

Annual report for the year 2024

State: Ukraine

Name of the area: Carpathian Biosphere Reserve

Year and number of years since the award or renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas:

2022, 2 year

Central authority concerned:

Name: Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine

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Authority responsible for its management:

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1. **Conditions:** List here all conditions which were attached to the award or the renewal of the European Diploma. Explain either how the conditions have been totally complied with or detail the progress in complying with the conditions. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

No conditions were attached to the renewal of the European Diploma

2. **Recommendations:** List here all recommendations which were attached to the award or the renewal of the European Diploma. Explain either how the recommendations have been totally complied with or detail the progress in complying with the recommendations. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

1. develop a ranger training programme, including where possible entry level apprenticeships for younger people, which provide a strong career basis for rangers, and assess salaries to ensure that they are sufficient to attract and keep suitably qualified staff;

Under the conditions of war, the ranger service of the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve (CBR) suffered the most, because about 10% of its staff were mobilized to the army and are now fighting in the east of Ukraine. At the same time, CBR closely cooperates with international funds that specialize in supporting rangers and provide serious assistance in material and technical support of their needs. These include the Frankfurt Zoological Society (Germany) and Global Conservation (USA). They also organize regular trainings for the ranger service with the aim of improving their qualification level and mastering innovative technologies such as the SMART patrol and monitoring system. Also, on a regular basis, internal trainings of ranger service specialists are organized on various aspects of current work. Additionally, in 2024 at the initiative of the CBR, the whole ranger service passed an online training held by the Academy of After-Diploma Education at the Ministry of Environment of Ukraine.

In the conditions of war time in 2024, the increase in the salaries for employees of the institution (like all budget institutions of Ukraine) was frozen (stopped). But the CBR managed to introduce for rangers the payment of allowance for the complexity and intensity of work, which allowed increasing their average payments by 30%.

2. enhance the research and monitoring directed towards better understanding of the effects of climate change on the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve (social, economic and on biodiversity), develop adaptation and mitigation plans and identify nature-based solutions to manage the effects;

CBR has a sufficiently high scientific potential for conducting research and ensure monitoring in the context of global climate change. In order to develop measures to mitigate the impact of climate change on natural complexes, a special program is being developed, which, in particular, involves the establishment of a series of stationary research plots to collect information in all representative types of ecosystems. Adaptation and mitigation measures are developed by scientists of the CBR and approved by the Ministry in the 5-year action plan of the Management plan.

CBR participates in the Life Prognoses project, which is aimed on conservation of the European ancient and primeval forests. It includes also a powerful climate component.

In 2024, the CBR, together with other European partners, started implementation of the project ForestConnect - "Towards a Climate-smart Forest Connectivity for Large Carnivores in the Balkan-Carpathian Region" within the framework of the EU Interreg Danube Region Program, which addresses common challenges and needs on protecting and preserving ecological corridors of large carnivores (LC) in the target area. ForestConnect aims to secure climate-resilient forest corridors for LC to move across borders in the Balkan-Carpathian-Dinaric region.

Also, in 2023 additional materials on forest management were prepared regarding transformation cuttings in derivative spruce stands to restore forests close to natural ones. In 2024, these materials were approved by the Ministry of Environment and the institution will begin their implementation in the nearest future.

3. dedicate research on and monitoring of open habitats and their component species in order to better understand the ecological processes needed to maintain them, especially in the light of climate change, wild mammal populations and agricultural practices, and consider and implement relevant adjustments to management;

On the territory of the CBR there are represented a number of open habitats which are important for the conservation of biotic and landscape diversity. These are, in particular, wetlands, floodplain meadows and highland meadows. These types of ecosystems of CBR are given special attention, which is reflected in their study and protection.

CBR wetlands have a status of Ramsar sites, for which special management plans have been developed, which are based on the results of many years of research.

Floodplain meadows, as one of the most vulnerable ecosystems, are a training ground for monitoring and research, on the basis of which a special scientific program for their management has been developed. Also here, over the past few years, have been implemented a several international scientific and environmental projects, the purpose of which is to preserve these unique ecosystems.

Highland meadow ecosystems, which for many centuries served as a place for traditional farming and the intensity of which has been decreasing in recent decades, are the object of special attention for scientists and conservationists of both the CBR and side institutions and organizations. The goal of cooperation with them is to develop a number of measures that will balance the reduction of the scale of management and nature use. They are included in the 5-year action plan (2024-2028) within the framework of Management Plan of CBR. In 2024 CBR already implemented some works on moving the highland meadows as part of these measures.

