

Rapid Assessment of Ecosystem Services, their Values and Potential Financing Mechanisms for Tara National Park, Serbia

Transfer project in the framework of the Klaus Toepfer Fellowship Programme

Vesna Maksimović

WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme Office in Serbia

E-Mail: ves.maksimovic@gmail.com

Executive Summary

Financing of protected areas (PAs) in Serbia comes partly from the State Budget and mostly from other revenues of PA managers and is usually criticized as insufficient. In order to secure funding, PA managers are obliged to use natural resources commercially. This creates a conflict of interest since, in many PAs, one entity is responsible for conservation and commercial exploration of natural resources.

Tara National Park (NP) is a typical forest area with highly preserved, diverse and productive forest ecosystems which cover about 75% of the park's territory. However, the PA manager (Public Enterprise "Tara National Park") is legally obliged to manage forest resources, and forestry activities (timber sale) generate around 80-85% of the annual budget of the PA manager. This leads to a continuous degradation of forest ecosystems and is not consistent with long term biodiversity conservation. In order to secure the future ecological integrity of forest ecosystems of Tara NP, the PA manager must turn to different sustainable financing mechanisms, based on the use of other ecosystem services (ESs). The choice of ESs strongly depends on available markets. Provisioning ESs have direct use values and are convenient to trade, but non-use regulating and cultural services often cannot be marketed. The failure to account for the Total Economic Value (TEV) (sum of use and non-use values) of ESs has been a significant factor in their continuing loss and degradation.

The main objective of this transfer project (TP) was to present to the PA manager a detailed and up-to-date overview of all ESs provided by forest ecosystems of Tara NP, as well as an overview of new potential financing mechanisms for the PA manager based on these ESs. In order to determine which ESs could be explored as a new potential source of income, a rapid ESs assessment was performed, by applying the participatory approach. A survey was created and distributed to 55 members of the local community and PA administration staff, in order to understand which ESs the local community perceives as important in their PA. By rating answers on a scale of 1-4, initial results pointed to 11 important ESs. In order to increase the credibility of survey answers, a technical assessment (TA) of four ESs was performed: biodiversity, carbon sequestration, freshwater and (eco-)tourism and recreation. The assessment criteria were those normally used to set up a PES schemes, since most of these ESs are usually marketed that way. After the assessment, three ESs were chosen for further exploration due to their feasibility to possibly diversify income sources for the park administration: biodiversity, carbon sequestration and (eco-)tourism and recreation.

Regulatory and voluntary market mechanisms were suggested for biodiversity and carbon sequestration. Due to legal and financial obstacles, at the moment, PE "Tara National Park" could only benefit from direct donations and voluntary market schemes. The performed monetary valuation of carbon sequestration serves as a tangible example of possibilities for future financing, since it showed that the annual value of harvested timber within the NP managed by the PA administration is worth approximately € 1,656,721 in carbon credits. In order to increase the income from tourism, a sustainable brown bear watching tourism offer will be developed.

In order to fully account for the TEV of ESs in Tara NP, a full assessment and valuation of all ESs is needed. This study and the applied methodology can be used in other PAs in Serbia and beyond (including Balkan and KTF regions) to perform ES assessments for other PAs. The TP was done in partnership with PE "Tara National Park" and with mentorship of Lucy Emerton (Environmental Management Group, Sri Lanka) and Alen Kiš (Institute for Nature Conservation of Vojvodina Province, Serbia).