

LIFE KOČEVŠKO

September 2014 – February 2019

LIFE13 NAT/SI/000314

## LIFE KOČEVŠKO After LIFE Conservation Plan





**LIFE13 NAT/SI/000314**

**After LIFE Conservation Plan**

Reporting Date  
**28/2/2019**

**LIFE Kočevsko**

Project location	Kočevsko – Slovenia
Project start date:	01/09/2014
Project end date:	28/02/2019
Total budget	2,270,013 €
EC contribution:	1,135,006 €
(%) of eligible costs	50 %

**DATA BENEFICIARY**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Table of Contents	3
2. List of Key Words and Abbreviations	4
3. Project History and Situation Analysis	5
3.1 A Brief Project History, the Key Challenges, and the Main Achievements	5
3.2 The Assessment of the Situation at the End of the Project – SWOT	6
4. The After Life Objectives and Methodology	8

## 2. List of Key Words and Abbreviations

MOP	Ministrstvo za okolje in prostor (Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning)
ZRSVN	Zavod Republike Slovenije za varstvo narave (Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation)
ZGS	Zavod za gozdove Slovenije (Slovenia Forest Service)
LUK	Ljudska univerza Kočevje (People's University of Kočevje)
PIK	Podjetniški Inkubator Kočevje (The Kočevje Business Incubator)
SiDG	Slovenski državni gozdovi d.o.o. (Slovenian State Forests, LLC)
LPN	Lovišča s posebnim namenom (Special Purpose State Hunting Reserves)
JK	Jamarsko društvo (Cave society)
DeGoMe	Projekt "Kočevska dežela gozdov in medveda" ( Kočevska – The Land of Forests and Bears project)

### 3. Project History and Situation Analysis

#### 3.1. A Brief Project History, the Key Challenges, and the Main Achievements

The project “Conservation of Natura 2000 sites Kočevsko” or shorter LIFE Kočevsko lasted from September 2014 until February 2019. The value of the project was 2.270,013 and it was founded 50% by the EU mechanism LIFE + Nature and 30% by the co-financier - the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning. The leading partner was the Municipality of Kočevje and the other partners were Slovenia Forest Service, The Kočevje Business Incubator, and the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation.

The Kočevsko project area is famous for its extensive forests and is considered to be one of the most naturally preserved parts of Slovenia. The whole Kočevsko area is defined as a Natura 2000 site both under the Birds Directive (SPA Kočevsko) and under the Habitats Directive (SCI Kočevsko).

The key challenge of the project was to re-establish favourable conservation status of the target species and one habitat type and to find long term solutions in regards to Natura 2000 management in the project area. There were no active measurements which would have ensured favourable living conditions of the priority species. Their habitat requirements had been affected by a human disturbance and by the pollution of the karst underground involving illegal waste disposal and the excessive and uncontrolled use of manure in agriculture.

The main four conservation actions were directed towards the improvement of the living conditions of the critically endangered forest birds (Western Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus*, hazel grouse *Bonasa bonasia*, white-backed woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotus*, three-toed woodpecker *Picoides trydactylus*, the only pair of a white-tailed eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) and an extremely vulnerable underground ecosystem with *Proteus Anguinus*.

Extensive biological and chemical analyses of groundwater have been conducted. The most polluted water caves have been cleaned and the access to them has been closed with either a wooden or stone wall. Various field measures contributed to the increase of the amount of dead biomass for woodpeckers. By placing feeding fences, a nutritional base for both grouse species has been enriched and by setting up roadblocks on forest roads a quiet zone has been established. The protection of the white-tailed eagle habitat was realized through a video surveillance system over the nest, a winter feeding station, and by setting up a new fishing regime by Reško Lake. Besides that, a new educational trail, and three observation towers around Reško Lake will generate less disturbance in the area.

The project managed to successfully implement concrete conservation actions and consequently improve the living conditions of the critically endangered species and one habitat type.

Apart from the above mentioned conservation actions, the project also focused on the public awareness and the dissemination of results. The results of the dissemination activities are the

project's website, the established Eagle's room and the Eagle's educational trail in Kočevska Reka.

The project represents an upgrade to the existing system management Natura 2000 sites Kočevsko and as such serves as an example of a successful management of Natura 2000 sites in Slovenia.

### **3.2 The Assessment of the Situation at the End of the Project – SWOT**

By using the SWOT analysis, the main strengths of the project are illustrated as well as issues, challenges, and future opportunities.

#### **STRENGTHS**

The project managed to successfully improve the habitat conditions of the endangered species and one habitat type. Besides that, there has been an important breakthrough in educating and raising awareness of the main stakeholders and local public about the demands and opportunities that Natura 2000 is offering. Through organized workshops and meetings, the problematic issues were addressed and discussed. As such, the project served as a platform for a dialogue between the main stakeholders (e.g. hunters, photographers, fishermen, police etc.) and a local community. Among other efficient implementations the cave cadastre needs to be mentioned, which has been extensively upgraded.

There is a high applicable value of the implemented activities in connection to regular work of foresters and hunters (instructions, handbooks, manuals). Systematic policy solutions have been established on the national level in regards to silvicultural and forest management planning. In Kočevska Reka, the ground has been set for the development of tourism infrastructure and the implemented public facilities have already been frequently used and visited. On a local level, an initiative was put forward for a *Decree of Protection of Reško Lake* with an aim to further protect and control the area.

For the first time in Slovenia, a feeding station for birds of prey followed by a surveillance system for birds of prey, which provides a control over the nest, has been established and this will serve as an example to other surveillance systems.

