Expert input sheet

Conservation and management of Continental Woodland and forest in Bulgaria

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Habitat(s):
91E0 - Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae); 91F0 - Riparian mixed forests of Quercus robur, Ulmus laevis and Ulmus minor, Fraxinus excelsior or Fraxinus angustifolia, along the great rivers (Ulmenion minoris)

Biogeographical region:
Continental

Member state:
Bulgaria

Region(s) (if applicable):

Issues and pressures
J02 Human induced changes in hydraulic conditions
I01 Invasive non-native species
B02.01.02 Forest replanting (non-native trees)
B02.02 Forestry clearance (clear cuts)
B02.04 Removal of dead and dying trees
B06 Grazing in forests/woodland
E01.03 Dispersed habitation
K02.01 Species composition change (succession)

Loss of area is caused by reforestation with exotic tree species and cultivars, agricultural activities such as transformation of riverside forests into cultivated land, grazing, modification of water flow and clearing of the river beds. Hydro-ameliorative activities (construction of dikes, draining, redirection of river beds), small hydropower projects and weirs cause changes in the water regime and deterioration of the conditions in the alluvial forests and reduce area, quality and structure of the phytocoenoses.

Conservation requirements
Development and implementation of legislation. Formal education, awareness and capacity building. Study of the biology and ecology, threats, objectives and levels of crop protection measures, habitat status, trends. Development and implementation of management plans for Natura 2000. Habitat and place based maintenance actions/conservation, restoration, corridors, identification of new protected areas, creation of protected areas, management of protected areas, expansion of protected areas, based initiatives in the community. Forest management systems in continuous forest cover and the sustainable
use of forest resources (many forest ecosystem services approach applies). Designation of areas for maintenance of old-growthness. Introduction and implementation of certain restrictions in managed forests: ban on felling except those for the maintenance of technical equipment; ban on the construction of facilities for the use of renewable energy sources; restrictions of grazing; restrictions of management on slopes steeper than 45 degrees, etc.

**Conservation management**

Much of the preserved parts of the habitat are included in reserves, but their management plans did not actually perform. Certified some units in which management is carried out appropriate habitat, but their share is still small. Very few plans for the management of Natura 2000 sites are elaborated. Are made targeted measures for forest management in Natura 2000 (from the State Forestry Agency), but not yet widely implemented nor tested. Proposed and probated are methodologies for assessing the conservation status of forest habitats have been proposed some restrictions in forest management in Natura 2000 by non-governmental organizations, but not formally adopted and legalized. Education and research in the fields of biology, ecology and forestry are carried out at the university level, but the curriculum should be improved. Designation of areas for maintenance of old-growthness not yet implemented, is currently developing regulatory documents for the initiation and regulation of this activity. There is a real danger that a reduction in area and habitat degradation continue in the future.

**Species specific management:**

Yes

Habitat management should aim to preserve wood are typical composition including species such as Quercus robur, Fraxinus oxycarpa, Ulmus laevis, Ulmus minor, Alnus glutinosa, Populis nigra, Populus alba, etc. The specific character of vegetation due to the participation of a number of lianas, whose protection should also be a priority: Smilax excelsa, Periploca graeca, Vitis sylvestris, Hedera helix, etc. The habitat is important for the conservation of a number of fauna species.

No plant species of the Natura 2000 lists.

**Barriers and bottlenecks**

Lack of operating rules. Dubious activity and competence of the institutions involved. Slow implementation of the new forest policy, highlighting ecosystem functions and biodiversity. Current problems with floods that initiate purged of riverbeds. Lack of experience and traditions in the active protection of the habitat. Lack of motivation on the part of the owners - insufficient funds to compensate forest owners for foregone profits.

**Solutions and opportunities**

Enhancing the competencies and responsibilities of the persons and institutions. Providing funds for compensation to the owners. Financing of activities for sustainable management. Informing the public about the importance of habitat protection. Dissemination of modern management methods among professionals in the field.
Cross cutting issues
Effective habitat protection would be possible that a general state policy, involving all relevant institutions. Bad example in this respect is the inclusion of the National Forestry Agency in the process of formulating prohibitions on activities in forest habitats in orders for designation of protected areas. Extremely appropriate would be ongoing discussions on the legal basis for the preparation of forest management plans and programs to include representatives of the Ministry of Environment and Water. Possibility of drawing up integrated management plans is too tempting to be missed. So would save funds and efforts in achieving effective management and conservation of biodiversity. It is very important the role of state institutions as arbitrator in conflicts arising between the interests of local communities and the interests of nature conservation.

Lessons learned / best practice
Floodplain riparian forests are one of the most affected by human activities in Bulgaria habitats. The majority of them is in the range of reserves and protected areas. In recent years developed significant number of projects to restore and protect the places have been destroyed or are in an advanced stage of degradation. Most of these projects are in the initial stage and it is too early to draw definitive assessments of their effectiveness. One of the most important lessons learned is that the recovery of specific species composition through reforestation and planting of typical species is doomed, if not permanently reinstated specific hydrological regime. Correction of river flows, drainage areas to increase agricultural areas, construction of hydraulic facilities have led to permanent changes in habitat and in many cases recovery is almost impossible. The main effort should be directed towards the elimination of area losses and decline of structural and functional characteristics. The best possibilities for recovery are in the territories in which in the past natural trees have been replaced as a result of reforestation with non-native species and cultivars.

Opportunities for joint action
Floodplain riparian forests are habitat to azonal nature and are found in all countries in continental region. This provides great opportunities for exchange of experiences related to activities in conservation and management of this habitat.

References