As part of the implementation of the ForestConnect project, mentioned in the previous paragraph, a set of measures is envisaged to preserve populations of large carnivores (wolf, bear, lynx), including the restoration of forage lands by maintaining after-forest meadows and planting wild fruit trees within the main migration corridors.

4. undertake research and monitoring to understanding the ecological dynamics of wilderness management, especially how the ecosystem functions in the absence of traditional farming and forestry practices;

Lowland, after-forest and highland meadow ecosystems suffer the most from the loss of traditional practices and scale of management use. The greatest threat to them is a forest succession, which has intensified significantly in recent decades.

In order to stop it, several management plans have been developed, which are based on the results of many years of research and monitoring aimed at conservation of the inherent biodiversity. They include the mowing and uprooting of those areas, the overgrowth of which leads to the greatest losses or proceeds at a high pace. They are also included in the 5-year action plan (2024-2028) within the framework of the Management Plan of CBR. In the reporting year, the implementation of these measures began.

5. review the methodologies for monitoring large mammals, prioritizing the more at-risk carnivores, to achieve reliable estimates of species populations; review the state of knowledge of the ecological role of the large mammals in the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve, and determine optimum population numbers to maintain the coherence of the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve;

The Carpathian Biosphere Reserve is home to almost all species of large mammals of the Carpathians, including large carnivores (bear, lynx and wolf). Only chamois and mountain marmots are absent. Bear and lynx are listed in the Red Data Book of Ukraine.

Monitoring of large mammals, in particular large carnivores, is carried out by registering animal encounters by researchers and rangers using the SMART patrol and monitoring system, registration of animals using camera traps, conducting census' of the number according to special methods. Such monitoring makes it possible to obtain fairly reliable information about the state of populations of these animals.

The number and population density of rare species on the territory of the reserve is close to the optimal density. A reliable protection system allows us to guarantee the further conservation of these species on the territory of the reserve.

As part of the implementation of ForestConnect project, mentioned in paragraph 2, it is planned to implement a set of measures to monitor and preserve populations of large carnivores (wolf, bear, lynx).

6. continue to liaise with the relevant authorities to ensure that the environmental impact of the proposed ski resort in the Svydovets mountain range, including any potential negative effects on the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve, are assessed, prevented or effectively mitigated;

The Carpathian Biosphere Reserve is an opponent of the idea of creation of a large ski resort complex in the central part of the Svydovets Range, which is characterized by unique landscapes, biodiversity and wetlands.

The project of resort construction is currently on hold due to ongoing legal proceedings. There was no negative impact on the reserve's territory during the reporting period.

In 2024, the CBR, together with public organizations, completed the development of a project of extension of the reserve, in the framework of which the possibility of including new territories of the Svydovets range is being considered. The specified project was passed to the Ministry of Environment for further consideration.

7. secure and increase the budget allocation for education, awareness-raising activities, scientific programmes, the development of the ranger service and support for socio-economic priorities in the extended Carpathian Biosphere Reserve; continue to develop project-based funding appropriately, ensuring that there is not an over-reliance on project funds to support long-term needs;

Because of the state of war in Ukraine, the state has limited opportunities to finance budget institutions.

Instead, in 2024, the Frankfurt Zoological Society provided significant assistance to the institution. In particular, the reserve's current needs in fuel, car maintenance, insurance, stationery goods, building materials, field equipment and gear, etc. were covered by them. Also, with the donor's funds, some administrative buildings were renovated, and Global Conservation fund provided appropriate assistance to increase the monitoring capabilities of the institution.

CBR has prepared a budget request for 2025 to the Ministry of Environment, which plans to increase the amount of funding compared to 2024. CBR also prepared several project applications to international funds and organizations for financing separate areas of activity.

8. continue close co-operation between the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve and the State Forest Enterprise, especially in adapting to and mitigating the effects of climate change, including the economic impact on the local communities;

CBR closely cooperates with neighbouring state forestry enterprises, which form the main part of the transition territory of the UNESCO Carpathian BR. As part of this cooperation, is being considered a possibility of extending the territory of the reserve to include in the CBR significant areas of ancient forests, which are of particular importance in the context of global climate change, as deposits of carbon.

Programs to mitigate global climate change on forest ecosystems are being developed jointly, which include, in particular, abandoning the practice of artificial plantations and gradually moving to natural forests restoration, refusing the practice of clear-cutting. Also, an important area of cooperation is the restoration of indigenous tree stands resilient to climate change.

