pushcha Euroregion. Participants of the Euroregion in Belarus are Pruzhany,

Kamenets, and Svisloch districts, and in the nearest future the Euroregion is believed to develop rapidly with initial assistance from Tacis project (briefly described later).

The proposed UNDP initiative will focus on increasing the capacity of the regional stakeholders through assisting in defining the most basic prerequisites for development of alternative environmentally friendly private economic schemes. Exchange of information and expertise with the Polish side will be built into the very coordination mechanisms of the project (Cross-border task force and Cross-border Advisory board, see attachment) to insure the best possible effect from project implementation<sup>1</sup>.

While working mainly for the benefit of the districts of the Belavezhskaya Pushcha National Park region, the project in its advisory body will involve Belavezhskaya Pushcha representatives. This will enable both, learning for districts from the experience of the Park as well as development of ways for synergetic interaction between the Park and the surrounding districts.

By general agreement reached in the consultations and workshops preceding this project, if the project is to be deployed in the Belavezhskaya Pushcha Region, the Park will still have interest: today, Belavezhskaya Pushcha National Park in Belarus derives 40 percent of its income from tourist catering. As an example of successful project implementation, Pushcha could make use of additional numbers of tourists who would be coming into the region. Pushcha could participate in training of local privates targeted by the future projects.

### 1.3. Project region

The project region was shaped basing on the results of GEF – World Bank project *Forest Biodiversity Protection* which was initiated in September 1992 (grant GEF 05/28621-BY) and implemented in 1992-1996 in the National Park “Belavezhskaya pushcha”, and following consultations with Ministry for Environment and other project partners.

One of the main results of the GEF project was elaboration of the concept of Bialowieza Ecological Region (*BER*), where *BER* was considered as the region encompassing Belavezhskaya pushcha and the surrounding territories which “have the greatest impact on ecology of the forests of the National Park and simultaneously form themselves and develop their social structure under the influence of the Belavezhskaya pushcha”<sup>2</sup>. *BER* was shaped basing on administrative and territorial situation, natural and social parameters, protection status and other factors which all closely interlace and add on to each other forming prerequisites for natural, social, economical and demographic development in the region.

The idea of creation of *BER* was to support the development of recreation and tourism services on the basis of ecologically clean agriculture and manufacturing to allow creation of stable economical and social base for eliminating conflict of interests between the National Park and the local society. Which, in fact, is very close to the notion of *sustainable livelihoods*.

Geographically, *BER* lies within territories of Kamenets and Pruzhany districts (rayons) of Brest region (oblast) and Svisloch and Volkovysk districts of Grodno region. The former three districts are also Euroregion “Belavezhskaya pushcha” partners. The addition of the *Zelva* district to the project adds vast experience in agro- and ecotourism development and ensures geographical optimisation of the project range as *Zelva* district lies between Volkovysk and Pruzhany districts.

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<sup>1</sup> Modes of cross-border exchange are further described for each project component.

<sup>2</sup> Cited from: *Conservation of biological diversity of Belavezhskaya pushcha forests*, - Kameniuki, 1996 – materials of GEF 05/28 621 BY project

Five districts in the project will also ensure increased stability of the project. This concerns awareness raising and training for potential providers of agrotourism services and, in particular, successful implementation of the *small-grants scheme*. The experience of implementing Pilot Program within Bialowieza Forest Project (BFP I) in Poland (April 2000) and trainings for Belarusian potential agrotourism providers conducted by “Agro- and Ecotourism Association” (July 2003) shows that at an early stage of development of the sustainable livelihoods sector in Belarus, if narrowing the geographical range of the Project, the number of potential service providers which have enough capacity and potential for agrotourism development can be too low for a proper selection of candidates eligible for funding within the Small-grant scheme.

#### 1.4. Project environment

The concept of the *rural tourism* project was worked out during implementation of DANCEE-UNDP-COWI international project on development of cross-border cooperation in Belavezhskaya pushcha region “Pushcha without borders” and following planning meetings with UNDP regional program.

DANCEE-COWI-UNDP Belarus “Pushcha without borders” project focused mainly on increasing awareness and capacity building of several target groups for strengthening of nature protection in Belavezhskaya pushcha forest region. One of the key elements of the “Pushcha without borders” project was transfer of experience of two Polish DANCEE financed projects “Bialowieza forest project” (BFP I) and “Bialowieza forest project II” (BFP II). These projects proved to be very successful in supporting sustainable development of Bialowieza region in Poland.

