



## DANUBE RIVER WETLANDS ECOTOURISM DESTINATION

### Action Plan for Ecotourism Destination

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World Bank



United States Agency for International  
Development (USAID)

through the Biodiversity Conservation &  
Economic Growth Project II

Between August and November 2003 Ecotourism Action Plans for twelve potential ecotourism destinations were developed throughout the country. Many stakeholders participated in the development of the Plans. This work included the review and assessment of local resources and opportunities, setting priorities, and assembling the plans. The proposals prepared during the process have been used in the development of the National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan for Bulgaria.

The development of Action Plans for Ecotourism Destinations is a continual process engaging participants from regions' private citizens, municipalities and donor programs. As such, the Plans should not be repositories of exhaustive lists of projects from the destinations. Nor should the projects be viewed as definitive. Although considerable regional cooperation and coordination was undertaken during their development, the Action Plans have not been officially approved as a planning document at either the municipal or district levels. Additional work in the regions is needed to ensure duly approved and balanced action plans that fit with the National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan, that comply with the current regional development legislative framework and which fully reflect the regions' vision for ecotourism. The projects and activities listed in the Action Plans are important, but they should not be seen as the only regional priority actions in the tourism sphere.

## ***List of Acronyms***

<b>BCEG</b>	Biodiversity Conservation and Economic Growth Project
<b>BSPB</b>	Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds
<b>GEF</b>	Global Environment Facility
<b>MoEW</b>	Ministry of Environment and Water
<b>NATURA 2000</b>	European Ecological Net (for the EU countries and the countries from Central and East Europe, in integration process), contains territories under protection according to the requirements of the Bird and Habitats Directive
<b>NETS</b>	National Eco-Tourism Strategy
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>PHARE</b>	EU Assistance for Economic Restructuring Program
<b>RAMSAR</b>	Convention on Wetlands adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971. Ramsar is the only global environmental treaty dealing with a particular ecosystem
<b>RIEW</b>	Regional Inspectorate of Environment and Water
<b>SAPARD</b>	EU Investment pre-accession Funds in the Field of Agriculture and Forestry
<b>UNESCO</b>	Abbreviation for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, a structure of the United Nations Organization for education, science and culture; supports cooperation between countries in indicated areas.
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development

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FOLLOW THE BULGARIAN DANUBE SHORE!

## **Introduction**

The drafting of the ecotourism plan for the Danube River Wetlands Ecotourism destination is an integral part of the overall National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan. The MOEW project “Wetland Restoration and Pollution Reduction” (GEF TF 050706 BUL) was nominated by the Biodiversity Conservation and Economic Growth II Project team and sponsored by both the United States Agency for International Development and the government of the Republic of Bulgaria. This project facilitated the drafting of the regional ecotourism action plan for the ecotourism destination.

The process of drafting this regional ecotourism action plan included over 60 representatives from various interested parties: state institutions, municipal and regional administrations, regional environment and water inspectorates, protected areas and park administrations, NGO’s, mass media, and the tourist industry. These partners and stakeholders in the Danube River Wetlands Ecotourism destination served to identify a large number of natural, cultural, historical, infrastructural, and human resources. These resources provided the basis for the plan and will be consolidated into an information database.

The regional population is, in general, not well-educated in terms of the economic growth potential in ecotourism. There are some local and regional initiatives within the framework of nature and cultural heritage protection activities, but they all lack a strategic approach and systematic consistency.

Via the NETS program, state institutions and municipal administrations, as well as the non-governmental and business sector, became interested in drafting an action plan for ecotourism. Currently, the interest in developing ecotourism around protected areas and parks in the ecotourism destination greatly exceeds available ecotourism infrastructure.

The primary goal of the ecotourism action plan is to identify priority measures and activities for ecotourism development in the ecotourism destination of Danube River regions through the year 2008. Successful implementation of this ecotourism plan will also contribute to fulfilling the goals of municipal and regional development plans, and it is hoped that it will become an integral component of comprehensive regional economic development policy. The plan’s inherent flexibility will allow it to be adapted to the changing goals and priorities of regional municipalities within the Danube River Wetlands Ecotourism destination.

### **1. Description of the Ecotourism Destination**

#### **1.2 General description**

The Danube River forms the natural northern boundary of this ecotourism destination. Its southern boundary is formed by the Danube River floodplain and includes the Beli and Cherni Lom river valleys. The ecotourism destination includes

a total of 25 municipalities along the Danube, which are part of 6 administrative regions. Municipalities include Bregovo, Novo Selo, Vidin, Dimovo, Lom, Vulchedrum, Kozlodui, Mizia, Oryahovo, Dolna Mitropoliya, Gulyantsi, Nikopol, Belene, Svishtov, Tsenovo, Borovo, Ivanovo, Hlebarovo, Dve Mogili, Russe, Slivo Pole, Tutrakan, Glavinitsa, Sitovo, and Silistra. The administrative regions are as follows: Vidin, Montana, Veliko Turnovo, Pleven, Rouse, and Silistra.

