

Reinforcing protected areas capacity through an innovative methodology for sustainability

Newsletter 1: October 2018



BIO2CARE – A project that cares for the environment

A Few Words for our Project

Reinforcing protected areas capacity through an innovative methodology for sustainability “BIO2CARE” is a project approved for funding under the Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020 territorial cooperation programme. BIO2CARE falls under the Priority Axis 2: A Sustainable and Climate adaptable Cross-Border area, Thematic Objective 6: Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency, Investment Priority 6d: Protecting and restoring biodiversity, soil protection and restoration and promoting ecosystem services including NATURA 2000 and green infrastructures.

In full compliance with CBC GR-BG 2014-20 objective, BIO2CARE project overall objective is “To reinforce Protected Areas’ Management Bodies (PA MBs) efficiency and effectiveness in an innovative and integrated approach”, promoting territorial cooperation in a very concrete and well-defined approach. BIO2CARE main objective is to enhance PA MBs administrative capacities on the benefit of biodiversity as of local communities. This is in full compliance with programme priority specific objective: “To enhance the effectiveness of biodiversity protection activities”.

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The Project is co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund and by national funds of the countries participating in the Interreg V-A "Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020" Cooperation Programme.

The BIO2CARE proposed decision-making platform could become a valuable tool for understanding the activities and quantifying their respective impacts on biodiversity (e.g. measuring ecological footprint, carbon footprint and water footprint). The monitoring activities proposed will give a competitive advantage in managing bodies to enhance their capabilities of protecting the areas of interest and mitigating illegal activities. Small infrastructures like pathways accessible by disabled people will make PAs more attractive to new audience never been attracted so far, while will attract new target groups for neighboring businesses. At the same time this will be PAs contribution to social coherence. To further more support entrepreneurship on surrounding areas BIO2CARE will establish the process of awarding an ecolabel, a quality scheme that will help local businesses to show a qualitative distinction, surpassing competitors.

BIO2CARE applies an integrated approach responding to PAs entire environmental systems. It will deliver a wide range of differentiated outputs. Its main deliverables are:

(D.1) a set of studies,

(D.2) one set of monitoring equipment fully operational per country,

(D.3) two sets of ICT applications and e-tools for valorizing, studies and data produced from monitoring systems per country,

(D.4) two small infrastructures certified for disabled people use,

(D.5) one common labeling scheme,

(D.6) training sessions and

(D.7) one Policy Recommendations Report.

D.1, D.2, D.3 will form the essential components of one integrate Decision Support system (DSS) per country, that could operate separately or jointly on the Cross-Border area. D.4, D.5, D.6 will feedback DSS. Lessons learned during BIO2CARE implementation and scientific results from studies will form the D.7 output, to be discussed during last quarter of project with local, regional and national authorities.



The seven Rila lakes Credits: Rila National Park



Riparian forest, river Nestos *Credits: Municipality of Nestos*

Expected Results of BIO2CARE project

BIO2CARE project intervention logic was developed based on the theory of change, taking into account the attempted changes as the basis for a result orientated project. It will succeed so,

(1) by producing new knowledge (WP3),

(2) by applying to PA MBs new procedures and tools (WP3&4),

(3) by setting the first solid foundations for one common or two commonly operating cross-border Decision Support system (-s) (WP4),

(4) by setting in operation two jointly designed sets of monitoring equipment and exchanging information produced by them (WP4),

(5) by setting in force an eco-labeling award scheme to help local businesses to overcome possible disadvantages emerge from protection status that apply (WP4),

(6) by making PAs accessible to disable and aged persons (WP4 & 5),

(7) by training specific target groups with training sessions and workshops (WP5),

(8) by aware target groups and wide audience (WP2),

(9) by contributing to a better policy making through Policy Recommendations Report (WP5).



Riparian forest, river Nestos *Credits: Municipality of Nestos*

As BIO2CARE project is devoted to change, at the end of its implementation major positive impacts will be identified on PA MBs capacities and on local business communities. The development of the two e-tools will increase the managerial capacity of the PA MBs in order to improve the management of the PAs as systems, define and prioritize the necessary improvements. The combination with high-tech monitoring systems (both for fauna/flora and for illegal activities) will furthermore contribute to the improvement of PAs environmental status. Small technical works (pathways), will provide a steady groundwork for the promotion of green tourism without discrimination, for every disabled and/or aged person to enjoy the natural beauty of the PAs. This social approach of green tourism that is coupled with the promotion of the silver economy approach is expected to be a starting point for the establishment of similar activities in both countries.

Our Partnership

We Cooperate! We Act Jointly and We All Win!