In course of implementation of “Pushcha without borders” project it was acknowledged that regional economic development has an important role in supporting sustainable development of the region, though being out of the scope of the project these issues were not duly addressed.

On the Polish side of the border there exists positive experience of successfully addressing this issue when under the Pilot Programme the BFP I and BFP II provided grants to organisations or individuals that were seeking to establish small business that develop, use, and preserve the region’s nature resources in parallel with the project’s objectives. Altogether 53 pilots were accepted in the following fields: tourism and agro tourism enterprises; agriculture and horticulture; services; trading establishments; transport; handicraft etc.

As an addition to “Pushcha without borders”, the proposed project develops the ideas further and is largely based on successful experience of BFP I&II. At the same time, the project pursues the demand for more effective development of the ecotourism sector acknowledged in the 1992 – 1996 GEF – World Bank Project *Forest Biodiversity Protection* initiated in September 1992 (grant GEF 05/28621-BY).

Implementation of the planned project will be taking place in generally positive environment for development of cross-border cooperation already created during implementation of “Pushcha without borders” project. The new initiative will also take advantage of the possibilities for regional development, created by establishment of Euroregion “Belavezhskaya pushcha”, established in 2002 in border region of Belarus and Poland (in Belarus it includes territories of Svisloch, Pruzhany and Kameniets districts).

At the same time, the concept of the proposed UNDP project falls in line with the TACIS funded project<sup>3</sup> *Strengthening the cross-border co-operation for regional development in the transboundary area of Bialowieza Forest, based on participatory and sustainable principles*. The project is aimed at supporting sustainable development and environmental awareness in

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<sup>3</sup> The project is expected to begin in the second half of 2003.

the region around Bialowieza Forest in Poland and Belarus. With no overlapping of the project scopes, implementation of TACIS project will add up to strengthening the capacity in the region for implementation of **Small Grants Programme**. In particular, the following outputs of the TACIS project are worth coordinating activities with:

- output 1.11 “Plan and conduct training for Bed & Breakfast providers in Belarus” - a small number (likely 3) of targeted workshops in Belarus, with on-the-site training, provided by B&B providers in Poland, assisted by a tourism development specialist.
- output 1.3 “Conduct regional sustainable tourism development workshops” - 2 workshops on explanation and implementation of mechanisms of developing tourism according to principles of sustainability and on suggesting new tourism products, while ensuring that the regional tourism marketing will reflect and stay true to the local characteristic and heritage.

## **PART 2. PROJECT GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES**

### 2.1 Project goal

*To develop basic legal, economic and awareness-raising prerequisites for development of environmentally friendly alternative sustainable livelihoods in the Belavezhskaya Pushcha region in Belarus building on the cross-border experience and focusing on agrotourism.*

Although the project focuses on protected area management, if successful it will ultimately bring benefit to local people, raising their income, creating jobs, improving entrepreneurial environment, as well as raise their awareness of opportunities to combine nature conservation with economic activities.

### 2.2 Project matrix<sup>4</sup>

<b>Output 1.</b> Regional capacity for sustainable livelihoods development strengthened		
	<i>Activities</i>	<i>Description</i>
1.1	Cross-border Task Force established	Cross-border Task Force <sup>5</sup> for sustainable livelihoods development in the Belavezhskaya pushcha region (BPR) will operate as a cross-border working group. TF will include representatives of local and central authorities, EUROREGION and National Park, NGOs, etc.
1.2.	Technical Working Groups established	The following national Technical Working Groups (TWG) will be established: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainable Livelihoods Development</li> <li>• Conservation of Cultural and Natural Heritage of BPR</li> </ul> TWG will be a back-bone for implementation of the project components and will ensure sustainability of the results beyond the project. TWG will include specialists and experts, NGO, representatives of local government thus facilitating communication and ensuring of acceptance of the results.
1.3	Trainings	Envisages input from Activity 1.4. of the polish component.
1.4	Cross-border exchange of experience	Study tour to Poland and workshop on <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Sustainable forest ecosystem management</li> <li>2) Exchange of the experience on agro-tourism development.</li> </ol>

<sup>4</sup> The first part of the matrix describes general strategic guidelines and principles of UNDP assistance to Belarus in the area of environmental governance. The second part is dedicated specifically to project outputs and activities. Inputs are presented in the budget table below.