This ecotourism destination comprises towns and villages belonging to three plan regions: North-West, North-Central and North-East. The Danube River municipalities are also trans-boundary cooperation areas.

According to the classification of the National Plan for the Development of Agriculture and Rural Regions 2000-2006, as per SAPARD, 13 municipalities from the ecotourism destination are “backward rural areas.” In connection with supporting activities under measure 1.3 *“Development of agricultural activities aimed at environmental protection,”* 19 Danube municipalities are defined as municipalities having a “potential for developing rural tourism.” The area of the Russenski Lom Nature Park is a pilot area under this agro-ecological measure. This provides opportunities to preserve the bio and landscape diversity of the park area through agro-ecological activities which maintain and even improve semi-natural habitats.

The legislative framework of the Ecotourism Action Plan is determined by several primary documents: The Tourism Act, the Regional Development Act, the Protected Areas Act, and the Biodiversity Conservation Act. When defining priority goals and activities, the ecotourism plan supports the goals of the National Regional Development Plan, the National Environment Protection Strategy, the Wetlands Restoration Strategy, the Danube Islands Restoration Strategy, the National Plan for Agriculture and Rural Regions Development, etc. Bulgaria is party to all international agreements related to the protected areas.

The administrations of regional governors and municipalities, along with those of parks and protected areas, provide the institutional framework for implementing the ecotourism action plan. It is these bodies which will integrate the ecotourism action plan with already standing municipal, district, and regional development plans focused on cultural heritage tourism. “Sustainable development” is the overarching ethic which drives all aspects of this process.

In this ecotourism destination, the three tourism councils are located in Vidin, Russe and Silistra. The tourism council in Russe is the most active. Its members also include different companies, tour operators and agencies, hotel and restaurant keepers, and other individuals engaged in tourism.

Tourism information centers are particularly active in offering ecotourism packages and services within the territory of the ecotourism destination. Such centers exist in Tutrakan, Russe, Ivanovo, Vidin, Novo Selo. The visitor’s center at Russenski Lom Nature Park also provides information for regional tourism.

Tourism information offices located with “Business Centers under the JOBS Project of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy” (set up with the financial assistance of UNDP) can also provide ecotourism and general tourism services.

The Ecotourism destination Danube River Wetlands houses three of the country’s total of 24 tourism information offices. These are to be found in Silistra, Svishtov, and Vidin. These offices are able to continuously update their information on accommodations, food, tourist attractions, etc.

The business centers also offer various training courses for starting up small businesses, including in the field of tourism. Due to their well-organized network and trans-boundary cooperation areas status, they can participate in regional and trans-boundary projects and offer regional and trans-boundary ecotourism products as well.

The entire Danube River Wetlands Ecotourism destination is located in Euro-Region Lower Danube. This region is seeing the implementation of many biodiversity preservation projects sponsored by the EU and other parties, including “Wetlands Restoration and Pollution Reduction,” “Agriculture Pollution Control,” “Vidin and Russe for the Russenski Lom Nature Park,” “The Wonderful World of the Orlova Chuka Cave,” “Lower Danube Green Corridor,” etc.

The ecotourism destination also boasts NGOs for trans-boundary cooperation with Romania and the former Yugoslav republics: the Euro-Region Danubius Association, Russe; the Euro-Region Silistra-Kalarash Association, Silistra; the Euro-Region Dunav-21 Association, Vidin; the Association for Trans-Boundary Cooperation and Development of North-West Bulgaria, Vidin; the Association of Danube Municipalities-Kalafat Zone; the Association for Border Cooperation and Regional Development Timok-21, Vidin.

Particularly active in this ecotourism destination are NGOs that implement projects related to environmental protection and especially ecotourism: “World for All,” Silistra (Sreburna-a European Dream project on the Territory of the Sreburna Nature Reserve); the Kalimok-Brushlen Protected Area, Tutrakan (presently managing the Kalimok-Brushlen Protected Area under the MOEW project “Wetlands Restoration and Pollution Reduction”); the Fishermen’s Association, Tutrakan; the Akademik Student’s Association, Russe; Ekosever, Russe (an accomplished project on European legislation in the field of the environment); Yacht Club Vidin; European Spaces, Russe; Ekoglasnost, Russe; Ekoplaneta, Russe. Additionally, the Aleko Tourist Society, Svishtov; The Earth Forever, Svishtov; BSPB, Svishtov; and the Training Center in Svishtov offer ecotourism packages.

## **1.2 Resource Diversity of the Ecotourism Destination**

### ***Natural Resources***

The Danube River Wetlands Ecotourism destination is characterized with lowlands and flat-undulating relief. The climate there is classified as temperate-continental.