9. review the viability of traditional farming practices; consider how State funding and other initiatives can support and incentivize traditional farming where it benefits the aims of the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve (including direct payments to farmers for ecosystem services); pilot potential options where possible;

CBR annually pays a significant land tax and other payments to the budgets of local territorial communities. A significant part of these taxes goes to support traditional farming, and first of all to animal husbandry.

The CBR administration provides possible assistance to farms located on its territory. It is mainly the provision of construction timber and fire-wood, repair and maintenance of roads, bridges, farm buildings and other infrastructure. Also CBR is actively promoting agro-touristic destinations in the area, cooperating with stakeholders and involving additional projects, especially around the traditional polonyna highland farming and first Ukrainian product with geographical indication – Hutsul sheep bryndzja.

In addition, CBR is actively searching for international aid and grants to support local farms. Provide electric shepherds, which ensure both the preservation of the property of people, and protection of large carnivores.

In close cooperation with NGOs, pilot measures are implemented to restore the water buffalo population in the Valley of Narcissus, which at the same time is a combination of measures to restore traditional local farming practices and also helps to support the population of narcissus and other red-listed species.

CBR is currently working on preparation of a new project application to EOCA on supporting the meadow ecosystems of the Valley of Narcissus with the use of traditional agricultural practices.

10. develop a strategy for sustainable ecotourism to support the local economy, secure and focus funding on infrastructure priorities, and create more opportunities for employment for local people to reduce outward migration;

In CBR were formed two important departments - a recreation department and a department for sustainable development and project cooperation. One of the main tasks of the first one is the implementation of the concept of sustainable tourism on the territory of the CBR and adjacent territories, basing on a developed strategic document. The other department is working on the cooperation with stakeholders and searching for opportunities to implement sustainable development principles in broader sense, including the use of eco-touristic opportunities to support local economy. Key provisions of developed strategies are reflected in the Management Plan.

Opportunities are used to start cooperation with international organizations to promote the area and attract more visitors. There are developed documents and projects to ensure cooperation, experience exchange and getting best practices within the framework of a number of international programs.

Since financial resources are quite limited in the conditions of war situation in Ukraine, the possibilities of the institution to increase funding in this area are very small. However, due to the support from international institutions, in particular the Frankfurt Zoological Society, and the activities of a number of international projects, it is possible to get some funding for priority tasks. In addition, cooperation is established with a volunteer organization, which, together with the institution, is working on construction and maintaining the proper functioning of a number of highland eco-points and ecotourism trails.

Also here at CBR is functioning a Coordinating Board, which deals with issues of coordination for sustainable development and recreational cooperation with local stakeholders, and also heads of relevant departments and field divisions participate in meetings of local self-government bodies. In the current year, such a meeting of the Coordinating Board was held in April.

We have introduced the practice of development of joint programs for the socio-economic development of settlements in the area of activity of the institution, where specific measures aimed at the development and maintenance of recreational infrastructure, roads and bridges, which are used by tourists as well as by local population to maintain traditional farming. In the current year, such programs were signed with the territorial communities of Bohdan and Neresnytsya.

In cooperation with regard to the recreational direction, an agreement is concluded annually to ensure the development of winter types of recreation on the territory of the institution – skiing on the territory of the Drahobrat tract, according to the planned measures in Management Plan.

Also in the reporting year, a meeting was held with representatives of Global Conservation regarding the development of the reserve's tourism and recreational potential. An agreement was reached on financial support for some projects to create new infrastructure elements and purchase equipment and supplies.

11. ensure that the European Diploma logo and the significance of the award are widely promoted in all Carpathian Biosphere Reserve material, events and communications;

CBR actively disseminates information about the European Diploma during all meetings in its presentations, in all the reports and promotion booklets about the reserve. The European Diploma logo is used in presentations and in information materials, on the reserve's website.

The obligation to properly preserve the institution's values and maintain international statuses is included in the Regulations of the CBR.

12. develop a strategy for enhancing ecological connectivity within the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve between the eight original massifs; examine the ecological connectivity issues between the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve and other parts of the Ukrainian Carpathians; continue to pursue trans-border connectivity, for example with Romania.

In 2016, CBR established a UNESCO transition area, which ensured ecological connectivity between most of the reserve's clusters. Currently, development strategies are being developed for this area, which will be based on increasing the ecological connectivity between protected massifs. Work continues also on the establishment of a UNESCO transboundary biosphere reserve together with Romanian protected areas. Its creation will promote cross-border connectivity between the existing protected areas of Ukraine and Romania.

The CBR directly borders with other protected areas in Carpathians – Synevyr and Carpathian National Nature Parks, which makes it possible to strengthen ecological connectivity and implement joint measures.

