RESOLUTION

on addressing the main issues of protected area management in Romania

December 2015

Signatories: Protected area administrators in Romania (administrations and custodies), convened in Braşov between 16-18 December 2015 (Annex 1)

Context

The "Protected Area Gala" organised in Braşov between 16-18 December 2015 facilitated the review of the current status of protected areas in Romania and a discussion on the main issues currently faced by practicians in this field. The event brought together 160 participants, mostly protected area administrators and experts, who contributed to the working group sessions on the following topics: (1) Ensuring a unitary and efficient protected area management system, (2) Preventing and assessing the significant impact upon protected area values, (3) Natura 2000 sites and sustainable development, (4) How to communicate the importance of protected areas? and (5) The role of protected areas in ecological education.

This resolution shows the major issues faced in practice by working group participants (point 2) and the main measures they proposed for solving these issues (point 3), for which support from competent authorities at national level is required.

1. Preamble

Being aware that Romania stands out among European countries by the wealth and diversity of its natural values, we acknowledge that the protected area management system designed to preserve such values is relatively new and under development, with the main progress registered during the last 10-15 years. Although protected area management in Romania faces many issues, we are also aware of the positive outcomes achieved so far.

Thus in the context of the European Union adhesion, the national network for protected areas was established and the legislative and institutional framework for nature protection was created. Many

protected areas were assigned for administration and individual administrations were created for larger protected areas, with a large number of governmental and non-governmental players undertaking management responsibility based on their own resources.

Thanks to the European funds available, inventory and baseline conservation studies have been performed and management plans have been prepared which establish management measures for a number of Natura 2000 sites. The projects developed by administrators, funded almost fully from external funds, helped achieve important steps towards building databases for protected area management, building infrastructures for information, education, awareness and visiting, informing stakeholders and involving them in management measures, visitor management in protected areas, developing ecotourism, supporting local community development, ensuring the actual conservation of natural and social values, as well as stopping or reducing activities with a negative impact upon nature in some protected areas.

Being aware that this evolution is not unitary within the national management system, we acknowledge the benefits of the current decentralised, open, collaborative system for protected area management, which allowed an overall large number of governmental and non-governmental players to develop their basic knowledge, minimum technical capacity and collaboration or trust relations with stakeholders, necessary for protected area management.

2. Premises: review of the issues regarding protected area management in Romania

At the same time the current operation model of the protected area management system in Romania entails a number of limitations for administrators and significantly reduces their ability to ensure an efficient management of protected areas and to fulfil their commitments, despite their constant efforts to provide the necessary resources for this purpose. Of these, the most important ones for the fields under discussion are:

a) Insufficient coordination among responsible players at national level for establishing regulations, policies, strategies, methodological norms (ministries, national agencies and other institutions directly or indirectly in charge, organisations, funding entities), including for providing control and feed-back to administrators. This leads to incoherent policies, inconsistencies between sectoral policy provisions, omissions and failure to integrate nature protection objectives in sectoral policies (e.g. for natural resource management, planning and territorial development etc.);

b) Legislative inconsistency, which creates confusion among all players in charge and instability;

c) Lack of strategic planning at sector level (both for nature protection and for related fields) and long term thinking;

d) Lack of a unitary national strategy for protected area management and subsequent fields - e.g. communication of protected areas to the general public and stakeholders, visitor management, data and information supply, monitoring, the role of protected areas in ecological education, research and support for sustainable development of local communities etc.

e) Insufficient national coordination of protected area management approaches implemented locally. Therefore management practices are not unitary, harmonised, integrated;

f) The influence of politics at various levels of the protected area management system;

g) Difficult or impossible access to existing data/ information required for establishing management measures and implementing them - e.g. data and information on natural resource management and land planning (forestry management plans, forestry-pasture land plans, general urban planning (PUG), physical blocks etc.) and the land register in protected areas. The institutions or organisations holding this information refuse to make it available to administrators, even when these data are public, thus breaching legal provisions and making it more difficult to establish conservation and/or management measures.

h) The unwieldy bureaucratic approval process for management plans, which hinders the implementation of conservation measures, the clarification of the use regime for some lands or resources and the blocking of some investments or activities with a negative impact upon nature;

i) The poor quality of impact assessment studies performed in Romania, as a result of existing ethics, professionalism and capacity gaps among their authors - which significantly hinders or limits the administrators' ability to stop activities with a negative impact upon protected areas;

j) Poor recognition of administrators' authority and legitimacy in the field (particularly of custodians);

k) The lack of compensation payments for land owners in protected areas, which creates tense relations between land owners and administrators, making it more difficult to implement management measures;

l) Stakeholders' failure to get properly involved in the design of local, regional or national management or sustainable development plans;

m) The absence of a State budget line dedicated to protected areas, although protected areas preserve values and provide undeniable environmental services and public benefits;

n) Limited institutional capacity (e.g. technical, logistic, human, financial etc.) and professional capacity (e.g. training, qualification, promotion) of all players involved in protected area management: administrators, authorities, stakeholders etc.;

o) Limitations imposed to some management activities by the funding rules (e.g. for communication activities the assessment is based on quantitative indicators, such as the number of participants, rather than on the real impact upon the public);

p) The low importance at national level given to ecological education and communication, as well as the lack of possibilities (resources) for ensuring the continuity of ecological education activities undertaken by protected area administrations and NGOs;

q) Current lack of administration for some protected areas (delegates or on a contractual basis) - which cover a total area of about 2.5 mil. ha.