Soil types vary, with the most typical being alkaline humus, alluvial-meadow, and humus-carbonate soils. Soils in the Danube Plain are fertile and humus-rich. Alluvial-meadow soils predominate in river valleys.

The Bulgarian bank of the Danube River from the Timok River to Silistra is 471.45 km long. At many points the bank is narrow and steep down to the water line while at others it is up to several kilometers wide and borders relatively large lowlands which are periodically flooded.

The ecotourism destination is poor in forests. Natural vegetation in Danube lowlands consists of riverside strips of *Salix alba* willows, *Populus alba* poplars, old acidophyllic oak forests *Quercus robur* and riverside mixed forests of *Quercus robur*, *Ulmus laevis*, and *Ulmus minor*. Along the river valley of Russenski Lom there are mixed forests – oak, hornbeam, lime, elm, ash and maple. Natural forests have been greatly reduced due to the agricultural use of the region.

Flooded forests along the river's main stem and on Danube Islands are of major importance for biodiversity along the Danube River. There are a total of 75 islands along the river within Bulgarian territory. Their form changes continuously due to the river's hydrology. These islands are the habitat of 53 major species, as well as plants and animals of national, European and world conservation importance. In the last decades the expansion of areas with poplar vegetation on Danube islands has resulted in destruction and damage of natural flooded forests. That is why the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests and the Ministry of Environment and Waters have adopted a Strategy for Preservation and Restoration of flooded forests on Danube Islands.

The water resources of the ecotourism destination are limited. The Danube River itself is the major water resource. High-water rivers flowing through the ecotourism destination include various Danube tributaries: the Iskur, Vit, Ossum, Yantra, and Russenski Lom rivers. The Russenski Lom and Yantra Rivers flow through canyon-like valleys. There is a karst spring near the village of Pissanets, Vetovo Municipality.

The Bulgarian Danube shore is a wealth of natural heritage for Bulgaria. The Danube River riparian zone and its adjacent forests are habitat for an abundance of plant and animal communities, many of them with rare and threatened species status and European/world importance. Several strategic documents deal specifically with preserving Danube River water purity and biodiversity.

The river valley is of major importance for a number of bird species threatened on a world scale. These species visit riverside areas during different seasons to breed, nest and roost. The areas they use have been identified as habitats of ornithological significance and are to be incorporated into the NATURA 2000 European Ecological Network. Sites of ornithological significance in Bulgaria number a total of 50, of which 12 are along the Danube in the Danube River Wetlands Ecotourism destination. Also of significance are the fisheries of Orsoya, Funiyata, Gorni Tsibur Island, Ibisha Island, Vardim Island, the Belene Islands, the Lomovete Valley, those near the village of Mechka, the Kalimok marsh, Stenata, Pozharevo Island, and the Sreburna Reserve.



The Russenski Lom Reserve is a valuable nature, cultural and historical heritage site in the Danube River Wetlands Ecotourism destination. A NATURA 2000 site and site of ornithological significance, the park is part of the Via Pontica migration corridor. It has several visitor areas: reception area, mass recreation area, historical area and special-regime area.

Wetlands are habitats which have enormous significance for the biological conservation of various biological species. From the viewpoint of ecotourism, wetlands are visited by many nature lovers and scientists, who watch birds and rare animals, take part in trainings on wetlands importance and functions, traverse eco-trails and rest actively. Unfortunately, human impact has drastically reduced the wetlands area along Bulgarian Danube shore.

The largest wetland areas in the ecotourism destination are Persina and Kalimok-Brushlen. Under the MOEW project "Wetlands Restoration and Pollution Reduction" they should be restored near to their natural state before their natural water regime is disturbed. They are expected to be fully restored by the end of 2007.

Persina Nature Park is the largest Ramsar site in Bulgaria and contains a rich and diverse bird population. Species biodiversity and conservation status are currently being studied in detail. Kalimok-Brushlen is a sum total of beaches, in-island water basins, marches and canals. The area is a small migration route of birds of prey, a place for rest and winter quarters of many ducks, cormorants, pelicans and others, including 16 worldwide endangered species.

The Stariyat Dub (Old Oak) protected locale covers part of Vardim island and is included in the list of sites of ornithological significance in Bulgaria and in the National Plan for priority activities on preserving major wetlands in Bulgaria. It is also monitored by the World Wild Nature Fund under the Green Danube program. A proposal model for declaring the island a NATURA 2000 protected area has been made.

Sreburna Lake is a wetland under the Ramsar Convention. The reserve is a habitat of 70 to 80 pelican mating pairs as well as other species of waterfowl, animals and reptiles for a total of 1,338 species. The buffer area houses the Nature Science Museum of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, where the pelican colony can be observed on a video screen through a camera placed at the lake in 2003.

Two of Bulgaria's most beautiful caves, Orlova Chuka cave near Russe and Magura near Vidin, are located in the ecotourism destination.

