

Work Package 3: Proposal for integrated development of the network of protected areas in Lithuania

Activity 3.5. Preparation of proposal for development of the network of protected areas in Lithuania

Summary of the report

The proposal for the development of the network of protected areas dedicated to the conservation of biodiversity was formulated based on the outcomes of project activities 2.2, 2.3, 3.1-3.4. It involved the application of various GIS tools, including multi-criteria analysis using the "Suitability Modeler," a tool commonly used for prioritizing areas for conservation. The selection of conservation areas also took into consideration the need to achieve more even representation among and within the biogeographical districts.

The proposed areas for biodiversity conservation cover 15.3% of the total land area. Including already established protected areas focusing on biodiversity conservation, this constitutes 28% of the total land area. Proposed strictly protected areas make up 2.8%, and this figure increases to 3.4% when including current nature reserves. Habitats of community importance account for almost half of the proposed strictly protected areas. Proposed OECM's (Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures) – 12.5 %.

However, the project identified several challenges. Firstly, protected areas as a conservation tool are not equally effective in achieving different conservation goals. Secondly, the extent of designations requires substantial time and resources. Lithuania has not yet completed the establishment of the Natura 2000 network, and the process faces challenges due to overstretched human resources and opposition from landowners. In light of this, the project focused on state-owned land as the basis for protected areas. Additionally, there is no legal basis for the establishment of strictly protected areas and one type of proposed OECM - migratory corridors. Existing types of protected areas do not align well with these two categories.

Overall, the process of prioritization proved to be challenging and raised numerous questions but provided an important basis for further efforts in the conservation of biodiversity.

The final map indicating all proposed changes in the network of protected areas (scale 1:100 000) has been produced using ArcGIS Desktop Advanced (ArcMap and ArcGIS Pro) software with relevant Analysis, Spatial Analyst, Spatial Statistics, Network Analyst and Data Management tools and made available for general public on the interactive web mapping application. A static digital map (A0+, scale 1:350 000) has been also prepared using ArcMap software and available in JPEG and PDF formats.