<sup>5</sup> Not to be confused with the Cross-Border Advisory Board, which is a coordinating body for the whole regional project, described in the attachment.

	<b>Output 2. Legal and normative basis for environmentally friendly alternative livelihoods developed.</b>	
2.1	Study legal base for sustainable tourism from neighboring countries (focusing on Poland).	Legal base in neighboring countries in the field of sustainable livelihoods and focusing on agrotourism will be studied.
2.2	Describe legal conditions currently present in Belarus	Analysis of present legal situation in the field of tourism
2.3.	Identify gaps to be filled to create enabling legal environment for agrotourism development in Belarus	Identification of opportunities sustainable livelihoods development within existing legislation, as well as areas to be addressed specifically.
2.4	Propose concrete changes to legislation and lobby for changes in the legislation if necessary	Concrete changes will be proposed (amendments formulated) for acceptance by the relevant authorities (Min. for Taxes, Min. for Tourism, etc.)
	<b>Output 3. The needs for development of alternative livelihoods in the Belavezhskaja Pushcha (including study of demand and supply side for sustainable tourism) studied</b>	
3.1	Identify potential providers	Work with local authorities to identify entrepreneurs and population who would potentially have initial capacity to participate in private sustainable tourism and development and other types of private alternative livelihoods
3.2	Inventory all economic, as well as cultural and natural heritage aspects defining sustainable tourism in the region.	Detailed inventory of economic, as well as cultural and natural heritage aspects defining sustainable tourism in the region will be conducted by TWG on Sustainable Livelihoods Development and Conservation of Cultural and Natural Heritage of BPR
3.3	Describe in detail and build bridges with tourist operators (demand side) who would potentially be involved in marketing the local tourist product.	A number of working meetings will be held to establish contacts with tourist operators.  This activity also envisages inputs from activities 4.4; 4.5; 5.1
3.4	Describe the local sustainable tourism product, as well as other products of sustainable livelihoods (local crafts, cultural values, etc.).	Basing on the consultation with TWG on Sustainable livelihoods development and TWG on Conservation of Cultural and Natural Heritage, as well as with inputs from <i>Activity 4.2</i> and the results of cross-border “Pushcha without borders” project, potential local sustainable tourism products will be identified and described in detail.
3.5	Study both internal and external market potential for sustainable tourism.	Marketing potential (both external and internal) for the local sustainable tourism products, identified by <i>Activity 3.4</i> will be analysed.
3.6	Study possibilities for certification	Possibilities for certification of sustainable local products of high market potential (as identified in <i>Activity 3.5</i> ) will be studied.
	<b>Output 4. Grounds for conservation of traditional cultural landscape as a major asset for the development of rural tourism in Belavezhskaja pushcha region strengthened</b>	
4.1	Conduct inventory of objects of cultural, historical and natural heritage of the cross-border Belavezhskaja pushcha region.	The inventory will be implemented by TWG on Conservation of Cultural and Natural Heritage.  Information will be gathered by field inventories (including cross-border), analysis of existing materials and input from

		<p>cross-border UNDP “Pushcha without borders” project. Objects of high conservation value will be mapped and described using jointly worked out methodology.</p> <p>For each object of high conservation value and/or tourism potential a detailed inventory form will be filled. The forms will later be used for planning tourist trails in the region and copies will be handed over to district departments for conservation of cultural heritage.</p>
4.2	Identify traditional national traits in rural development (settlement composition, wooden architecture, decoration, etc.) for the cross-border Belavezhskaja pushcha region	Basing on the inventory materials, as well as in consultation with TWG, the core components of traditional regional countryside will be identified and described in detail.
4.3	Develop set of guidelines ensuring conservation of cultural heritage	Set of guidelines will be worked out to ensure conservation of traditional national landscape. The guidelines will be presented for use by regional departments for conservation of cultural heritage and local administration.
4.4	Conduct workshops and presentations	<p>A series of workshops and working meetings will be held to present materials worked out during project implementation and the opportunities created by better conservation of cultural heritage and preservation of traditional cultural landscape.</p> <p>This components envisages belarusian participation in similar polish workshops and cross-organization of such workshops using polish and belarusian grounds on alternative basis.</p>
<b>Output 5. Awareness raising, education and training of local people in sustainable tourism services and other types of alternative livelihoods identified on the basis of Polish experience</b>		
5.1	Train existing potential service providers, using the experience of the Polish partners	<p>Conduct a series of workshop for potential service providers on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• finances and accounting;</li> <li>• tourism and entrepreneurship legislation ;</li> <li>• marketing;</li> <li>• project application writing.</li> </ul> <p>After completion of the training potential service providers will be eligible for financing within “Small grants program”. The applicants will need to compile a grant application for the review, selection and approval.</p>
5.2	Produce awareness raising materials	A number of awareness raising materials (booklets, leaflets) on values and conservation of natural and cultural heritage as <i>an integral, interlaced natural and cultural complex</i> of the cross-border Belavezhskaja pushcha region will be worked out and produced.
5.3	Establish exhibition on cultural heritage theme	An exhibition featuring natural, ethnic and cultural specialty of Belavezhskaja pushcha region will be prepared and opened in NP “Belavezhskaja pushcha” Nature Museum in Kameniuky or in one of the districts.