### ***Cultural Monuments***

According to historic data, as far back as the 3<sup>rd</sup> century C.E., the Danube was the northern border of the Roman Empire, and fortresses built along its shores were protection against warlike tribes, including Goths, Huns and Slavs. Later, the Danube provided nautical access to Constantinople. In the era of the crusades, the

knights-crusaders used the river for their travel. During the Middle Ages, it facilitated the Turk tribes invasion of Western and Central Europe.

Along the Danube river coastline, beginning from the most northwestern part of the ecotourism destination to the most northeastern part, remains can be seen of Roman defenses and fortresses, which are historic, architectural, construction, ethnographic, and artistic monuments of culture. Many sites were settled by the Romans, and testify as to culture and traditions over the centuries: the national architectural and archeological reserve Durostorum-Drustur-Silistra, the antique Roman towns of Nove and Ulpia Escus, the fortresses of Baba Vida and Kaletu, Kastru Martis, the ancient castrum Dimum in Belene, the Thracian tomb and silver treasure dated 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. near Borovo, the only European late-antique tomb of 4<sup>th</sup> century C.E. in Silistra, the Omurtag Preslaven Dom on the Danube near the village of Maluk Preslavets, the antique fortress Transmariska in Tutrakan, Sexaginta Prista in Russe, the medieval town of Cherven, the archeological reserve Rock Churches in Ivanovo village and many others. The only ethnographic museum along the Bulgarian Danube river coastline, the 'Danube Fishing and Boat-Making' museum, is located in Tutrakan. Tutrakan also hosts an authentic and preserved fishing village dating from the Renaissance, with 48 authentic Renaissance houses. The National Museum of Transport and Communications is located in Russe. It occupies the building of the first railway station in Bulgaria. The only bridge between Bulgaria and Romania at present connects Russe and Gyurgevo. Excavations along the Danube river coast provide rich information about the customs and lifestyles of the population in the region of present Northern Bulgaria by telling us of their past.

### ***Land Use***

Agricultural landscapes in the region provide excellent opportunities for ecologically pure agricultural produce. This is exclusively due to the specific microclimate created by the Danube plain, which is located entirely in the Danube River Wetlands ecotourism destination. Traditional agricultural crops in this ecotourism destination are comprised of cereals (wheat, corn, barley), perennial plants (vineyards, and fruit gardens) and vegetables.

More than 45% of the peach plantations in the country are located in the Silistra region, where the famous peach brandy is also produced. Along the Danube coast, there are established plantations of local grapes, many of which produce high-quality wines. The most famous cellars are those in Novo Selo, Magura cave, Ruptsi, Svishtov, Pirgovo, Russe and Silistra.

Traditional Danubian cuisine is invariably linked to wheat and corn. The bread made here is made with special care, and from Vidin to Silistra locals make hominy with butter and cheese. People from the Danube region cook incredible fish soup right at the riverbank. In Kozlodui visitors can taste typical Wallachian dishes of Slamura and Cleen. In Tsenovo one can try Makarina (a type of pastry) and wine must gruel.

### ***Social Events and Traditions***

The diversity of religious communities in the ecotourism destination makes for a wide range of traditional holidays and customs along the Danube. Ethnographic and historical collections in villages and towns have preserved the population's rituals. The river connects and helps Bulgarians, Turks, Roma, Tartars, Cossacks, Wallachians, Slovaks, Armenians and Jews find a road to each other and improve their land. On religious holidays Orthodox Christians, Muslims, Jews and Catholics all get together as one.

The St. Dimitur Cathedral in Vidin is among the biggest Orthodox Christian churches in Bulgaria, second only to Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sofia. On December 6, 1868 the Vidin Metropolitan Bishop Antim, who was elected as the first Bulgarian Exarch in 1872, held the first church service in Bulgarian inside St. Dimitur. The church in Brestovitsa (Tsenovo municipality) has 5 gilt bells given as a gift by the Russian Tsar Alexander. Churches in the villages of Exarch Yossif and Novo Selo are famous for their murals. Silistra boasts the 1862 Bulgarian Orthodox church "Sts. Peter and Paul", Bulgaria's oldest (1620) Armenian Apostolic church "Surp Astvadzadzin" (Virgin Mary) and the 1640 Kursumli Mosque of the city's Muslim community. In September 2003 the relics of St. Dassi Dorostolski were brought to Silistra. There are cathedrals in Russe, Belene, Dolna Mitropolia, Svishtov, and Vidin. Russe is the center of the North Catholic Diocese. Moreover, in Russe there are numerous monuments, churches and cult buildings including Orthodox Christian, Catholic, Evangelist, Baptist, Adventist, and Armenian churches, synagogues and mosques.

