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NATURA 2000

AFTER-LIFE CONSERVATION PLAN

PROJECT LIFE13 NAT/BG/801 RIPARIAN FORESTS

After-LIFE Conservation Plan

for LIFE13 NAT/BG/000801 Project: Conservation and restoration of riparian forests (habitat type *91E0) in Natura 2000 sites and model areas in Bulgaria

The Project is implemented by the Executive Forest Agency in partnership with WWF-Bulgaria, the Regional Forest Directorate – Plovdiv, and the Regional Forest Directorate – Rousse, with the financial support of the EU LIFE Programme.

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Introduction

Due to their specific location in the transition areas between aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, riparian forests feature rich biodiversity, both in flora and fauna. They have formed and developed under specific environmental conditions: high humidity furnished by river flows and periodic floods, as well as by high groundwater.

Notwithstanding their extreme importance to river streams and groundwater quality, water balance, riverside protection, borderline plant communities and biological diversity, their current status in most of the country is unsatisfactory. The main reasons for this are the aftereffects of target or elemental human activities: drainage of swamps and marshland; diversion of watercourses; clear-cutting and removal of natural vegetation; change in the land-use pattern in these areas; extraction of aggregates; etc., as well as their improper management: application of inappropriate forestry and agricultural systems and methods of management; use of non-typical alien species in afforestation; induction of unfavourable succession processes with invasive species; etc. Climate aridization and the associated reduction of river flow and groundwater levels are also crucial for the resilience and longevity of these forest populations.

Floodplain forests have been widespread in Bulgaria in the past. Currently, such are partially preserved only along the Danube islands, the streams of Kamchia, Ropotamo and Tundzha, and the islands of Maritza river. These forests are almost completely destroyed along the reaches of Iskar, Vit, Osam, Yantra and Struma rivers.

The above-mentioned issues were the reason for the Project ‘Conservation and restoration of riparian forests (habitat type *91E0) in Natura 2000 sites and model areas in Bulgaria’ to be developed and implemented with the idea to demonstrate good practices for restoration and management of such a type of forest habitats.

Objectives of the After-LIFE Conservation Plan

The After-LIFE Conservation Plan is a mandatory component of each project funded under the LIFE Programme. It aims to outline the main conservation achievements of the project and to analyze its strengths and weaknesses, as well as threats and opportunities. The plan is expected to describe the conservation needs for each target site, the residual threats and the management challenges. Accordingly, this Plan aims to propose the way to follow-up the conservation activities initiated under the Project, both in a short-term perspective, immediately after the Project completion, as well as to pinpoint potential conservation activities in the longer term. In this regard, the Plan is expected to serve as a basis for the development of new project proposals and partnerships.

Overview of implemented project activities, key achievements and challenges

Project baseline

The project for conservation and restoration of riparian forests (habitat type *91E0) in Natura 2000 sites and model areas in Bulgaria is a joint initiative of the Executive Forest Agency and the Regional Forest Directorates of Plovdiv and Rousse in partnership with WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme Bulgaria. The overall project objective is to contribute to enhancing the conservation of natural habitat 91E0* Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (*Alno–Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae*). The specific project objectives are related to:

- Implementing activities for direct restoration and enhancement of the conservation status of habitat 91E0* in two protected sites under the Habitats Directive by applying a range of techniques and testing alternative forestry methods.
- Enhancing the baseline information and recapping the experience gained in riparian habitat restoration and management by compiling specific Guidelines.
- Enhancing the capacity of EFA, its two regional structures (RFD) in Plovdiv and Rousse, WWF Bulgaria, and – indirectly – of the forestry sector and NGOs on topics related to the restoration and management of riparian forest habitats and more specifically of habitat 91E0*.
- Raising the public awareness and enhancing the liaison with local stakeholders in the target project areas to ensure support for conservation activities in the target habitat and riparian habitats at large.

Target project sites of the Natura 2000 network are two protected sites: Maritza River (BG0000578) and Marten-Ryahovo (BG0000529), both designated as Sites of Community Importance (SCI) under the Habitats Directive.

