RESPONSIBLE TOURISM FOR RUSSENSKI LOM NATURE PARK

We all benefit from tourism in nature, but we largely look at this “service” as free and inexhaustible. What if we assess the value of this service and have to pay for it? WWF picked one protected area in Bulgaria – Russenski Lom Nature Park – and set out to demonstrate how the park’s natural capital can be saved from depletion by encouraging tourists and tourist companies to pay for the benefits of nature.

Russenski Lom Nature Park is located near the city of Ruse in the canyon-like valley of Russenski Lom River, a major tributary of the Danube in Bulgaria. In an area of 3,408 ha, 900 plant species, 200 bird species and 22 fish species thrive. The park generates income for 35,000 people living from agriculture, forestry and tourism. Annually the park attracts more than 10,000 visitors, bringing as much as 67,000 € to local people according to pessimistic valuations.
Russenski Lom Nature Park case study

WWF studies of the economic benefits of Russenski Lom Nature Park have revealed a strong economic dimension to it. However, the area is in need of protection because tourism has a major impact on the park's biodiversity and habitats. In 2009–2013, WWF set up a PES scheme to attract financial resources from companies from the tourism branch and visitors to the park. Funds are accumulated on a voluntary basis, with the awareness and consent of people, through donations, environmental surcharge or purchasing of tickets in the form of post cards.

What is the benefit of this PES scheme for people and ecosystems?

The goal of this scheme is to enhance the beauty and biodiversity of Russenski Lom Nature Park with funding from its users. Our vision is that Russenski Lom becomes a place with a restored and protected ecosystem, bringing socio-economic values to local communities with their active involvement.

The funds accumulated through the scheme are spent on conservation activities, including providing fish-stock for the Black stork, restoring Ground squirrel and Corncrake habitats, feeding Egyptian vultures, managing tourist flow through the maintenance of trails and camping places with minimal environmental impact. The management of the financial resources is done by the local association “Friends of Russenski Lom Nature Park” in accordance with the principles of transparency and non-discrimination.

The meadows of Russenski Lom are home to the Ground squirrel, a small rodent threatened with extinction.

The grasslands of Russenski Lom provide natural fodder for local animal-breeders, valued at 66,000 €/year.

Meadows and grazing lands occupy over 400 ha in Russenski Lom, storing 122,139 tonnes equivalent carbon emissions.

The territory of Russenski Lom Nature Park provides carbon sequestration of 1,177,232 tonnes of CO2.

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This case study was prepared as part of the project “Promoting payments for ecosystem services and related sustainable financing schemes in the Danube basin”. This project promotes and supports land managers who help us sustain the benefits that we all get from nature. The project is implemented by the WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme with the financial support of the GEF through UNEP and the European Commission.