Besides all that, new working groups have been formulated on a national and local level to discuss existing issues and suggest possible solutions in regards to excessive and uncontrolled use of manure in agriculture in the Karst region. This presents a starting point to possible changes in the national environmental policies or even changes in legislation and in a long term contributes to the sustainable development.

A successful synergistic partnership developed through the project is a great base and potential for future common projects and activities.

## **WEAKNESSES**

The results of the monitoring activities in water caves and the monitoring of the efficient implementation of the feeding fences will only be seen after a longer period of time. The period of four years is not sufficient to get adequate monitoring results.

There has been insufficient involvement and non-responsiveness of key agriculture stakeholders (farm owners-state and private) and their lack of proactive and strategic planning respectively. A more constructive dialogue with the above mentioned stakeholders needs to be further developed either through activities within other projects or on a local government initiative.

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

There is an extensive transferability of results and practical knowledge usage that can be applied to other projects not just in Kočevsko area but nationally. The municipality of Kočevje wants to further address the issue of the excessive manure in agriculture and is in the process of applying a new LIFE project entitled LIFE W-PARTNER that will continue resolving the issues connected with the agriculture sector. Another project entitled “Kočevska dežela gozdov in medveda” (DeGoMe) by Slovenia Forest Service and other partners will also continue focusing and carrying on with activities already tackled in the project.

Newly developed infrastructure in Kočevska Reka paves the way for the development of tourism and consequently new employment opportunities.

## **THREATS**

Severe weather conditions in the area might affect the implemented activities (The Eagles's educational trail, the three observation towers, the feeding fences). Moreover, the industry and agriculture sector can endanger the underground system and consequently the living conditions of *Proteus Anguinus*. A lack of interest and knowledge from the agriculture sector to resolve and find sustainable solutions presents a thread to the environment and to the living conditions of the endangered species.

The development of potentially extensive tourism in Kočevska Reka may not be suitable for the white-tailed eagle's habitat and its living conditions.

## 4. After life Objectives and Methodology

In this section, the guidelines for after life objectives and methodology are presented.

The focus is directed on activities which have been established, implemented and monitored during the project. However, the main highlight remains the need for further preservation of the endangered species, their habitats, and one habitat type. This will subsequently contribute to the sustainable development in the region. The main after LIFE activities are on site activities, long term management, monitoring and communication.

The funds for the below mentioned activities will be obtained from different sources (national funds, EU funds, possible future projects). They will be included in a yearly plan of each responsible institution. The details of each activity might be further developed and financially secured by appropriate responsible bodies and organizations.

Activities	Responsible institution	Resources	Time plan	Notes/Remarks
The integration of nature protection guidelines into the renewals of forest and hunting management plans	ZRSVN	Regular work	Unlimited	
	ZGS	Regular work	Unlimited	
	LIFE-IP NATURA.SI project (LIFE17 IPE/SI/000011)	EU funds	2026	
Target species monitoring	ZGS	Regular work	Unlimited	
	ZRSVN	Regular work	Unlimited	
	DeGoMe project	24.000,00 EUR	2023	
Monitoring of the white tailed eagle's habitat/the nest and the maintenance of the video surveillance system	ZGS	Regular work + volunteers	Unlimited	
	DeGoMe project	6.000,00	2023	
Lease of 300 habitat trees and 20 hectares of eco cells	ZGS	Regular work, national and EU scheme for environmental and climate measurements	Unlimited	After the period of 20 years extension of the lease (Forest Fund)
Additional cleaning of polluted caves	Municipality Kočevje	National projects of clean water funds	Unlimited	
	Local community	volunteers + projects	Unlimited	
	MOP	Resources from the Environmental Fund	Unlimited	
Monitoring of the cleaned water caves (in case of additional littering and waste disposal)	JK	Regular work + volunteers	Unlimited	
Maintenance of wooden fences, notice boards, and the iron gate in Smetljiva cave	Municipality Kočevje	Regular work	Unlimited	
Additional monitoring of biological and chemical analysis of ground water	Competent research institutions	National monitoring scheme + New projects	Unlimited	



Control and monitoring of implemented activities in forest	ZGS, ZRSVN	Regular work	Unlimited	
Maintenance of feeding fences	ZGS	Regular work	Unlimited	
	DeGoMe project	Project funds	2023	
	SIDG	Regular work		
Maintenance of road barriers and "quiet zone" notice boards	ZGS	Regular work	Unlimited	
	DeGoMe project	Project funds	2023	
	SIDG	Regular work	Unlimited	
The feeding station / Providing food supply	ZGS	Regular work	Unlimited	
	DeGoMe project	Project funds	2023	
Maintenance of the fence along Resko lake	Municipality Kočevje	Regular work	Unlimited	
Maintenance of the three observation towers and roads/paths leading to the observation towers	Municipality Kočevje	Regular work	Unlimited	
	DeGoMe project	Regular work	2023	
	SIDG	Regular work	Unlimited	
Project's website	PIK	Regular	until 2022	
	Municipality Kočevje	Regular work + other projects	from 2022 onwards-	
Project's Facebook site	PIK	Regular work	unlimited	
Additional trainings and education for foresters and hunters	ZGS	Regular	Unlimited	
	DeGoMe project	Project funds	2023	
Info room/The Eagles room in Kočevska Reka	PIK	Regular work	Unlimited	
	Municipality Kočevje	Regular work	Unlimited	
Maintenance of the Eagle's educational train, info boards and didactic equipment	PIK	Regular work	Unlimited	
	SIDG	Regular work	Unlimited	
	Municipality Kočevje	Regular work	Unlimited	
Dissemination	ZGS, PIK, ZRSVN, Municipality Kočevje	Regular work	Unlimited	
Public awareness	ZGS, PIK, ZRSVN, Municipality Kočevje	Regular work	Unlimited	