The Project is implemented in the period 1.09.2014 – 28.02.2019 and is funded by the EU LIFE Programme. In a way, it is also a follow-up of another EFA and WWF-Bulgaria initiative aimed at the conservation and restoration of 11 riparian habitats and wetlands within the Natura 2000 network (covering 10 Nature Parks), within the LIFE project framework as well.

Key conservation activities and outputs

The key Project achievements include:

Planning of restoration activities and regulatory approval thereof

Pursuant to the Bulgarian legislation, to provide for the implementation of conservation activities, technological plans were developed for the afforestation works envisaged, as well as for the application of elements of the Saarland method for enhancing the status (including removal of invasive riparian vegetation) of riparian habitats in the target sites. Following the applicable procedures, the deliverables were approved by the Executive Forest Agency (with regard to the provisions of the forestry legislation) and the Regional Inspectorates of Environment and Water in Rousse and Plovdiv (with regard to compliance with the environmental provisions and conformity

with the objectives of the relevant protected sites). The technological plans include detailed estimates of the type and volume of activities, the necessary reproductive materials, the type and volume of maintenance activities, etc.

Analysis of the connectivity between target sites and other neighbouring Natura 2000 sites

Within the framework of this activity, the connectivity of SCI Maritza River (BG0000578) with 4 neighbouring protected sites and the role of riparian habitats were analyzed. The analysis was submitted to 11 municipalities to integrate the results into the Municipal Development Plans, more specifically in the sections addressing the development of green infrastructure and establishment of bio-corridors between the Natura 2000 sites in the region. The analysis was also used to draw up a substantiated proposal for a new measure to be listed in the 2016-2021 Flood Risk Management Plan of the East Aegean Region.

Restoration activities for habitat 91E0* in the target project areas

The key Project achievements are as follows:

- 14.2 ha restored in SCI Maritza River, including 12.8 ha in the area of Merich orman (Maritza municipality forest areas) and 1.4 ha in the area of Gushterova odaya (state forest area managed by the State Forestry Enterprise of Asenovgrad).
- 9.8 ha restored in SCI Marten-Ryahovo (state forest area managed by the State Hunting Enterprise of Rousse).
- Adapted version of the Saarland method applied on 24.1 ha, resulting in adequate removal of rival invasive species and improved structural characteristics of the species composition of habitat 91E0* in pilot areas within SCI Maritza River (1.8 ha in the ward of SFE Parvomay) and SCI Marten-Ryahovo (22.3 ha on Aleko Island).

Restoration activities are carried out through successive completion in each site of: land clearing and removal of existing non-native vegetation, soil preparation (mechanized or manual), afforestation (mechanized or manual) using the whole range of species typical for habitat 91E0* (incl. *Quercus robur, Ulmus minor, Ulmus laevis, Fraxinus angustifolia, Alnus glutinosa, Polulus nigra, Alnus incana, Salix alba, Pyrus communis*), monitoring of the status, replenishment and aftercare.

Guidelines for restoration and management of riparian forest habitats

Recapping the experience gained so far in the country and abroad, as well as the experience gained under the Project, *Guidelines for restoration and management of riparian forest habitats* were developed. The Guidelines are focused on the 5 main types (and relevant subtypes) of riparian forest habitats occurring in Bulgaria, including description of their characteristics, significance and specific features, restoration approaches and pertaining organizational activities.

The purpose of these guidelines is to raise the awareness of relevant owners and managers with regard to the special status and particularities of these areas and to assist the experts in the future efforts for restoration and management of riparian habitats. The publication also aims to assist the work under projects for restoration and management of riparian forest habitats with an emphasis on preserving the water resources and on ensuring river conductivity and flood control.

Enhancing the capacity of EFA, two RFDs, and indirectly of experts in the forestry sector and NGOs is achieved through exchange of experience with colleagues from Hungary, as well as internal exchange of experience that also aided to discuss the challenges under the Project and to plan possible future activities.

Raising the public awareness on issues related to riparian habitat conservation

Within the Project framework, a number of information activities were carried out to raise the awareness and knowledge of various public groups on issues related to the conservation and management of riparian habitats.