The beauty of nature and earth along the Danube are a never-ending source of inspiration. Holidays depend on economic activity, so they are most numerous in winter when the land and people take a rest from hard work. Usually, Orthodox Christians along the Danube commemorate their saints with village- and city-wide festivities. On St. Todor's Day, there horse races in the village of Obretenik, Svishtov has "Svishtov Vines" on Trifon Zarezan, Belene marks St. Lazar's Day, Dolna Mitropolia still observes the "St. Flour" ritual, the Banat authentic Bulgarian weddings and Wallachians dance the Kalush dance. All Danube villages and towns hold in great respect the ritual of throwing a cross in the river on St. Jordan's Day. Traditional crafts in the ecotourism destination are also connected with the river. Tutrakan fishermen still weave fishing nets and are skilled in building boats. There are authentic fishermen's villages in Brushlen and Belene. Reed furniture is produced in Belene and Silistra. Dolna Mitropolia has a museum of Bulgarian- and Slovak-style woodcarving.

### ***Cultural Events and Itineraries***

Cultural and historical heritage in the ecotourism destination is centered mainly in regional centers and some smaller towns. Cultural landmarks of the ecotourism destination are the architecture and established cultural traditions, cultural and historical heritage and the exchange of cultural products and ideas.

For nearly half a century, Russe has played host to the March Music Days International Festival for symphony and cantata oratory music. Jazz art has been developing for over 30 years now. Folklore music and dancing are traditions for the

region. The Zlatnata Gadulka international folklore festival for authentic and arranged folklore, folk dances, songs and customs is held annually.

Every year Silistra hosts a Balkan children's festival "Tomorrow's peace starts with today's friendship," while the Russenski Lom Nature Park hosts the "Eco-Art" forum for reviving culture in the area. A rally to commemorate soldiers and officers – Bulgarians, Romanians, and Germans – that died in the Tutrakan battle is held every first Sunday in September at the Military Cemetery 191 near Tutrakan. Botev festivities are held between May 27<sup>th</sup> and June 3<sup>rd</sup> when Botev fans from all over Bulgaria march towards Okolchitsa peak, where the S.S. Radetski receives visitors on her deck. The Danube carnival takes place on June 24<sup>th</sup> in the village of Nikolovo. Vidin is host to the Danube Youth classical modern ballet festival, to the Dances at the Danube international folklore festival, to the Danube Rhythms regional festival for authentic folklore, an annual festival of Wallachian songs and dances, the annual Roma festival and the Dunaviada ethno-festival.

Ivanovo municipality has several culture itineraries developed by the Regional History Museum in Russe including "Gradishtata", "Stone of Faith", Tabachka's Caves", "Stulpishte", and the Nissovo Monasteries.

The ecotourism destination hosts an international regatta held every August and September along the Danube River from its spring in Germany to Silistra. Its participants camp along the Danube and in Bulgaria.

## **General Infrastructure**

The ecotourism destination has favorable transport and geographic location due to the fact that its territory is crossed by two European transport corridors (#7 and #9) which connect Europe (Baltic and North Sea), Asia and Africa (Mediterranean and Black Sea). The Danube River is a key transport link between Western Europe and the Balkan Peninsula. Presently, the river is used mainly for cargo transportation. Passenger transport is not well developed. Boat trips are offered at some inhabited places. There are border checkpoints along the river in Vidin, Oryahovo, Russe and Silistra.

The development of road infrastructure is of key importance for the ecotourism destination. Road infrastructure is well developed and relatively evenly distributed throughout the region. There is, however, a large discrepancy between the level of development of the road network in different towns and villages. This creates a difference in the quality of transportation services, which range from very good to unsatisfactory. Automobile transport is the main type of transportation. A number of places are difficult to access in winter. All road network components are in a relatively good condition but still fall short of the European standards for travel safety and comfort. They should be repaired and adequately maintained, which requires investments for road network renovation and development. Third- and fourth-class roads are the norm in villages. In towns, first- second- and third-class roads are more evident. Near Russe is the only bridge across the Danube between Bulgaria and Romania. The Hemus motorway is not far from Russe's southern border.

Railway transportation along the Danube has supplementary functions. For the entire Danubian area, the Vidin and Russe railway transport systems are the most effectively integrated into the national and international railway transportation system.

Water transport and port infrastructure plays a secondary role. There are ports in the municipalities of Vidin, Lom, Oryahovo, Dolna Mitropolia, Svishtov, Russe, Tutrakan and Silistra. This infrastructure is currently used mainly for cargo transportation.

Vidin has specialized RO-RO and RO-LA terminals, as well as a ferry connecting Vidin and Kalafat. This is the shortest route from Western Europe via Bulgaria to the Aegean Sea. Russe is Bulgaria's biggest Danubian city, and the port of Russe is the biggest Bulgarian port on the Danube. It is part of the major transport crossroads of trans-European transport corridors #7, #9 and the TRASEKA corridor (Europe-the Caucasus-Asia). 2004 will see the construction of a RO-RO terminal at Silistra as part of the #5 international corridor running from Turkey and the Middle East via Bulgaria towards Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, Russia and the Scandinavian countries. From Silistra along the Danube there is a regular passenger line to the Ukrainian town of Reni.