Democritus University of Thrace (DUTH - LB) is represented in the Project by **The Laboratory of Environmental Management and Industrial Ecology (LEMIE)** which is one of the laboratories of the Department of Production and Management Engineering of the Engineering School of Democritus University of Thrace. LEMIE provides training for undergraduate and postgraduate students of the Faculty of Engineering in environmental management, industrial ecology, environmental technology, industrial process systems and principles of sustainable development in Engineering. The main objective of LEMIE research activities is to increase the environmental sustainability of industrial systems through the development and adaptation of sustainable practices and strategies. LEMIE aims at realistic and applicable solutions based on holistic and innovative approaches and tools of Industrial Ecology. The research activities and interests of LEMIE extend to the following subjects:

- Sustainable Development - Production:
 - ✓ Development of methodologies for assessing the sustainability of industrial systems
 - ✓ Analysis of the life cycle of technical systems
 - ✓ Development of symbiotic eco-industrial actions
 - ✓ Social operational licensing of industrial systems

- Environmental Management:
 - ✓ Environmental Impact Analysis
 - ✓ Development of Sustainable Energy Action Plans addressing Climate Change
 - ✓ Assessment of Carbon Footprint and Carrying Capacity of technical and wider systems

- Environmental Technology - Air Pollution:
 - ✓ Assessment of indoors and ambient air quality with emphasis on suspended particulate matter

The Municipality of Nestos (PB3), is located at the eastern most point of Macedonia (Kavala regional unit) having Chrysoupoli, as its capital city. It has a size of 679 km² and a population of approximately 22.330 inhabitants. It is a place of unparalleled beauty with a diverse geophysical landscape. It has a rich mountainous mass with traditional villages, forests with beeches. Municipality of Nestos has been inherited with significant natural and cultural heritage capital as the historical nucleus of Chrysoupoli, the archaeological trade city of Pistyros, ancient Topeiros of Roman Via Egnatia, Lithochori with the burials of the horses, the imposing Monastery of Nikites, the Delta of Nestos, Keramoti with the emerald waters and the fine white sand as well as the largest riverside forest in Europe, Kotza Orman. Municipality of Nestos is a key transit node, as in its limits operates the airport "Megas Alexandros", as well as the port of Keramoti, through which is ensured a freight and passenger traffic to Thasos by ferry.

The wetland complex of our municipality is one of the most important in Greece, due to high biological, aesthetic, scientific, educational and geomorphological value. The habitats of the Nestos Delta show an exceptional variety and make up a mosaic that favours wildlife. Our main objective is to enhance the natural environment and protect the habitats of rare flora and fauna that inhabit and breed in the area.

The area around the Nestos River is full of history, which, starts from the Paleolithic Age. Thracian territory until the time of the Macedonians and constantly inhabited in the years of the Roman and Byzantine Empires, the area around Nestos remains a bounteous archaeological field for research and study.

Due to large scale irrigation projects, Chrysoupoli is nowadays the center of agricultural production on the western side of the Nestos Delta. Agricultural cooperatives standardize and export a large number of agricultural products to foreign markets. The kiwis and the asparagus of Nestos is considered to be of top quality and they are the most important exported agricultural products. At the lagoons of Keramoti (Vassova, Erateino, Agiasma) stand out the fish hatcheries with sea breams, crabs, mussels, sardines and mullets. Nowadays the "Nestos geothermal field" is exploited by a company specialized in the production of decorative and floricultural plants.

Website: <http://nestos.gr>

The Greek Biotope/Wetland Centre (EKBY – PB4) has its roots in the Goulandris Natural History Museum (www.gnhm.gr) founded in 1964; by its statutes (Presidential Decree 1220/B/2002), the Museum is mandated to conduct research and education activities. According to the same legislation, the aim of the Museum is the *“promotion of natural sciences and the simultaneous education of man, so that through knowledge he may return to the respect of nature as the sole source of life”*.

EKBY was established by the Museum in 1991, in Thessaloniki, Greece, with funding from the European Union and the Ministry of the Environment. Its facilities are located at The Farm of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki; with an area of 1,200 square meters, they include office spaces, a laboratory, a library with reading room, a lecture hall, meeting spaces, etc.

The overall objective of EKBY is *“to promote the sustainable management of renewable natural resources in Greece and other areas of the Mediterranean and Europe”*.

EKBY has extensive experience in the implementation of EU legislation and policies, including the Water Framework Directive, the Habitats and Birds Directives and Biodiversity Strategy, as well as in surveillance and monitoring of sites/habitats/species, monitoring waters bodies, management planning for Natura 2000 sites and other protected areas, environmental interpretation, public awareness, education and training. It maintains rich archives with environmental information and operates the biodiversity portal (www.biodiversity-info.gr) with more than 200,000 visits per year. Its contribution has been acknowledged by the EU (e.g. Best LIFE and Natura 2000 awards).

