Protected Areas for Nature and People

Collaboration with local communities and stakeholders in Una National Park.

Last year more than 80,000 tourists visited the park and its surrounding area, and this tourism is being managed in line with principals of sustainable tourism.

WWF Adria and Udruga Dinarica are implementing Field Project Una, which is part of the "Protected Areas for Nature and People" regional program. Field Project Una is providing a model for how national parks can generate environmentally responsible economic development by providing support for green business ideas, opening eco-markets, and positioning and branding local products on the tourism market.

Cooperation between WWF and Una National Park started in 2012 under the Dinaric Arc Parks project. This project, through workshops with stakeholders and analysis of the benefits of the projected area itself, showed the potential for local communities to be more active in the tourism sector. In 2014, WWF also helped Una National Park receive the European Certificate for Sustainable Tourism.

Building on this foundation, WWF launched Field Project Una as one of six field projects within the regional "Protected Areas for Nature and People" program.
Opportunities in Una National Park

In Bihać there is a high rate of unemployment, particularly in rural areas in and around Una National Park. A large number of people in rural areas are engaged in small family businesses related to agriculture or tourism, and the tourism sector in particular is an emerging driver of the local economy. Since Una was designated a National Park in 2008, the number of tourists visiting the area has grown exponentially. Now more than 80,000 people come to the park and the surrounding area each year. Local communities are increasingly providing goods and services for tourists, and there is a great opportunity to further develop the local economy while simultaneously conserving the cultural, historical, and environmental heritage that makes this area so interesting and attractive to visitors.

Field Project Una

The goal of the Una Field Project is to revitalize the economy of the whole Bihać area by encouraging entrepreneurs to start or grow businesses in the tourism sector. The field project will also show local communities, policy makers, and natural resource managers that the focus of environmental management is not only and solely for the protection of natural and cultural values, but can also be a catalyst for sustainable economic development. Over time this economic revitalization could reduce outmigration of youth from the area, and vastly increase the socioeconomic development of local communities.

To enable local communities to take advantage of the opportunities tourism can bring, in recent years WWF has fostered greater cooperation between the management of Una National Park and residents, small businesses, and other stakeholders. To continue this support, WWF is now working to encourage people in the Bihać area to start-up and grow small businesses in the tourism sector in a financially, environmentally, and socially sustainable way.
Field Project Una activities include:

Una Tourism Cluster: With support from WWF, this Cluster was officially created in March 2017 after years of informal collaboration between local community groups, tourism providers, sports associations, and other stakeholders in the Bihać area. The Cluster was founded in response to a need for a professional organization to implement the sustainable tourism development strategy for the area surrounding Una National Park. The Cluster will also suggest options for activities aimed at enriching tourism offers, strengthening the competitiveness of the tourism sector, and raising the standards and quality of all tourist services in and around the protected area.

Cluster members will play a significant role in national and regional tourism presentations, exhibitions, and fairs. Through a series of activities focused on education and training, Cluster members will strengthen their own capacities and develop good practice models for the management of tourism activities in and around the protected area. These models will be relevant for other parts of the country and the region.

Small grant support: Through the project, WWF is providing small grants between €1,500 and €3,000. These grants are issued to improve and enrich tourist offers and services. Grants support the production and availability for sale of traditional handicrafts, souvenirs, traditional foods and beverages, medicinal herbs and wild berries. Grants also support the development or improvement of tourism offers for adventure sports and other recreational activities, and raising the quality of lodging capacities and services. The small grants are encouraging the local population to be more involved in the tourism sector by reducing the financial risks of launching or expanding businesses.

Workshops, Trainings and an Eco-Market: Through a series of workshops and trainings, WWF is motivating the local population to collaborate to create a local identity that distinguishes and raises the profile of tourism offers to the area. These workshops and trainings are also equipping entrepreneurs and small business owners with the skills and knowledge to be more competitive and provide higher levels of services. In direct support to the local community, WWF has also facilitated the creation of an Eco-Market where entrepreneurs can sell local products.

Engaging Vulnerable Populations: Through the above activities WWF is also supporting economic opportunities for minorities, the elderly, women, and youth. For example, the growth in tourists to the area has increased demand for traditionally woven rugs and other woolen products. The production of these souvenirs is mainly a women’s activity. As such, it is a source of income for older women and/or minorities without other employment possibilities in their local communities.
Our Results

Through this project WWF is building a model for economic development in and around protected areas. This model is aimed at boosting growth and increasing employment, to improve living standards in local communities. Everything is based on principles of sustainable development, with an emphasis on the protection and preservation of the natural values of the area.

Project activities will strengthen partnerships. It is establishing cooperation between local and regional authorities and stakeholders for the development of protected area planning and management. Local stakeholders are also included in discussions of policies and legislation related to the development of the protected area.

Through the Una Tourism Cluster, Una National Park has gained a stable and relevant partner, and a platform for joint collaboration. This collaboration will lead to improved sustainable resource management and raise the quality of tourism offers. Overall, project activities are also increasing the local populations’ understanding of the natural and socioeconomic values of Una National Park.

The project is providing small grants, creating an Eco-Market, leading workshops, lectures, vocational training, and supporting the creation of a local identity – brand – for the area as a tourist destination. This will position Una on the map of protected areas with high-quality well-rounded tourism offers based on principals of sustainable development and the protection of natural, historical, and local heritage.

For more Information:

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