Danubian municipalities have a well-established electrical infrastructure. Bulgaria's only nuclear power station is located in Kozlodui, and a second nuclear plant will be built in Belene.

The existing water-supply network supplies water to 98% of the towns and villages. Water quality is defined as “good for drinking” under Bulgarian State Standard. Asbestos water supply pipes account for over 80% of all pipelines. Most of them have not been replaced for over 20 years, are physically damaged and cause massive losses of potable water. Towns and villages in the ecotourism destination need investment support for the renovation of the water-supply network and replacement of old asbestos pipes.

Development of the national telephone network system and connection quality is relatively good. There are some problems with timely mail services in some smaller inhabited areas. Not all inhabited areas are covered by high-quality radio and TV signals. Optical telecommunication networks, which will also service trans-boundary traffic, will be designed and built. Digitalization in regional centers is at an advanced stage. The region enjoys good services related to modern information technologies (the Internet) through the nationwide Internet access number, 0134200.

Solid waste is collected and transported in bulk to compost heaps. They are intended for the deposit of both solid and construction wastes, as well as non-hazardous production waste. Industrial, domestic and hazardous wastes are subject to regional control. Regional depots for solid domestic waste are being currently built in Silistra, Russe, and Kozlodui. They are designed by the MOEW and funded by the ISPA program of the EU. These depots are expected to be built by the end of 2005. Vidin municipality already has such a depot whose capacity will expire in 2005. A new regional depot with cells for domestic and construction waste will be built under an ISPA project in the 2005 to 2006 period.

The sewage system network in the ecotourism destination is well developed mostly in larger cities: Russe (80% coverage), Byala (40%), Silistra, Vidin, Kozlodui, Dimovo and Svishtov. The towns of Borovo and Two Mogili have a partially built sewage network. The existing sewage system needs renovation. The remainder of towns and villages still use septic pits and absorption wells, thus impairing underground water quality. There are no wastewater purification facilities and the region’s water basins are uncontrollably polluted. Another problem is the still chaotic disposal of waste into compost heaps, near the outskirts of villages in particular. A widespread environmental pollution problem is the indiscriminate disposal of manure and other agricultural waste.

The ecotourism destination has no specialized high-school and higher educational establishments for the training of tourism personnel.

### ***Tourism Infrastructure***

The ecotourism destination as a whole is characterized by an underdeveloped tourist infrastructure. Tourism infrastructure is better developed only in the Russe region.

Hotels providing adequate accommodation are as follows:

- Vidin – a total of 14 hotels with 462 beds, the hotel compounds of Ninov, Bononia, Tourist House, the Zora, Dunav, Starite Borove, Merkurii, DNA, Rai, Yuzhen Park, Sinagovtsi, and Avramov hotels, the Cholakis motel, the Madonna hotel and folk-style restaurant, the Orlyaka hut near the Danube and the Bozhuritsa hut located in the only elevated oak forest in Northwest Bulgaria, between the villages of Sinagovtsi, Ivanovtsi, and Milchina Luka.
- Kozlodui – the Kozlodui Nuclear Power Station rest-house, the tourist chalet in the Botev Park, the Istur hotel
- Belene – the rest house of the National Electric Power Company has over 100 beds, and villas and chalets on the Magaretsa and Persin islands can accommodate 48 tourists
- Svishtov – the five hotels Dunav, Sviloza, Akademik, Kaleto and Korpus Yug can accommodate over 660 people
- Borovo – there is one hut with accommodation for
- Russe – the city has very good accommodation facilities comprised of hotels, motels, and huts: the Bistra and Galina, Danube Plaza Hotel, Lipnik business center, Kristal, Lilia, National, Riga, Splendid, Russe and Yuvelir hotels, the Luki, Petrov, and Rai motels, Zdravets and Prista huts, etc.
- Slivo Pole – tourists can be accommodated in the villa of the Pig Breeding Farm in the village of Golyamo Vranovo, and the rest house of Apiaria-93 in the village of Ryahovo
- Tutrakan – the Royal hotel near the village of Nova Cherna has 10 bedrooms with over 30 beds
- Sitovo – a hut in the village of Irnik and two mini-hotels in the village of Sitovo
- Sreburna – a private hotel accommodating 15
- Vetren, Silistra municipality – the Kalimaritsa hotel and restaurant (20 beds), a hotel and folk-style restaurant (9 beds), and a newly built hotel (10 beds), the Evroklub hotel (70 beds), 50 beds in the Bulgarian Tourist Union bungalows, the Silistra municipality hut (16 beds), and the ViK Simistra hut (10 beds)
- Silistra – the Zlatna Dobrudja and Bartimex hotels can accommodate larger groups of tourists. The Chefaka hotel offers 10 beds

Large hotels offer guests one-day packages for rural and culture tourism in adjacent areas. They have their own restaurants and transportation.