Website: www.ekby.gr



Delta, river Nestos Credits: Municipality of Nestos

The **National Confederation of Disabled People** (N.C.D.P. - PB5), is the umbrella organization representing the disability movement of Greece. N.C.D.P. was founded in 1989, as a non-profit legal entity, by organizations of people with disabilities and their families in order to cope with issues of common interest related to any kind of disability and therefore, is a strong, independent representative body for all disabled people in the Greek state. Today, N.C.D.P. has more than 450 member-organizations that deal with all kinds of disabilities. The N.C.D.P.'s mission is to combat discrimination against people with disabilities and protect their constitutional and human rights as well as the rights of their families. Its goal is the equalization of opportunities for people with disabilities in all areas of life, including the area of employment. Over the last years the N.C.D.P. has been working very hard for the implementation of the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which was ratified by the Greek State in 2012 (Greek Law 4074/2012). The N.C.D.P. is a founding member of the European Disability Forum (E.D.F), which is the umbrella organization of persons with disabilities and their families in European Level. In relation to Bio2care, our hope at N.C.D.P. is that this innovative project will set a precedent and a reference for many others to recognize their responsibility (and benefits) to provide access to all and to start working all together towards opening the door to nature for people with disabilities.

Website: www.esamea.gr

The **Regional Inspectorate of Environment and Waters – Blagoevgrad** (RIEW – Blagoevgrad), PB6, is a subdivision and an administrative structure of the Ministry of Environment and Waters of Bulgaria, ensuring the implementation of the state policy on environmental protection at regional level. The main responsibilities of RIEW – Blagoevgrad are:

- Water management policy
- Policy in the field of management of hazardous chemicals
- Policy in the field of waste management and soil protection
- Policy in the field of protection of atmospheric air purity
- Policy in the field of biodiversity conservation
- Policy - assessment and management of the environmental impact
- Policy in the field of enhancing control activity

The objectives of RIEW - Blagoevgrad controlling activities derive from the mission and strategic objectives of the Ministry of Environment and Water for preservation and improvement of the state of the environment, reasonable and effective use of natural resources and ensuring the reproduction, preservation of the diversity and restoration of the ecosystems and the services they provide.

Rila National Park Directorate (RNPD), PB7, is a specialized regional authority of the Ministry of Environment and Waters which has among its goals to preserve and maintain biological diversity and protect wildlife in the Park, and to foster scientific research as well as opportunities for developing tourism and ecologically sound sources of livelihood for the local population. All activities within the Park are carried out under the direction of a ten year Management Plan, approved by the Council of Ministers (Cabinet) of the Republic of Bulgaria.

The National Park Directorate comprises a Central Office, based in Blagoevgrad, and eight local branch offices responsible for management of the respective nine Park sections: Blagoevgrad, Belitsa, Yakoruda, Belovo, Kostenets, Borovets, Beli Iskar, Govedartsi, and Dupnitsa. A Visitor Centers operates at the Resort Complex of Panichishte and town of Samokov and provides information and guidance to tourists and visitors to Rila National Park.

The South-West University of Neofit Rilski in Blagoevgrad (SWU), PB8, is a state institution that offers training in Bulgarian and English in 71 Bachelor's, 100 Master's and 74 specialized PhD programmes. With its 38-years history, the SWU has subjugated a leading position in the scientific and educational space both in Bulgaria and Eastern Europe. The basic structures of the University include the following faculties: Law and History; Natural Science and Mathematics; Economics; Public health, health care and sport; Pedagogy; Philology; Philosophy; Arts; and Engineering.

SWU employs over 800 lecturers including professors, associate professors and assistant professors who provide training in different scientific fields for about 14 000 students of whom 700 are international. The University provides board and accommodation in three canteens and two renovated dormitories. Its library possesses over 200 000 volumes, an e-reading room with free access to the data bases of EBSCO Publishing, Science Direct, SCOPUS, Benham Sciece and ProQuest Central. The Career Centre provides quality aid and services to help the SWU students obtain adequate professional advice as well as support for the university graduates in finding suitable positions at the labour market.

The Pirin Tourism Forum (PTF), PB9, is a Bulgarian NGO established in 1997 as the successor of the three-year Project for Eco and Sustainable Tourism in Pirin and Rila (PREST, 1994-1997) funded by the British Environmental Know How Fund. The founders were municipalities from Blagoevgrad District and the Pirin National Park Directorate. The PTF acted as the regional tourism board for Southwest Bulgaria for about 13 years. At present, it rather has the character of a product organization focused on the development of sustainable tourism all over Bulgaria but also in the border areas of neighbouring countries.