A brochure about the riparian habitats describing the benefits they provide, their current state and conservation-related issues was issued and made publicly available. Two events were organized under the motto of *River and Forest Day*, where the main target group was adolescents, while a number of volunteers were involved in activities related to cleaning, trenching, etc. within the target project areas (e.g. Gushterova odaya, the Aleko Island on the Danube).

A special exhibition with 25 posters presenting riparian forests was also prepared and displayed in Plovdiv, Pazardzhik, Sofia, and even in Brussels at the *Beyond Wood* conference.

A gazebo in "Martvitsata protected area is recovered and turns into a green classroom wherethreatened or dissapering species could be seen.

Challenges

The main challenges for the Project were mainly related to the implementation of restoration activities and can generally be grouped in two clusters.

Firstly, two of the initially proposed areas where reconstruction activities under the Project proposal had to be implemented (both in SCI Maritza River) turned out to be problematic because of issues related to unclear ownership. This necessitated the identification of new suitable areas and such were found on the territory of Maritza Municipality (the area of Merich orman) and on the territory of SFE Asenovgrad (the area of Gushterova odaya). The changes made to this end did not affect the initial intentions, neither with regard to the target SCI and the target habitat, nor as regards the specific acreage of the two locations. Thus, the Project objectives remained unaffected. The choice of Merich orman, which is entirely municipal property, proved positive to a certain extent, since the Project had the opportunity to demonstrate good practices for restoration of riparian habitats in forests and land other than state-owned, as initially intended. The importance of pre-arrangements in the planning process of restoration measures, incl. prior clarification of the ownership, using the lessons learned from the Project, was also addressed in the Guidelines for restoration and management of riparian forest habitats.

The second major challenge for the Project was related to the low and very low survival rate of afforested stands, observed in the course of the periodic monitoring. While the rate of striking roots in the target area within SCI Marten Ryahovo was relatively high (80% in the autumn of 2018), the case with the two areas in SCI Maritza River was quite different. In the autumn of 2018, the rate of striking roots in Merich orman was about 59%, and that in the area of Gushterova odaya

only 27% even with the replenishment and watering undertaken. The reasons may be sought primarily in the unfavourable conditions of the summer of 2016 characterized by continuous drought and high summer temperatures. The relatively high drainage rate also plays a certain part for the results in Gushterova odaya, and the ongoing lowering of the riverbed of Maritza resulting from aggregate extraction has a negative role in this aspect. The issue is also described in the Guidelines for restoration and management of riparian forest habitats as a threat to restoration activities. These not completely convincing results gave reason to the project experts to change the replenishment strategy. While afforestation and subsequent replenishment until 2017 were carried out in the spring, the final replenishment (within the Project framework) was preferred to take place in the autumn, presuming to lead to better results. Also, preference was given to species that showed better resilience in the initial afforestation.

Project status, target areas and habitats

SWOT analysis

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
The target project areas are public property, which facilitates communication, decision making and implementation of management decisions.	The project partners (EFA, RFD, WWF-Bulgaria) are not owners of the land where the project conservation activities are undertaken.
The project team is a combination of state institutions (EFA, RFD) and NGO, assembling the experience and authority of the first, and the capacity of NGO in the implementation of conservation activities and their role as a trigger of change.	The project partners do not have the funds for aftercare (as required by the regulatory provisions) of the afforested stands to ensure their long-term sustainability.
Direct involvement of experts from state forestry/hunting enterprises in the conservation activities undertaken for two of the target project areas will provide the necessary support for subsequent maintenance activities.	
Long-term 30-year agreements have been signed with the owners / managers of the land where restoration activities were carried out, obliging them to ensure further management, conservation and protection of the stands.	
The EFA and its regional structures are legally obliged to carry out monitoring and control of all activities (including afforestation) in forest areas, which provides for their future engagement in ensuring the sustainability of project outputs.	
The regulatory provisions for the Natura 2000 network limit the possibilities to turn back to using non-native species (hybrid poplars) in the target areas or their designation for other non-forestry uses.	
Opportunities	**Threats**