The towns and villages in the ecotourism destination have enough private transport companies, travel offices, and currency exchange bureaus.

The ecotourism destination's natural resources offer excellent conditions for rest and recreation, bird-watching, water tourism, summer regattas, trips to historical places, photo-tourism, fishing and hunting, excursions, educational itineraries. However, the existing ecotourism and visitor infrastructure does not help promotion of the sights. Eco-trails, shelters, picnic spots and observation sites are not enough, boats are scarce, and trail marking is inadequate.

Vidin, Russe, and Silistra have natural city parks on the Danube. The park in Silistra is the oldest natural park along the Bulgarian part of the Danube.

Several tourist itineraries are offered in the Vidin area: Vidin—Belogradchik, Vidin—Kula, Vidin—Novo Selo, and Vidin—Rabisha—Belogradchik.

Boat trips are possible at Novo Selo. The horseback riding facility in Kozlodui can be used for sport races and leisure riding. Sports complexes exist in Vidin, Svishtov, Kozlodui, Russe and Silistra.

A Persina Nature Park visitor's center and a Danube Park are to be built in Belene. Persina Nature Park publishes a monthly information bulletin on events in and around the park. Svishtov currently offers four itineraries: a trip towards Pametnitsite locale, west of the town, southwest of the town and a boat trip along the river.

The villages of Koshov, Svalenik, Cherven, Ivanovo and Pissanets, all within the framework of the Russenski Lom Nature Park, all have private houses which offer a full set of amenities and B&B to tourists. The Park offers its visitors several general-education itineraries, several panoramic routes, a historical route to the Ivanovo rock churches and many walking trips. Tourist trails are well developed and rest stops are marked.

The Russe Tourist Information Center offers the 2002 tourist itinerary system in a "Guide to Cultural Heritage Routes." A similar guide and map of the region also exists for Vidin.

The Kalimok-Brushlen Protected Area association publishes a monthly information bulletin and advertising materials on the protected area. Ecotrails and itineraries are soon to be marked.

In 2003, tourist eco-trails around the Sreburna reserve and Silistra were built thanks to the assistance of the "World for Everyone" association and local NGOs. Advertising and information materials tell visitors about biodiversity in the reserve.

Visitors to Silistra have several possibilities to learn about the history and traditions of the area including a tour of Silistra sights, a trip to the Krepostta forest park and the Drustur archeological reserve a visit to the history and ethnographic museums as well as the art gallery.

*Vast, unique and challenging — this is the Danube River Wetlands ecotourism destination!*



## 2. Situation analysis

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>WEAKNESSES</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Resources for the development of eco- and cultural tourism</li> <li>2. The Danube River, a transport corridor for servicing tourist flow</li> <li>3. Cultural events of national importance</li> <li>4. Preserved wetlands biodiversity;</li> <li>5. Existing regional business associations</li> <li>6. Existing tourist societies with ecotourism development facilities</li> <li>7. Council of Tourism to impliment regional ecotourism development policy</li> <li>8. Existing higher-education and secondary schools that can train personnel</li> <li>9. Ethnic and religious diversity—traditions and spiritual values as a tourist resource.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Underdeveloped infrastructure (tourist and general)</li> <li>2. Lack of a uniform information database on tourist sites, services and itineraries</li> <li>3. Lack of regional strategies and plans for ecotourism development</li> <li>4. Poor environmental culture</li> <li>5. River transport, an untapped tourist resource</li> <li>6. Shortage of diverse products, advertising and information materials</li> <li>7. Lack of marketing surveys on the demand of ecotourism products</li> <li>8. Lack of specialized educational structures/specialties for training ecotourism business personnel</li> <li>9. Lack of administrative capacities and well-trained staff for the development of modern tourism</li> <li>10. Poor knowledge of the cultures of ethnic and religious minorities</li> </ol>
<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Through Russe municipality, Bulgaria is a member of the Danube Countries Working Community (an EU structure), which is a possibility for ecotourism development in a broader context</li> <li>2. Using the possibilities of the PHARE-Trans-Boundary Cooperation for developing ecotourism in the destination</li> <li>3. Existence of university and college specialties related to business and agriculture in Ecotourism destination 12, which allows for rapid restructuring to meet educational needs</li> <li>4. Inclusion of sites and attractions into national and international tourist itineraries</li> <li>5. Seven municipalities have a zero profit tax</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Delayed adoption of the National Ecotourism Development Strategy can delay the drafting of regional strategies</li> <li>2. The inadequate funding of strategies to be drafted will demotivate process participants</li> <li>3. Global warming has a negative impact on biodiversity and river transportation development for the needs of tourism in the ecotourism destination</li> <li>4. Delay in financial decentralization does not allow the development of regional and local initiatives in the field of tourism to be financially provided for.</li> </ol>



### **3. Vision of the development of ecotourism in the region**

The Danube River Wetlands ecotourism destination is a European region characterized by a clean and blue Danube, green shores, rich biodiversity in restored wetlands, rich cultural and historical heritage dating from antiquity to the present day and authentic and diverse Danubian culture.