The types of activities of PTF are: (1) strategic planning in the fields of tourism and environment protection incl. Management Plans of protected areas; (2) development of human resources for tourism, incl. trainings, information and awareness raising, dissemination of good practices, exchange and study trips, etc.; (3) inventory and evaluations of tourism and environmental resources; (4) development of tourism services and products with focus on heritage interpretation, incl. thematic trails, visitor centers' expositions, folklore demonstrations, culinary tasting, etc.; (5) information provision of tourism, incl. tourism databases, dissemination of printed and electronic information, signposting, etc.; (6) tourism marketing, incl. production of advertisement materials and souvenirs, Web sites, fam trips for media and tour operators, participation in travel fairs, etc.; (7) environmental education and research, incl. development of educational programmes and guidebooks, training of trainers, analysis of the components of environment, etc.; (8) project preparation and management.



PTF Culinary Weekends 2018 Credits: Pirin Tourism Forum

Implementation of BIO2CARE project

Since the beginning of the project, LEMIE put focus on the recruitment of the right people that could bring their scientific expertise on board, for the successful implementation of the BIO2CARE activities. All the procurement procedures regarding staff members for the project have been completed on January of 2018.

Since the procurement procedures for staffing were successfully completed, the immediate work assignment for each Work Package followed. LEMIE staff members focused on the detailed description and content development for several Deliverables, while, in compliance with the Lead Beneficiary role, distributed relevant content to all project Beneficiaries, while ensuring efficient communication among all parties. As of the time of the first newsletter, the Deliverables regarding the development of the methodological framework are nearly completed, showcasing promising results. At the same time, LEMIE worked on the communication plan for the project, which is meant to be finalized within the next few weeks.

BIO2CARE Project Kick-off Meeting in Chrysoupoli, GR

The Kick off Meeting of the Project “BIO2CARE” took place in the Town Hall – City Council Room of the Municipality of Nestos, Chrysoupoli, Greece on 14-16 of November 2017. The Mayor of the Municipality of Nestos, Mr. Tsompanopoulos welcomed the participants and highlighted the significance of the project since the effective protection of the Nestos River and Lakes Vistonida – Ismarida is of prime importance to the Municipality of Nestos. Mr. Tsompanopoulos expressed his support to the Project’s objectives and his belief that the project will be successful.

During the meeting LEMIE presented a more detailed description of the Work Packages, timeline and respective deliverables and lead a discussion. Issues discussed included the allocation of specific responsibilities for each task and review of budget allocation/STPP. Additionally, the Project Steering Committee, Coordination, Quality Control Groups and WP Leaders were defined and the Communication Plan was discussed. The Kick-Off meeting was very successful and all partners gained a clearer picture of their obligations and the objectives of the BIO2CARE project.



The BIO2CARE team with the Mayor of the Municipality of Nestos during the Kick-off meeting



The Kick-off meeting ended up with a Team-Building field trip where partners had the opportunity to visit the Delta of Nestos Information Center located in Keramoti, enjoy the natural habitat of the National Park of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace and go bird-watching

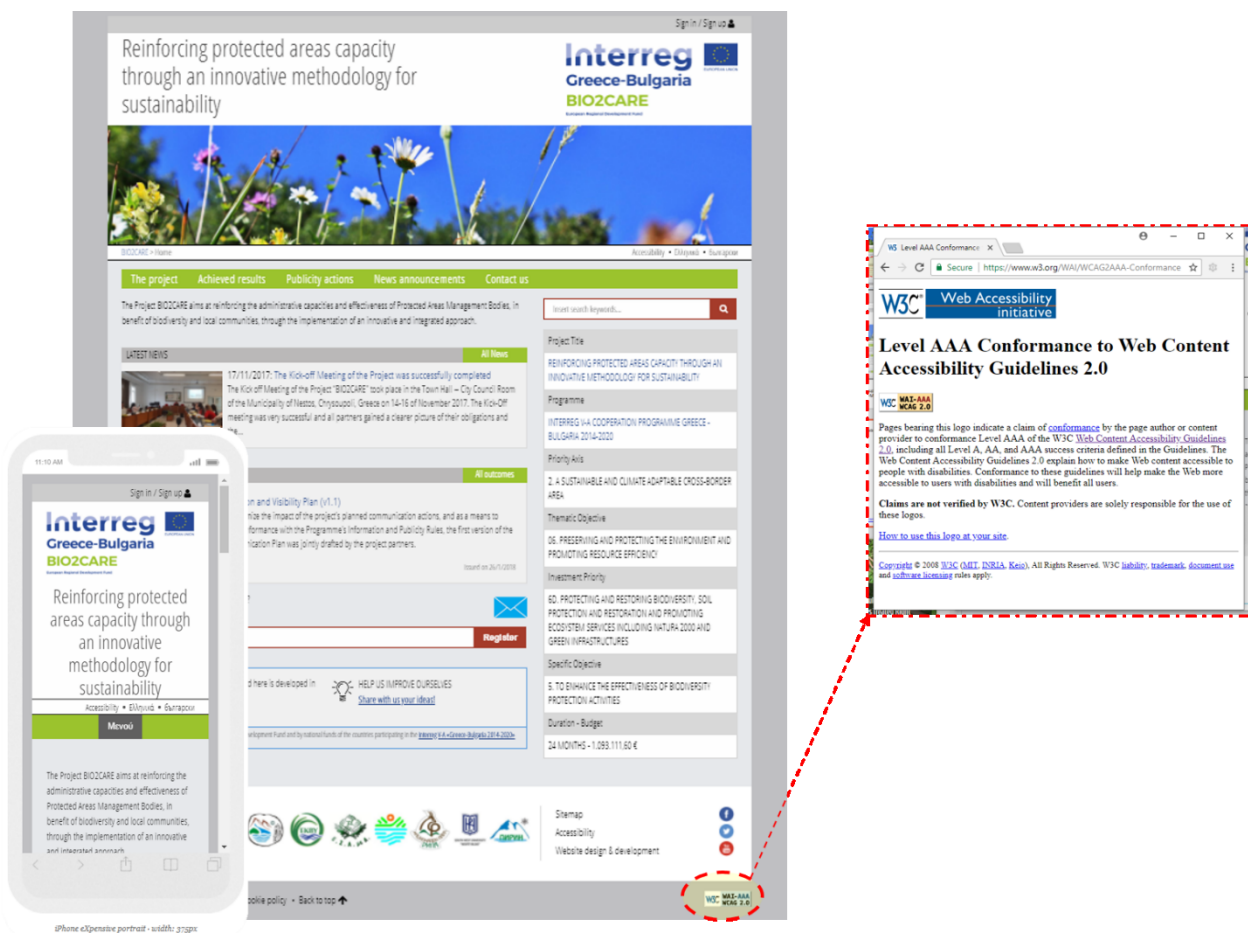
Municipality of Nestos (PB3)