In 2024, CBR, together with public organizations, completed the development of a project of extension of the territory. The implementation of this project will significantly improve ecological connectivity in the region where the CBR is located.

3. Site Management: List here any changes to the European Diploma holding site management, in relation to both terrestrial and aquatic environments (as appropriate), and in relation to staff and finances, since the last annual report was submitted to the Council of Europe. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

There were no significant changes in the management of the institution neither in recent years nor in 2024 in particular. But it should be mentioned that as a result of recent extension of the area, the staff of CBR was increased by 92 positions and additional financing for salaries allocated by the state in amount of 10 mln. UAH.

In 2024, by order No. 1271 of the Minister of Environmental Protection a new 5-year action plan for 2024-2029 was approved for the management of the CBR territory, and a corresponding report on the implementation of the previous 5-year action plan was prepared.

Management problems are also observed in certain types of ecosystems. The most threatened ones are meadow ecosystems, as well as wetlands. One of such problems is the forest succession in the territory of the Valley of Narcissus, where semi-natural flood plains, which can also be treated as wetlands, are present.

During last year, the traditional nature management measures (haymaking and willows cutting) have been carried out in "The Valley of Narcissus" massif to maintain meadow plant communities and conservation of *Narcissus angustifolius* population. The situation had been disturbed here before the area became protected. Activities aimed for the hydrological balance restoration have been held in this protected massif.

In particular, here during 2024 was implemented an international project "Save the Narcissus Valley" with the financial support of EOCA (European Outdoor Conservation Association) and ORTOVOX. Within its framework, 3 hydrological constructions (flood-gates) were maintained on drainage channels (in total, presently there are 13 of them). Also, about 50 hectares, which were left out by the local population due to a decrease in the demand for hay were mowed with joint financing from the project funds and with the CBR's own funds.

In addition, this year the implementation of a project within the framework of the Open River program was launched, which provides for the removal of the remnants of the dams that were built during the Austro-Hungarian times for rafting timber. They have lost their economic importance, but they posed a significant environmental problem for migratory fish species, including a number of rare species.

4. Boundaries: Give details of any changes to the boundaries of the European Diploma holding site since the last annual report was submitted to the Council of Europe. If there are any changes, please attach an appropriate map to this report. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

In January 2022, by the Decree of the President of Ukraine, the territory of the reserve was extended by 8,381.6 ha, and currently it is 66,417.4 ha. Most of the newly added territories are covered with the primeval and old-growth forest. In addition, as part of this extension process, over 9,000 hectares of natural beech and spruce forests were passed within its territory under the direct management of the CBR administration - the ones which were previously subordinated to state-owned forestry companies. Currently, the process of transferring new territories under the management of the CBR administration is ongoing.

A map of the CBR territory can also be viewed at the following link: http://cbr.nature.org.ua/jpg/CBR_CoE.jpg

5. Other information:

Military actions from the aggression of the Russian Federation are happening at a great distance from the CBR and do not directly affect its territory.

In April and September, by the order of the Ministry of Environment, the representatives of the CBR participated in 2 meetings of the Joint Management Committee (JMC) of the UNESCO World Heritage Site "Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe", and also during the given year the reserve participated in several international workshops and meetings dedicated to the management of the UNESCO World Heritage Site and its buffer zone.

In July 2024, representative of the institution, as a national expert of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, as part of the official delegation of Ukraine, took part in the 46th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee (New Delhi, India).

CBR was an organizer of the International Round Table Meeting "Ecological and legal, scientific-educational and cross-border aspects of implementation of the Carpathian Convention and its Protocols", which was held on October 3, 2024 in Rakhiv, Zakarpattia region. Over 70 participants from Ukraine, Romania, Austria, Slovakia and Poland participated in it.

Representatives of the reserve, on behalf of the Ministry of Environment of Ukraine, participated in a joint conference of the Alpine and Carpathian Conventions to exchange practical knowledge on the management of large carnivores (March 2024, Brdo, Slovenia).

In October 2024, the institution's delegation participated in the final conference of the Life Prognoses project - Protection of Old Growth Forests in Europe: Natural heritage, Outline, Synthesis and Ecosystem Services (Bruges, Belgium) with the participation of representatives of the European Commission.

In July 2024, the All-Ukrainian Scientific and Practical Conference "Functioning of Objects of the Nature Reserve Fund of Ukraine under Martial Law: Ways of Restoration and Development" was held in Kyiv (organizer – Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine). The Director of the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve delivered a plenary report.