Additional future work on restoring and/or enhancing the conservation status of habitat 91E0 can be funded through EU funds as the activity is listed as a measure in the National Prioritised Action Framework for Natura 2000.	Potential adverse climatic conditions (continuous droughts combined with high temperatures) may have a negative impact on the afforested stands.
The forthcoming development of Woodland Development Plans (where forest ecosystem services will be addressed) is an opportunity to integrate conservation requirements for riparian habitats.	Changes in the water balance of target areas resulting from demolition of dykes or from aggregate extraction may lead to a long-term over-wetting (e.g. in SCI Marten-Ryahovo) or a long-term drainage (in Gushterova odaya) of the land, which is likely to have an adverse effect on some of the afforested species at their earliest age.
The interest expressed and demonstrated by the corporate sector to participate in voluntary activities can be used in future restoration and/or maintenance activities.	Frequent institutional changes in the forestry sector can lead to a loss of capacity accumulated within the Project framework.
	The economic focus of the activity of forestry enterprises gives lower priority to afforestation activities that have a purely conservation purpose.
	The lack of a qualified workforce with experience in forestry practices may compromise the aftercare activities and, in general, the future conservation afforestation works.
	The opportunities for direct conservation activities within the OP Environment seem to be limited considering the current conditions. Not all the funding mechanisms for Natura 2000 activities are operational yet (e.g. compensation mechanisms for owners whose forest areas are part of the network have not been set off yet, although the operational programs are already at the end of their implementation for the planning period).

Effect of project activities on target sites and habitats

The effect of project activities for habitat 91E0* in the target SCIs is assessed as follows:

SCI Maritza River (BG0000578)

The area of restored 91E0* habitats in the SCI amounts to 14.2 ha. According to data from the 'Mapping and Identifying the Conservation Status of Natural Habitats and Species - Phase I' Project, the total area of the habitat within the SCI is only 0.43 ha (or 0.003% of the SCI area), showing a significant mismatch to the data listed in the Standard Natura 2000 Data Form, where the habitat area is estimated to be 405.33 hectares. Thus, the newly created forests, if proving sustainable in the future, will contribute to a significant increase in the habitat area within the SCI and its share will have the potential to increase to 0.1% of the SCI area only as a result of the project activities. The application of the Saarland method to 1.8 ha is also expected to contribute

to enhancing the overall habitat coverage and status, since this method has now been applied in anthropogenic habitats with a prevalence of non-native species with spots or sporadically dispersed native vegetation, whose future development and further natural regeneration is tolerated.

At present, the conservation status of the habitat remains unchanged to the findings of the Natura 2000 mapping project – 'unfavourable – unsatisfactory'. (Mapping and Identifying the Conservation Status of Natural Habitats and Species - Phase I' Project, DIR-59318-1-2)

SCI Marten-Ryahovo (BG0000529)

The area of 91E0* habitats restored under the Project in the SCI amounts to 9.8 ha. According to data from the 'Mapping and Identifying the Conservation Status of Natural Habitats and Species - Phase I' Project, the total area of the habitat within the SCI is 229.36 ha (or 19.56% of the SCI area). Thus the Project contributes to an increase of more than 1% of the habitat area.

In addition, the implementation of the Saarland method resulted in enhancing the status of 22.3 ha, due to removing non-native and invasive species and improving the structural characteristics of the species composition.

At present, the conservation status of the habitat remains unchanged to the findings of the Natura 2000 mapping project – 'unfavourable – unsatisfactory', with the potential for certain improvement that can be verified by subsequent more extensive monitoring.

Existing threats to target areas

The main immediate threat to the areas where the project restoration activities were carried out is mainly related to the likelihood of extreme climatic conditions and in particular of adverse temperature and humidity conditions. As observed during the implementation of the Project, the combination of continuous droughts with high temperatures, which proved increasingly likely in the last years, may partially and even entirely compromise the newly created stands.

For Gushterova Odaya specifically, the relatively high rate of land drainage and the decreasing level of groundwater may also have an adverse effect. The reasons for this are debatable, but very likely related to the changes in the level of the Maritsa river (lowering of the riverbed) resulting from the aggregate extraction.

