

Wilderness is important element of our life

Wilderness used to be an important element of the Muránska planina situated in the central part of Western Carpathians, Slovakia! Even today, Muránska planina National Park is specific due to low intensity of human settlements, road infrastructure and land use. It is a area of the 21st first century!

1. Typical features of Muránska planina National Park:

Muránska planina is the large carstic area even today covered in 85% by valuable forests. It was formed in specific conditions due to long-term presence of rare species for example 4 endemic species – small bush tree (glacial relict) – *Daphne arbuscula* which is growing in limestone rocks or 3 species of beetles (*Duvalius szaboi szaboi*, *Malthodes muranensis*, *Limnastis sp.*) limited to natural forest habitats or caves. Woodlands with many meadow patches, deep valleys and rock cliffs are optimal for presence of all native carnivores (wild cat, lynx, wolf, bear) and its natural pray (red deer, roe deer, wild boar) or birds of prey like golden eagle, peregrine falcon with many species of owls (pygmy owl, boreal owl, ural owl). Old spruce forest is a home of one of the most endangered bird species – capercaillie. This all and much more is hidden in this national park and it is up to us how long we can maintain this unique wild area.

2. The biggest threats

The biggest threat of the Muranska Wilderness is the confrontation between implementation of two national laws which applied in same area – nature conservation law (543/2002 Z.z.) and forestry law (326/2005 Z. z.). These two legal norms form a legal framework for the daily management of this area. System of nature conservation is divided into 5 degrees/levels of protection. The 1st the lowest and 5th is the highest – that means without human intervention. 86% of NP area belongs to 3th degree, which means in practice that this area is managed mostly by forest legislation and implementation is carried out by various stakeholders (mostly State forestry, but also private). This leads to intensive logging activities of non-protected old forest stands what at the end leads to reduction of biodiversity and habitats lost. Logging escalation started to be serious after year 2004 – after large scale of wind disturbances followed by bark beetle impact.

The second threat is the growing intensity of hunting activities hand in hand with poaching. Current model of hunting management, possibility to rent hunting by non-professionals (who pay more) is from perspective of nature conservation – non-systematic. That means that the species management in

area of national park is implemented by hunters and not by experts on biology, ecology or resource management.

3. How to improve this situation:

Suggestions to improve the current situation:

- The gradual reduction of logging operation in the areas with most valuable nature habitats and potential Wilderness
- Improve the forest management in the areas where it is necessary (e.g. forests without suitable species composition), or using less damaging logging techniques e.g. using Muran norik horse, instead of tractors, in the areas where natural conditions are suitable and objective of that area is biodiversity conservation e.g. buffer zone or propose B/C zone.
- Expanding the area of nature reserves or core zones - potential Wilderness. These areas now covering only 14% of the Muránska planina National Park. The result of this low percentage is the high level of fragmentation. In present, there are still ca 30% of suitable natural habitats which should be much more effectively protected and even with the potential to create in the future (after restoration) valuable Wilderness. This new system of protection should be based on the data from monitoring and research of rare and protected species, which are currently still widely spread around clear-cut areas and outside core zone. If this news system will not be implemented then the future of Muránska planina National Park and particularly Muranska Wilderness is threatened.
- Another important management measure is to reduce and in some specific zones (Wilderness) gradually completely eliminate hunting. This however requires development of the compensation mechanism for the private hunting societies which are now present inside the national park. Nevertheless, majority of national park area belongs to the state ownership and so it is just political decision either to continue current model of hunting management or create hunting free zones managed just by professional wildlife management employed by administration of national park.
- Muránska planina National Park and particularly potential Muranska planina Wilderness has a great possibility to implement or improve existing ecotourism activities. In certain part of the protected area there is a great possibility for horse riding, wildlife watching, developing photo-workshops of rare animals and plants which are connected with increased demand for accommodation services and others which

supposed to be implemented hand-in-hand with national park administration.

Four example developing the system of the gateways means to create the so-called catchment areas (filters). National park administration can have a strong impact on tourist regulation, can coordinate selling local products such as meat, cheese, souvenirs, local specialities. That means another profit not only for protected area but primary for local communities. The benefit generating from this process can actually contribute also to support protected area annual budget and so create situation for better protection of wildlife, hired the more qualified Park Rangers and provide them the monitoring equipment.

We need to work on this plan step by step. It is a long-term process, and we can see progress in about 10 years. This process if well planned and carefully implemented can differentiate Muranska Planina from all other protected areas in Slovakian and other Carpathian countries as well.