

Protection and management of coastal habitats - LV

1. Policy Objective & Theme

- SUSTAINABLE USE OF RESOURCES: Preserving coastal environment (its functioning and integrity) to share space
- SUSTAINABLE USE OF RESOURCES: Sound use of resources and promotion of less resource intensive processes/products

2. Key Approaches

- Participation
- Ecosystems based approach
- Socio-economic
- Technical

3. Experiences that can be exchanged

Working with local stakeholders to conserve, restore and manage coastal habitats and species of Community importance which are under pressure from human activities,

4. Overview of the case

The whole Latvian coastline was subjected to habitat mapping to use as a basis for the development of management plans and the implementation of urgent restoration measures for the most threatened habitats and species.

5. Context and Objectives

a) Context

The entire Baltic Sea coast, with an approx. 300 m wide zone, was the focus for this work. In Latvia, this territory is traditionally protected as the Baltic Sea coastal protection belt. In areas where nature conservation plans were elaborated for the protected nature areas, actions were extended to cover the entire areas of the habitats. The length of the Baltic Sea Coast in Latvia is 496 km and approx. 45% of the Latvian Sea coast has been included in the national Natura 2000 network. Between 1945 and 1990, access to the seashore in Latvia was restricted because the western boundary of Latvia was also the border of the USSR. Controlled access was allowed only in particular locations. While this system degraded the traditional economical and cultural environment, it ensured that natural habitats were protected and that building was restricted in contrast to most other European countries. These restrictions were removed after renewal of independence in 1991. Now, the number of visitors in the coastal zone is growing exponentially. Natural habitats are suffering both from the activities of tourists and from inappropriate management.

The main threats to the coast are degradation of natural habitats by recreation and activities of tourism; deterioration of the ecosystem by motorised vehicles; destruction of indigenous flora and vegetation by aggressive alien species; the reduction of the area of grey dunes; a decreasing area of semi-natural meadows; a decrease of the biological diversity of forests resulting from inappropriate management; a decrease in the area of endangered habitats due to building and due to inappropriate coastal management; deterioration of endangered habitats in protected nature areas due to lack of nature conservation plans; and deterioration of natural habitats due to low public awareness.

b) Objectives

The aim was the conservation, restoration and sustainable management of coastal habitats and species of Community importance. There would be a focus on 14 demonstration sites, including 20 ha. of grey dunes and 115 ha. of coastal meadows, and four management plans were developed in close consultation with local municipalities and communities. Once these would be established, a number of urgent on-site actions would be undertaken to restore and protect key areas from further damage or degradation. This entails an extensive programme of visitor management to channel the increasing stream of tourists away from the most sensitive areas. Accompanying this would be a national awareness-raising campaign aimed at visitors and local communities.

6. Implementation of the ICZM Approach (i.e. management, tools, resources)

a) Management

The North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve and Liepāja Regional Environmental Board worked with the Faculty of Biology, University of Latvia to realise the initiative.

b) ICZM tools

One of the most important aspects of the initiative was the elaboration of nature conservation plans for 4 Natura 2000 sites — Nature Parks “Piejūra” and “Bernāti”, and Nature Reserves “Užava” and Vidzemes Akmenaina Jurmala.

Nature Park “Bernāti” is located in Nica municipality, Liepāja District. Biodiversity values — wooded dunes, grey dunes and fore-dunes. Main threat is the growing anthropogenic pressure. Management priorities: conservation of old dune forests and dune slacks, building of recreation infrastructure, raising of public awareness. A Nature conservation plan was elaborated and Regulations on Individual Protection and Use of the Nature Park were approved on 08.04.2004.

Nature Reserve “Užava” is located in Užavamunicipality, Ventspils District. Main nature values —pristine grey dunes (grey dunes with herbaceous vegetation, grey dunes with *Salix repens*), wooded dunes with old, naturally developed pine forests. For 12 lichen species, Užava grey dunes is the only locality in Latvia. Management priorities: diminishing anthropogenic pressure by establishment of a network of nature paths, resting sites, car parks; public education. The nature conservation plan was approved on 01.11.2004.