During last semester Municipality of Nestos (PB3), has succeed the following tasks:

1. Municipality of Nestos has conclude an External experts Tender resulting to hire two experts.
2. It has participated in BIO2CARE 2nd PSC Meeting took place in Xanthi 30-31 October 2018. He has participated with three experts, presenting partner achievements during last semester.
3. It has consolidated an internal informal group of experts to monitor and accelerate the smooth implementation of the project.

D2.4 – Official Project Website, accessible to all

NCDP, PB5 in BIO2CARE, designed a website dedicated to the project, for communicating widely the objectives, the activities and the achieved results of Bio2Care (see www.bio2care.eu). This official website of the project follows contemporary best practices for accessibility to people with disabilities and various adaptations mechanisms, while it is fully conformant with the last standard of W3C for accessibility WCAG 2.0, at the highest possible level, i.e. at level AAA. The website will be constantly updated with new information and data, in all three languages: English, Greek and Bulgarian.



Partners PB6, PB7, PB8 and PB9

WP1

All BG partners have appointed their project management staff and developed the initial project documents such as procurement plans and others. They have provided input for the first project amendment approved in February 2018. They have taken part in the kick-off project meeting in Chrysoupoli, Greece, and the 1st Steering Committee Meeting in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria. Each partner has appointed representatives for the project management and monitoring bodies. PB9 has already undergone a process of expenditure verification for the first project reporting period (20.10 – 31.12.2017).

WP2

D.2.1 – Communication Plan

All BG partners have made initial contributions to the development of the project Communication Plan; they have filled in the Questionnaires for initial survey prepared by the LP, and have provided inputs for p. 6 – Communication activities and tools chosen – of the Plan. PB9 is working on the chapters of the Plan that are its responsibility (9. Timetable, and 10. Information and Publicity Guidebook).

D.2.2 – Four project newsletters

PB9 has collected information from all other BG partners and have provided the input for the Bulgarian part of the project territory. It has also translated this first newsletter into Bulgarian language.

D.2.3 – Promo material in three languages

Those are being currently specified in the draft Communication Plan of the project. External service providers have been appointed meanwhile and ready to begin work.

D.2.4 – Project web-site and social media campaign

BG partners have provided initial inputs for the project web-site in terms of profiles and photos. PB6 has appointed an expert to create project profiles in different social media (for example Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and etc.) for the purpose of acquaintance as well as project results distribution and communication with the stakeholders and the general public and to update regularly created profiles by uploading the results and information for the project to each created social media platform.

D.2.5 – Presentations/contributions to external events

Has not started for BG partners.