The easy access to the area, in the immediate vicinity of a main road, presents certain threats as well:

- pollution with household waste – illegal landfilling is observed in the accessways to the area;
- pollution with industrial waste – one of the Maritza river branches where untreated water from a local business is discharged passes right next to the area;
- grazing – can lead to damaging the saplings, especially at their young age;
- fires – related with the proximity of a main road.

As regards the areas in SCI Marten - Ryahovo, the main threat is associated with the uncontrolled spread of invasive species, with the potential of impact being significantly higher until the stands develop a good canopy. Therefore, the implementation of sylvicultural measures is of great importance.

For both sites in the longer term there is also the threat of improper implementation of forestry practices. Taking into account the capacity built and the agreements signed to ensure conformity with the project conservation objectives, the likelihood of that is low.

Future conservation priorities

Sustainability of the results achieved can only be ensured if the pursued actions for the target habitat in the target SCIs still continue after the formal completion of the Project. For the purposes of the after-LIFE conservation plan, these actions are divided into such that will be implemented immediately after the end of the project, and potential actions in the longer term, which are considered to contribute to enhancing the conservation status of habitat 91E0, incl. within the target SCIs under the Project.

Activities in the target sites that will be implemented in the near future after the Project completion

In the short term, these activities include: monitoring and inventory of the site status, aftercare for afforested stands, implementation of additional aftercare measures in the areas where the Saarland method is envisaged, protection of the sites from anthropogenic impacts, etc. The implementation of these activities will also ensure compliance with the national regulations and in particular Ordinance No.2 of 7.2.2013 on the afforestation, which requires newly created stands in protected sites to be taken care of in the course of 5 years after the afforestation.

The relevant specific activities, implementation deadlines, responsibilities, financial values and sources of funding are listed in the Table below.

Activity	Implementation Deadline	Responsibility	Source of Funding	Financial Estimate, BGN
Monitoring (current) of the state and inventory (once a year) of the stand in the area of Gushterova odaya – SCI Maritza River	2021	SFE Asenovgrad under the supervision of RFD Plovdiv	SFE budget	BGN 1,000
Aftercares for the afforested stand in the area of Gushterova odaya – two successions in 2019 (incl. removal of sprouts, disking, watering, supplementary afforestation, if necessary), one in 2020 and, if necessary, in 2021.	2021	SFE Asenovgrad under the supervision of RFD Plovdiv	SFE budget	Y2019 – BGN 10,000 Y2020 – BGN 5,000 Y2021 – BGN 5,000 if necessary
Providing protection of the stand in Gushterova	2021	RFD Plovdiv	RFD and SFE budget	Part of the routine work of

odaya against anthropogenic impacts (illegal activities, grazing, etc.)		SFE Asenovgrad		the two institutions
Maintaining the refurbished gazebo in the Oxbow ('Murtvitzata') protected area (SCI Maritza River)	текущо	Popovitza village Hunting company to HFA Parvomay	Volunteers + WWF Bulgaria (if necessary to maintain the information boards)	BGN 500
Monitoring of the status of the site in SCI Maritza River near the city of Parvomay where the Saarland method has been applied	2021	SFE Parvomay	SFE budget	BGN 500
Re-application of the Saarland method to a site in SCI Maritza River – once an year	2021	SFE Parvomay	SFE budget	BGN 600
Monitoring (at least once an year) of the status of the newly created stand in SCI Marten-Ryahovo	2021	SHE Dunav under the supervision of RFD Rousse	SFE and RFD budget	BGN 1,000
Providing protection of the stand in SCI Marten-Ryahovo against anthropogenic impacts (illegal activities, grazing, etc.)	2021	RFD Rousse SHE Dunav	RFD and SFE budget	Part of the routine work of the two institutions
Monitoring of the status of the site in SCI Marten-Ryahovo where the Saarland method has been applied	2021	SHE Dunav	SHE budget	BGN 500
Re-application of the Saarland method to a site in SCI Marten-Ryahovo – once an year	2021	SHE Parvomay	To be identified	BGN 3,000
Integration of the objectives for further enhancement of the conservation status of habitat 91E0 into the Plovdiv District Woodland Development Plan	2024	EFA	EFA budget	BGN 180,000