Nature park “Piejūra” is located at the coast of Gulf of Riga, in Riga, Carnikava and Saulkrasti municipalities. This is an area of high diversity of coastal habitats — the beach, white and grey dunes, various types of grasslands including coastal meadows, lagoons etc. In summer, the park is a holiday site for thousands of people. Nature protection priorities: the establishment of recreation infrastructure, control of the nature protection regime, public education. The plan has been approved and Regulations on Individual Protection and Use were approved on 14.03.2006.

Nature Reserve “Vidzemes Akmenaina Jurmala” is located in Limbaži District, Salacgrīva and Liepupe municipalities. Habitats — fore-dunes, embryonic dunes, grey dunes, wooded dunes, semi-natural grasslands, and also beaches with stones and pebbles, and sandstone cliffs at the sea coast. Management priorities: diminishing of anthropogenic pressure (by means of boardwalks, stairs, waste management), dune strengthening at some sites, control of invasive species, public education. The plan was approved on 20.08.2004.

Implementation of the management plans has led to the restoration and maintenance of coastal meadows and grey dunes in areas where immediate protection actions were required (cutting of trees and bushes, mowing, grazing); removal of aggressive alien plant species (in some areas where they were rapidly expanding in distribution and destroying indigenous flora). For the restoration and maintenance of the coastal meadows, mowing and grazing of coastal grasslands was organised in Nature Reserve “Randu plavas” and in the Nature Park “Piejūra”. In Randu meadows, an enclosure of 21 ha. was built, the area grazed by cattle looked after by a local farmer; a further 16.5 ha. were managed by mowing. In Nature Park “Piejūra”, more than 80 hectares of reed beds and grasslands were mown with cattle grazing 5.5 ha. After only 3 years of grassland management, the biodiversity began to increase. The cover of reed decreased and the abundance of typical grassland species as well as rare species (*Armeria maritima*, *Gladiolus imbricatus*, *Dactylorhiza incarnata*, *Triglochin maritimum*) have increased. In mown grasslands in Salacgrīva, the abundance of *Angelica palustris* has increased. After the end of the work, the grassland management continued, thanks to an agri-environmental system and the support of Riga and Salacgrīva municipalities.

Invasive species are being restricted in the coastal zone. *Rosa rugosa* is the most dispersed and aggressive species: it

threatens the open dunes, dune woodlands and also grasslands and is mostly found in foredunes and grey dunes. In dune woodlands in Riga and Jurmala, the invasive shrub *Amelanchier spicata* is spreading; its dispersal is promoted by eutrophication.

7. Cost and resources

The total budget was €2,270,860 of which there was a Life contribution of €1,703,145.

8. Effectiveness (i.e. were the foreseen goals/objectives of the work reached?)

The basic framework for the sustainable management of the coastal protection belt of the Baltic Sea in Latvia has been created. Information gathered on habitat mapping and functional zoning is being widely used for the planning of nature conservation measures and the drawing up and evaluation of the territorial plans of the coastal municipalities. The building of a small-scale demonstration site consisting of pedestrian trails, stairs, resting sites and car parking sites etc. served to raise awareness among local stakeholders. The project also drew up comprehensive digital maps of habitats of Community importance and functional zoning for the protection measures in the coastal zone of Latvia. These maps have been used by local government bodies as a way of integrating conservation into the management planning of 24 municipalities. The implementation of management plans is on-going in a proposed area of 987 hectares. In addition, 65 micro-reserves have been approved.

9. Success and Fail factors

The awareness-raising reached coastal municipalities and landowners who were able to learn more about sustainable coastal management. The local stakeholders are, therefore, equipped to continue the conservation initiatives.

10. Unforeseen outcomes

None so far.

11. Prepared by

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12. Verified by

It has not been possible to verify this case.

13. Sources

- PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT OF COASTAL HABITATS IN LATVIA Layman's Report
- LIFE02 NAT/LV/008498 Year 2002-2006 Faculty of Biology, University of Latvia



LIFE 8498 laymans report (8.7 MB)