		<p>It is seen, that an exchange of polish and belarusian exhibitions will take place, or alternatively, a joint exhibition can be prepared for subsequent presentation in Poland and Belarus.</p> <p>In Belarus, the parts of the exhibition will also be presented in Brest and district centers.</p>
5.4	Train future generations of local environmentally-friendly entrepreneurs on the basis of ecological schools in the district	<p>A series of lectures will consist of the following components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• promotion of conservation of natural and cultural heritage of the region;</li> <li>• basics knowledge of legislation in the field of natural/cultural heritage conservation, tourism;</li> <li>• case studies of successful agrotourism examples;</li> <li>• possibility of an internship for pupils willing to specialize in provision of local crafts;</li> <li>• possibility of a study visit to Poland.</li> </ul>
5.5	Prepare plan of development of tourist trails in the region	<p>Basing on the inventory a set of tourist trails linking places of interest in and around NP “Belavezhskaja Pushcha”, service providers identified/supported by the project, transportation routes will be developed.</p> <p>The list of tourist trails will be handed over to the regional tourist operators for marketing.</p>
<b>Output 6. Private small enterprises in the area of sustainable tourism and other types of environmentally friendly livelihoods in the region launched, using the experience of Polish partners,</b>		
6.1	Start of marketing of tourist products	<p>Special programs based on the network of tourist trails (Activity 5.5) will be prepared.</p> <p>Information stands with materials on opportunities for sustainable tourism in BPR will be created in the offices of the main tourist operators.</p> <p>It is foreseen, that cross-marketing of sustainable tourism products in the Belavezhskaja Pushcha region by belarusian and polish tourist operators will take place.</p>
6.2	Small-grants scheme	<p>Small Grant Scheme for sustainable alternative livelihoods development will be implemented. The grants will be awarded on a competitors basis following selection and approval of grant applications from potential providers.</p> <p>The format of the Grant Scheme (size of the grant, necessity for in-kind contribution by the applicant, monitoring methods) is to be worked out by TWG on Sustainable Livelihood Development</p>

### **PART 3. PROJECT MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS, MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

The project (the Belarusian part of the regional project) will be implemented by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Belarus. Project personnel will be hired, and all project transactions will be effected in accordance with UNDP procedures.

To advise the project on the project progress a National Advisory Board will be established. The Advisory Board will be headed by the National Project Director, who will be a representative of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection. Apart from the National Director, the Advisory Board will include:

- Heads of local executive committees from Belavezhskaya Pushcha region (Kameniets, Pruzhany, Svisloch, Volkovysk, Zelva).
- Representative of Euroregion (from Belarus side).
- Representative of forest authorities.
- Representative of Belavezhskaya Pushcha National Park.
- Representative of President Affairs' Department
- NGOs active in the region
- Ministry of Sports and Tourism
- Donors and international organizations active in the region.

The Project Manager serves as a Secretary to the meetings of the National Advisory Board.

The advisory board will work in accordance with the TOR (attachment) and meet biannually or more regularly as required.

For cross-country coordination, a joint Cross-Border Advisory Board for the project will be established. The structure and Terms of Reference for the Cross-Border Advisory Board are presented in the attachment.

Monitoring and evaluation of the project (the Belarusian component of the regional project) are effected in accordance with UNDP procedures. Project reports shall be submitted by Project Manager to UNDP Resident Representative (as well as to the Ministry of Economy of Belarus for information) twice per year. Sufficient resources were allocated in the project for monitoring and evaluation purposes.