Integration of the objectives for further enhancement of the conservation status of habitat 91E0 into the Rousse District Woodland Development Plan	2024	EFA	EFA budget	BGN 180,000

The long-term sustainability of the sites where the restoration activities have been carried out, in view of upkeeping the conservation objectives during the future management, is also ensured by the agreements signed with the South-Central and North-Eastern state forestry establishments respectively, as well as with Maritza Municipality for the site in the area of Merich orman. The agreements have a term of 30 years and the parties thereto commit to manage, after the end of the Project, the restored riparian forests in conformity with the law and in line with the approved papers and guidelines related to a system of forest management practices and measures to be applied in natural forest habitat types included in the European Ecological Network Natura 2000.

Potential measures for enhancing the conservation status of habitat 91E0

To enhance the conservation status of habitat 91E0, incl. within the target project SCIs, efforts are needed towards:

Enhancing the baseline information:

- studying the occurrence and environmental role of alien invasive species and testing relevant measures to eliminate/control those;
- more detailed mapping and phytocoenological habitat surveys at national level aimed to outline priority areas for these forests and clarify the environmental trends therein;
- assessment and valuation of the ecosystem services provided by the habitat in various conditions.

Integrating the conservation objectives into the planning documents:

- Undertaking activities to clarify the status of a large part of the riparian habitats and the responsibilities for their management;
- Integrating the objectives related to the habitat conservation/restoration into the District Woodland Development Plans, incl. assessments of ecosystem services;
- Integrating the objectives related to the habitat conservation/restoration into the updated River Basin Management Plans;
- Development of programmes for the gradual conversion of man-made plantations (mostly from Euro-American hybrid poplars) into stands of naturally occurring native species, typical of habitat 91E0, and integration of specific measures in the Forestry Plans (for the forest areas).

Implementing direct restoration and conservation measures:

- Implementing restoration activities in locations favourable for habitat 91E0 (restoration of nearly 80 ha of such habitats on the territory of the South-West State Establishment is included in a project proposal that awaits funding approval under the LIFE Programme);
- Enhancing the status and the natural composition (incl. through application of the Saarland method) of stands that have lost their natural appearance, but still preserve components of habitat 91E0 and provide conditions for natural regeneration of the species occurring in the habitat;
- Gradual replacement of European poplar plantations in protected sites with stands of native species;
- Implementation of programmes for elimination of alien invasive species in protected sites;
- Reinstatement of the water balance in places occupied by alluvial forests, where it has been significantly affected by the construction of various hydro-engineering facilities – e.g. providing conditions for periodic flooding in locations that are not close to settlements; restoration of old riverbeds, etc.;
- Enhancing the protection of lowland riparian forests against illegal felling;
- Instituting incentives and compensation mechanisms for owners of abandoned agricultural lands now occupied by alluvial forests.

Funding opportunities for the conservation work

The National Prioritised Action Framework (2014-2020) for Natura 2000 is the main document setting out the priorities and measures for the conservation and restoration of habitats in the Natura 2000 network, incl. for habitat 91E0. For example, specifically for this habitat, the following priority measures are applicable:

G1a – General priority measures for Natura 2000, incl. scientific surveys/inventories, mapping and assessment of the status; coordination with stakeholders; management of invasive alien species; monitoring and risk management; provision of information materials; infrastructure for restoration of habitats and species; public access infrastructure, etc.

G1b – Priority measures for Natura 2000 for agricultural and forest habitats and species, incl. pilot projects, habitat and species management; compensation of rights and benefits foregone; trainings; construction and maintenance of infrastructure, etc.

G2a - Priority measures for providing ecosystem benefits from Natura 2000, especially in relation to climate change mitigation or adaptation, incl. pilot projects; development of management plans, strategies and schemes; trainings; infrastructure, etc.