3. Requirements for supporting the protected area system in Romania

Considering the importance of protected areas for maintaining natural and cultural values, ensuring a healthy life environment and a framework for sustainable development, as well as the need to ensure conditions for the efficient management of protected areas in Romania, and being aware of the above mentioned issues, we propose the following measures to be urgently adopted:

3.1. **Providing a national unitary and functional system for protected area management. Creating the National Agency for Natural Protected Areas (ANANP)**, as a state agency subordinated to the Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests, partly funded from the state budget, eligible and able to access external funding through projects. To ensure that the above mentioned issues are addressed, ANANP attributions will include:

a) Coordinating the protected area network by its own national and local structures;
b) Assigning protected areas without an administrator for administration and custody, monitoring and supervising ongoing administration contracts;
c) Administering protected areas which are not assigned for administration;
d) Distributing state budget funds for protected area management;
e) Creating the conditions for granting compensations to land owners (from state budget funds);

f) Managing/ allocating Natura 2000 payments (from European funds);
g) Granting technical support (counselling) to protected area administrators for writing projects and accessing funds.

ANANP's position within the protected area management system and its relations with the other entities in charge, according to this proposal, are shown in **Annex 2**.

3.2. Improving coordination among central authorities (Ministry of Environment and National Environmental Protection Agency), by:

a. Creating a unitary framework for preparing and approving management plans (e.g. a unitary model for structuring and organising the process, unitary national criteria for assessing and approving the Plans, a unitary system for monitoring the management implementation and efficiency, for amending the Plan etc.);
b. Simplifying and accelerating the management plan verification and approval procedures (for instance by simplifying the inter-ministerial approval procedures);
c. Establishing clear methodological norms (approved by law) on assigning protected areas for administration/ custody, and ensuring the unitary implementation of the norms.

3.3. Awarding compensation payments and Natura 2000 payments to land owners and users in protected areas;

3.4. Providing the necessary financial support for protected area administration by:

a. Ensuring a state budget line for protected area management;
b. Ensuring the co-financing and even pre-financing of projects, with funds from the Environmental Fund Administration;
c. Awarding exemptions from taxes paid to the Environmental Fund Administration to institutions which allocate funds for protected area management.

3.5. Correlating the provisions of sectoral legislation on natural resource management and land use planning with legislation on protected area management (agriculture, forestry, hunting, water etc.) and removing conflicting provisions;

3.6. Improving access to data and information funded from public funds required in the protected area management process, regarding:

a. natural resource management and land use planning (such as forestry plans, forestry-pasture land plans, PUG (general urban planning), physical blocks, orthophoto maps from APIA etc.);

b. land register and land use data;

c. relevant spatial data and information in digital format for protected area management (GIS data, aerial photographs, orthophoto maps, satellite images);

d. socio-economic statistical data, including those from sociological surveys - such as on the population's perceptions and/or attitudes;

e. information on investment and land use planning projects within protected areas and their neighbourhood;

f. information on environmental impact assessment in protected areas or in their vicinity.

3.7. Involving protected area administrators and nature protection representatives in the development of PUG plans and plans and strategies for development and land use planning at all levels.

3.8. Providing the necessary resources for employing staff to fulfil management responsibilities;

3.9. Creating an appropriate framework for the adequate qualification, selection, lifelong learning, performance evaluation and proper motivation (salaries and promotion opportunities) for the personnel employed in the system at all levels, through a unitary national-wide approach.

3.10. Creating professional training opportunities for both administrators and stakeholders, on relevant topics for protected area management, such as:

a. Designing and coordinating participatory processes, conflict management and developing partnerships;
b. Management planning and implementing the management plan;
c. Strategic planning;
d. Preparing and assessing environmental studies;
e. Communication;
f. Ecological education;
g. Integrated sustainable development for local communities

3.11. Providing the necessary measures for guaranteeing transparent decision making processes on protected areas and the public's access to information in this field, at all levels.