WP3

D.3.1 – Study on anthropogenic activities in the project territories

PB8 has developed 11 reports for the Study, namely: “Geographical Characteristics”, “Flora”, “Fauna”, “Forests”, “Waters”, “Demographic Characteristics”, “Energy Analysis”, “Transport Activity”, “Building Stock”, “Agricultural and Livestock Activity”, and “Industrial Activity”. PB6 has contributed with the report “Key material, food and energy flows”, and PB9 – with the report “Tourist Activity”. All these reports concern the Bulgarian project area of Rila NP and Blagoevgradska Bistritsa River catchment area in particular.

PB9 has also provided contributions with the SWOT and benchmark analyses of the Bulgarian study area, the latter including comparison with other protected areas outside of Bulgaria.

D.3.2 – Methodological framework for assessing the environmental status of examined areas

PB6 and PB8 are in the process of finalizing their experts’ reports on various aspects of the methodology of carrying capacity (CC) estimation and the assessing of the environmental status of the examined area.

D.3.3 – Implementation of the methodological framework in two intervention areas

Preparatory activities have been launched which include the appointment of experts and preparation of technical specifications for events.

D.3.4 - Case study/model assessing the symbiotic potential of the existing and future activities within the examined areas & Comparative study based on the Life Cycle Approach, presenting the benefits of circular economy for the environment (existing situation vs symbiotic situation)

Has not started for BG partners.

Activities of BIO2CARE project beneficiaries

Event organized by Municipality of Nestos (PB3)

During last semester Municipality of Nestos has informed the participants of an Informative evening event "*To prevent the burning of the reeds in the Nestos plain*" took place at the Municipal Theater of Chrysoupolis on 28/11/2018. The event has been organized by the Managing Authority of Nestos Delta, Vistonida-Ismarida & Thassos, a former partner of BIO2CARE project. The speakers were Mr. Hantzaras Alexandros from the Managing Authority of Nestos Delta, Vistonida-Ismarida & Thassos, Mr. Panzartzidis Panagiotis - Commander of the Chrysoupolis Fire Brigade, Mr. Argyrakis Savvas - President of the Rural Association of Nestos Municipality, Simoglou Konstantinos - Msc Agricultural Engineer - Entomologist - DAOK Drama. Municipality of Nestos took the challenge to present BIO2CARE objectives and to stress how an anthropogenic activity such the burning of the reeds will affect biodiversity and general health of Nestos plain and East Macedonia and Thrace protected area.

[http://nestos.gr/Grafeio-Typou/Anakoinwseis/dtrastiriotitesdimarxosdimotikiarxi-\(9\)](http://nestos.gr/Grafeio-Typou/Anakoinwseis/dtrastiriotitesdimarxosdimotikiarxi-(9))



EKBY is implementing WetMainAreas (Interreg Balkan-Mediterranean)

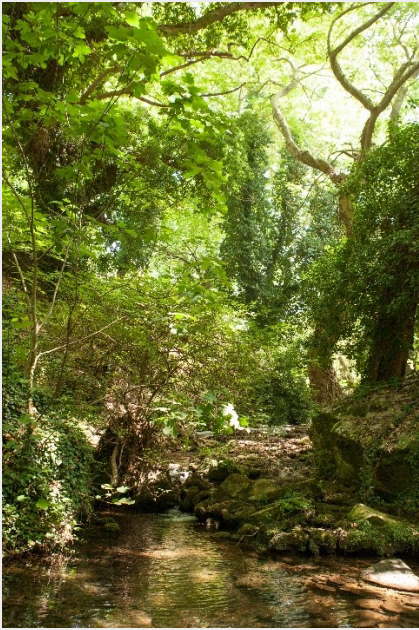
The Greek Biotope-Wetland Centre (EKBY, by its Greek initials and partner PB4 for BIO2CARE project) is also participating in the implementation of another Interreg project.

The WetMainAreas project was launched in September 2017 under the Transnational Cooperation Programme Balkan-Mediterranean 2014-2020 with the main goal to contribute to the protection and conservation of wetlands, as a shared asset of the Balkan Mediterranean territory. It serves directly to program's specific objectives "to take on the transnational challenge by promoting ecological connectivity and transnational ecosystems' integration". It is carried out by researchers and competent authorities, from Bulgaria, Greece, FYROM and Albania, who collaborate to overcome national borders and build shared knowledge on biodiversity and transnational ecosystems. Its methodology combines nature conservation and satellite technology for the creation of interactive geoportal that will host the BalkanMed harmonized wetland inventory. This is going to increase the visibility of their role in ecological connectivity and transnational ecosystem integration of designated areas (national parks, NATURA 2000 sites, Ramsar sites, Emerald sites). Within the project it is foreseen a Living Lab workshop for competent authorities of the four countries to cooperate for transnational action plans on BalkanMed wetland natural and cultural heritage.