G2b - Priority measures for promoting sustainable tourism and employment in relation to Natura 2000, incl. pilot projects; development of management plans, strategies and schemes; monitoring; trainings; infrastructure, etc.

G2c - Priority measures for promoting innovative approaches in relation to Natura 2000, incl. pilot projects and infrastructure for restoration of habitats and species.

The main funding opportunities for future activities similar to those implemented under the LIFE13 NAT/BG/000801 Project are again linked to the EU LIFE Programme. At national level, the main funding instruments are set out in the Rural Development Programme (RDP) and the

Environment Operational Programme (OPE) which pertain to the planning period of 2014-2020, i.e. at the time of the Project completion are almost at the end of their implementation.

As regards the **RDP**, the following measures and sub-measures, directly or indirectly related to the conservation of species and natural habitats in protected areas and sites, are applicable:

Measure 7 – Basic services and village renewal in rural areas

Sub-measure 7.5. Investments in public infrastructure for recreation, tourist infrastructure

Sub-measure 7.6. Surveys and investments related to maintenance and restoration of the cultural and natural heritage of the villages

Measure 8 – Investments in forest area development and improvement of the viability of forests

Sub-measure 8.1. Afforestation and maintenance

Sub-measure 8.3. Prevention of damage to forests from forest fires, natural disasters and catastrophic events

Sub-measure 8.4. Restoration of damage to forests from forest fires, natural disasters and catastrophic events

Sub-measure 8.5. Investments improving the resilience and environmental value of forest ecosystems

Sub-measure 8.6. Investments in forestry technologies and in processing, mobilizing and marketing of forest products

It should be noted here that the forest measure is not among the government priorities and, except for 1, none of the sub-measures have started until the completion of this Project.

Measure 10 — Agri-environment and climate

Sub-measure 10.1 — Payments for agri-environment and climate-related commitments, incl. for maintenance of the habitats of protected species in arable land of ornithological importance, soil erosion control

Measure 12 — Natura 2000 and Water Framework Directive payments

Sub-measure 12.1. Compensation payments for agricultural land within Natura 2000.

As regards the target habitat and sites under the Project, of importance at this stage are **Sub-measure 12.2.** *Compensation payments for forests in Natura 2000* and **Sub-measure 12.3.** *Compensation payments for agricultural areas included in the river basin management plans* which are not subject to funding. The situation is also similar with the whole of Measure 15 – *Forest-environmental and climate services and forest conservation*.

Within the framework of **OPE**, the most relevant in terms of funding of activities pertaining to the Project theme is considered to be Priority Axis 3 – 'Natura and biodiversity' with its relevant

measures aimed at development and improvement of the management of the Natura 2000 network; maintenance and enhancement of the conservation status of species and natural habitats; analyses and surveys of species and habitats for the purposes of the reporting under Art. 17 of the Habitats Directive; drafting/updating management plans for protected sites; support for the development and management of ecosystem services.

Sharing the lessons learnt and the good practices

Dissemination of materials developed under the Project and popularization of the experience gained and the lessons learnt will continue even after the end of the Project, notably with the leading role of the WWF-Bulgaria and the Executive Forest Agency. The achievements and the themes addressed by the Project are summarized in a special brochure: 'Riparian Forests – the wealth we hardly know', issued in 500 copies, whose target audience is the general public.

Another two of the key Project deliverables: the brochure *Riparian forests: benefits, present condition and conservation* and the *Guidelines for restoration and management of riparian forest habitats in Bulgaria* not only provide an opportunity to spread the knowledge among broader circles of society, but are expected to play an important role in enhancing the capacity of experts involved in this specific subject. All these materials are freely available on the websites of WWF-Bulgaria and the EFA.

WWF will continue to use or make available for use in various events the exhibition of riparian forests as well.

After the end of the Project, an article summarizing the Project outputs is envisaged to be included in the specialized magazine 'Gora' (Forest), which is distributed mainly among the forest employees. The article is expected to include links to all the Project information materials.

Sharing of the lessons learned will further continue through informal communication of the teams and experts involved in the Project with other forest experts working at the local, regional or national level.