- **Environmental impact assessment**

3.12. Raising the quality of environmental assessment studies in Romania by setting legally adopted quality standards (e.g. content, structure, approach, minimum necessary data etc.);

3.13. Clarifying/ establishing the legal responsibility of experts who prepare environmental impact assessment studies in relation with such studies;

3.14. Preparing the detailed technical guidelines for assessing the impact upon habitats and species and preparing impact studies for them;

3.15. Appointing project controllers;

3.16. Reconsidering the Register of experts and clarifying aspects related to competences, selection, sanctions and taking responsibilities;

3.17. Including in the EIA legislation the requirements to assess critical habitats (including for protected areas).

- **Communication and education**

3.18. Developing national communication and awareness plans/strategies for protected areas, by the main players in charge (national authorities, NGOs etc., together with nature communication experts), taking into account the current attitudes, values, beliefs of target groups;

3.19. Ensuring the necessary conditions for maintaining a constant dialogue between authorities and the whole range of players in charge and stakeholders.

3.20. Using positive communication methods, based on benefits, values and positive aspects.

3.21. Developing the funder-required indicators for communication activities, together with practician experts in communication, to ensure that quality criteria are included;

3.22. Amending the funding conditions to ensure that they allow for creative solutions to measure and secure the impact of communication actions;

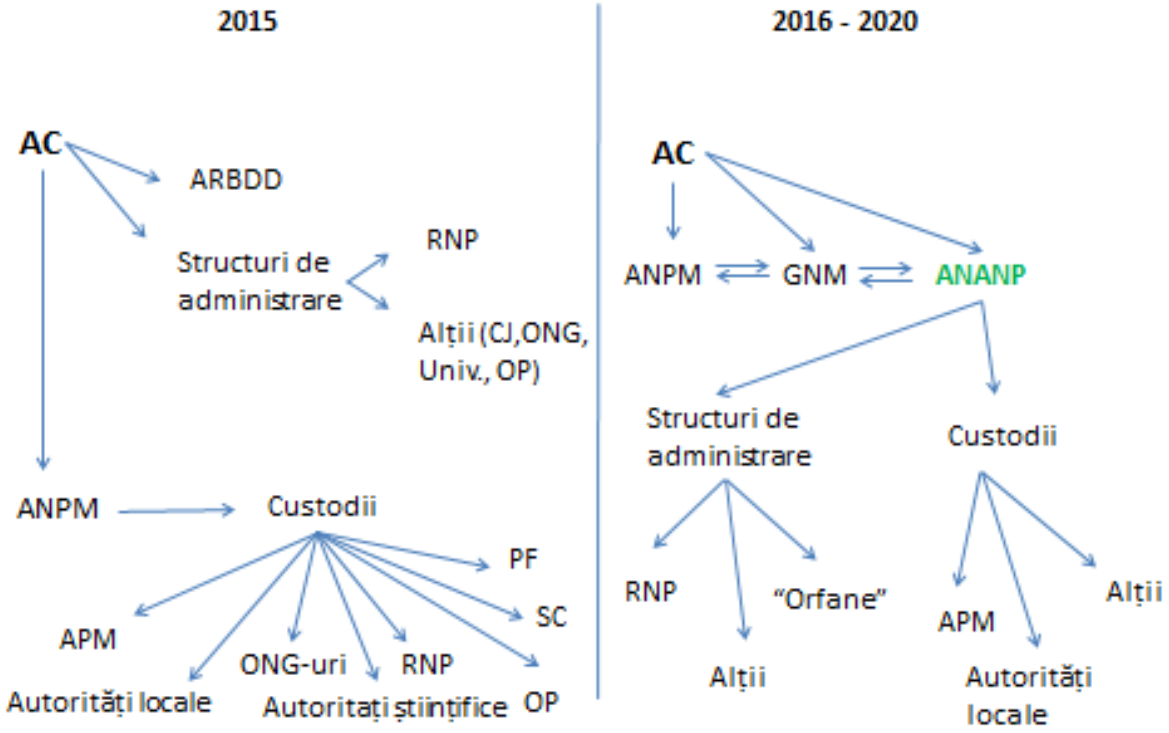
3.23. Introducing nature classes in the school curricula, as a priority (for instance one day per month when children can go out of the classroom and attend a full lesson taught in the nature);

3.24. Developing a national education programme in protected areas, funded from the state budget and partly from the Environmental Fund Administration; this programme should provide financial support for establishing centres and developing permanent nature education programmes in all counties, as a priority in regions with natural protected areas, with the direct involvement of protected area administrators (such as Documentation and Information Centres).

3.25. Preparing a model and a set of nation-wide thematic pedagogical resources, to be used as working instruments in education for nature centres (e.g.: the River, the Forest, the Pasture etc.)

Annex 2

Proposal for the reorganisation of the national protected area management system



A. Current situation ***B. Proposed alternative***

Figure 1. **The structure of the protected area management system in Romania (component entities and relations between them) - current version and amendment proposal**

Abbreviations:

AC = central authority, ANPM = National Environmental Protection Agency, ANANP = National Agency for Natural Protected Areas, APM = Environmental Protection Agencies, ARBDD = Danube Delta Biosphere, CJ = County Councils, GNM = National Environmental Guard, ONG = non-governmental organisations, PF = natural persons, RNP = National Forest Administration – Romsilva.

"orphans" = protected areas currently not assigned for administration