PROJECT IMPROVING THE CONSERVATION EFFECTIVENESS OF WETLANDS

Project co-funded by the European Union and
National funds of the participating countries



River Nestos, Mun. of Nestos

NCDP – The National Confederation of Disabled People

The irony is that those who could gain the most from being in the nature, the disabled, have the hardest time getting in. All these years we receive numerous complaints from disabled nature enthusiasts, about the lack of accessibility compliance of nature sites. There's a natural tendency to want a one-size-fits-all solution, but that's not the nature of access. It is clear to us at N.C.D.P., after all these years, that there are many things to consider aside from accessibility laws: the wide-ranging needs of people with various disabling conditions; the particular characteristics of each site; the potential impact on natural and cultural resources; and the cost of infrastructure changes.

However, providing better access to nature doesn't have to mean paving it over. In fact, proposed guidelines for "outdoor developed areas" have a lot of built-in flexibility, to make sure that increased accessibility is balanced with protection of historic, natural, and cultural features. In some instances, providing reasonable access—such as raised boardwalks over marshes—can even mean better protection for fragile ecosystems. N.C.D.P. over the years, has been involved in various activities and groups working on such issues, including into two more new Interreg projects related to the capitalization of natural heritage assets for touristic purposes (see www.4all-project.eu and www.access2heritage.eu), and is willing to build on its previous past efforts (e.g., see www.prosvasimes-poleis.eu and www.a4all.eu) in order to introduce novel, inclusion-oriented and accessibility-centric, approaches for sustainable development.

RIEW – Blagoevgrad Managing Nature for the Future

RIEW - Blagoevgrad, PB6, is constantly implementing activities for the management of 81 nature sites (by 31.12.2017) of the National Ecological Network, including:

- Protected areas as part of the European Ecological Network of NATURA 2000, a total of 27 areas:
 - ✓ 12 areas for protection of wild birds (for 9 areas – the whole territory, and for 3 - partially);
 - ✓ 15 areas for protection of natural habitats and wild flora and fauna (for 12 areas – the whole territory, and for 3 - partially);

- Areas protected by the Protected Areas Act – 54 in total (without the sites falling within Pirin and Rila National Parks):

- ✓ Nature reserve – 5;
- ✓ Maintained reserve – 1;
- ✓ Protected locality – 28;
- ✓ Natural phenomenon – 18;
- ✓ Nature park – 2;
- ✓ National park – 2.

The protected areas cover about 40% of the territory which RIEW – Blagoevgrad is responsible for. Management activities are oriented towards clear and tangible benefits for nature and local population.



River Nestos, Mun. of Nestos

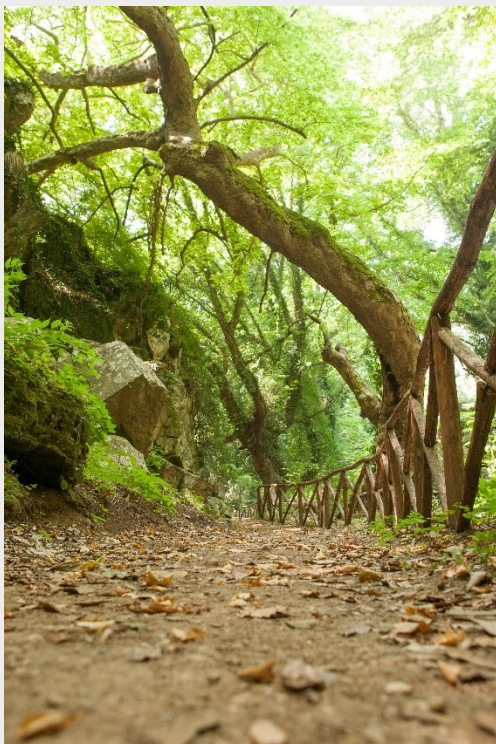
Rila National Park Directorate has a busy Environmental Spring

RNPД has been implementing activities of the National System for Monitoring the Condition of Biodiversity throughout the year. One of the priority activities for the implementation of the program is the maintenance and construction of modern means for monitoring of species of conservation significance in their natural environment. On the territory of the Park, monitoring is being carried of mapped deposits of *Galanthus elwesii* in the Blagoevgrad Park section, but it is also expected to be made for Brown bear, European wolf, Red deer (*Cervus elaphus*), Roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*), Capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*) in the whole protected area. The information is getting summarized and analyzed every year and serves to more effectively protect and manage species, their natural habitats and protected area. Traditionally, environmental education programs and environmental campaigns are held annually with the participation of thousands of children in kindergartens, students and volunteers in the classrooms and on the territory of the National Park, as well. Until now, the team of the Directorate has organized events for: World Wetlands Day, 26th Anniversary of Rila National Park, World Water Day, 50th Anniversary of the Designation of Skakavitsa Reserve, and World Earth Day, under the motto "World without Pollution by Plastics". The Park Directorate participated in the XXth National Student Feast "About our Bread ..." on the occasion of the World Earth Day with an organized information stand for the promotion of the Rila National Park and the biodiversity of the Park, and experts from the Park Directorate joined as jury in the respective directions of the student competition. What is forthcoming are the National Student Competition entitled "Rila National Park - Known and Unknown" and the National Nature Conservation Prize in a literary competition in the name of "Mimi Pramatarova" (the first Director of the Park) on the theme "Climate is changing. Are people changing?"

At present, the Rila National Park Directorate's efforts are oriented towards the implementation of the Annual Operational Plan for Firefighting in the Rila National Park in 2018, the Annual Plan for the Grazing of Domestic Animals and the Utilization of Hunting on the territory of Rila National Park; Plan of the Rila National Park Directorate for Monitoring of Wildlife, Plant Species, Forest Ecosystems, Tourist Pressure in the area of the Seven Rila Lakes and of Waters (running and standing) on the territory of Rila National Park in 2018.

The South-West University of Neofit Rilski Cares Broadly about the Environment

SWU - Blagoevgrad, PB8, is implementing in parallel several projects related to better environment management. One of them is called “Green Pump” and is funded also by the Interreg V-A Programme Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020. The Lead Partner is the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, and the other partners are the Technological Educational Institute of Central Macedonia, the Eastern Macedonia and Thrace Institute of Technology – Department of Business Administration, the Municipality of Pilea - Hortiatis and the Municipality of Petrich. The project aims at better management and utilization of water, based on an innovative approach reducing public works and decreasing impact on waters and the environment.



**Riparian forest, river Nestos,
Credits: Municipality of Nestos**

Another project funded by the same programme, with acronym “BatsConserve”, involves the SWU’s Faculty of Economy as a Lead Partner, and the Department of Forestry and Natural Environment of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. The project aims at the conservation of bats populations in two cross-border areas between Bulgaria and Greece, incl., the development of joint database and assessment of populations’ health, mapping of bats habitats, direct conservation measures such as delivery of bat boxes and public awareness raising activities.

The Pirin Tourism Forum Is a Focus for Sustainable Tourism Development in Bulgaria



Training of Nature Guides
Credits: Pirin Tourism Forum

The PTF, PB9, has just started a new project funded by the German Federal Foundation for the Environment (DBU), with the participation of two German partners: the small environmental communications company Terolog and BTE – a consulting association in the field of sustainable tourism. This is a pilot project entitled “Tour Guides for Protected Areas in Bulgaria” and it will focus in the training of protected areas’ staff to become specialized guides for the foreign hiking tourists interested in Bulgarian nature.

There will be a marketing element of the project too, incl. a Web platform and promotional materials. The project will end in August-September 2019.

The PTF has also finalized another project for sustainable tourism called Cross-Border Fun Center, in partnership with the Environmental Association Planetum from Strumica, FYROM. The project was funded by EC through the Interreg-IPA CBC Programme Bulgaria – Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and built a cross-border network of suppliers of tourism services who developed and are offering, via a special Web platform at www.crossborderfuncenter.net, an array of modern and attractive tourism services based on heritage interpretation.



CBFC Project Meeting March Credits: Pirin Tourism Forum

Other news



Second Call of the Interreg-IPA CBC Programme Bulgaria – Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Has Just Been Closed

May 10th, 2018, was the deadline for submission of project proposals under the Second Call of the Interreg-IPA CBC Programme Bulgaria – FYROM.

The budget of the call was 6,917,631 EUR, of which 85% provided by the EC and 15% - by the governments of Bulgaria and FYROM. 2,690,189 EUR were allocated to Priority Axis 1 – Environment and 3,074,503 EUR to Priority Axis 2 – Tourism, with focus on sustainable tourism. The eligible areas from Bulgarian side include Blagoevgrad and Kyustendil Districts where a number of valuable protected areas re located, including the bigger part of Rila National Park. Nearly 200 project proposals have been submitted under this call; contracting is expected up to 10 months after the deadline for submission of applications.



New Programming Period of the EEA Grants in Bulgaria

On May 23rd in Sofia, the programming agreements for the new programming period (2014-2021) of the financial mechanisms of EEA and Norway for Bulgaria were signed by the respective parties.

This event was accompanied by the celebration of the 10th anniversary of this programme in the country. Earlier on, Bulgaria and Norway signed the first agreement under the new period, granting 30.5 million BGN under the programme “Environment and Climate Change” for measures in the fields of monitoring, management and improvement of the ecological status of marine waters, waste management, and adaptation to climate change. Priority will be given to projects building on the results from the previous programming period.



The Parangalitsa Credits: Rila National Park



River Nestos Credits: Municipality of Nestos

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The Newsletter of the BIO2CARE project has been transcribed in multiple accessible formats by the National Confederation of Disabled People, Greece (Project Beneficiary PB5).



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