This plan's strategic goal is to have the protected area network along the Danube expanded within 5 years, conditions created for biodiversity preservation and restoration, for ecotourism become a major part of the economic development of municipalities in the ecotourism destination and for the Danube River Wetlands ecotourism destination to become an attractive ecotourism destination. Local communities will be the motive force behind these processes with a responsible and committed attitude towards nature.

### **4. Strategic goals**

#### **4.1 Preserving Natural and Cultural Heritage**

- 4.1.1 Inventory of available resources and establishment of a unified database for such resources.
- 4.1.2 Preservation and sustainable use of natural resources within the region.
- 4.1.3 Expansion of the protected area network within the region.
- 4.1.4 Development of a marketing strategy to promote the regional crafts, culture and traditions.
- 4.1.5 Increasing public awareness in order to form ecoculture among the population.

#### **4.2 Developing Ecotourism Business**

- 4.2.1 Development of appropriate general and specific tourism infrastructure.
- 4.2.2 Restoration of tourism transport along the Danube.
- 4.2.3 Attracting financial resources in support of ecotourism development within the destination - EU financial tools and other donors.
- 4.2.4 Stimulating businesses, local authorities and NGO to develop ecotourism through development of regional and local ecotourism policy and economy.
- 4.2.5 Development of a mechanism for spreading information about ecotourism opportunities within the region.

#### **4.3 Regional and Local Development**

- 4.3.1 Regional and local ecotourism capacity building.
- 4.3.2 Development and implementation of regional and local strategies and plans for ecotourism development.

- 4.3.3 Encouraging the regional and trans-boundary cooperation for ecotourism through establishing a regional ecotourism coordination center.
- 4.3.4 Institutional ecotourism capacity building.
- 4.3.5 Involving the population in the preservation and maintenance of natural and historic resources, and their interpretation through tourism.

## 5. Priority Actions

<p><b>Action # 1: Development of Management Plans for Protected Areas and Buffer Zones</b></p>
<p><b>Description:</b> Development and application of management plans for Orlova Chuka Natural Landmark, Maluk Preslavets Marsh Natural Landmark, Kalimok-Brushlen Protected Locale, Buffer Zone to Srebarna Maintained Reserve</p>
<p><b>Justification:</b> Orlova Chuka Natural Landmark – the second longest cave in Bulgaria. It is comparatively poor in formations, but it is very attractive with its entirely horizontal tourism section and the bats that inhabit it. Its entrance is located in the Cherni Lom river canyon, and is accessible by an automobile road. The natural landmark was declared with 80 hectares of adjacent area. There are no visitor infrastructure established, but such an infrastructure should be implemented on both riverbanks.</p> <p>Maluk Preslavets Marsh Natural Landmark – Valued for its exceptionally attractive landscape of high esthetic value and low anthropogenic impact. No biological diversity surveys have been performed, but the site has significant potential. There are no ecotrails or visitor infrastructure.</p> <p>Buffer Zone to the Srebarna Maintained Reserve – there are guesthouses established and operational nearby (Vetren village) with a total capacity of 10 beds.</p> <p>Kalimok-Brushlen Protected Locale – This is a territory of high ecotourism potential. It could offer diverse tourism attractions, related to cognitive tourism, recreation, etc.</p>
<p><b>Territorial Scope:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Orlova Chuka Natural Landmark – Orlova Chuka Cave – Dve Mogili Municipality, Ivanovo Municipality, Russe Municipality</li> <li>• Maluk Preslavets Marsh Natural Landmark – Glavinitsa Municipality, Silistra Municipality</li> <li>• Buffer Zone to the Srebarna Maintained Reserve – Silistra Region</li> <li>• Kalimok-Brushlen Protected Locale - Silistra Region, Russe Region</li> </ul>
<p><b>Strategic Objective(s):</b> 5.1.1, 5.1.2</p>
<p><b>Expected Results:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biological diversity conservation</li> <li>• Creating opportunities for usage of protected area resources for ecotourism development</li> <li>• Creating preconditions for usage of protected area resources for local development</li> </ul>
<p><b>Activities:</b> Surveying, planning, discussing, adopting, applying, and evaluating of management plans</p>

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<p><b>Indicators:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State of biological diversity</li> <li>• Number of developed and implemented management plans</li> <li>• Availability of local ecotourism initiatives</li> </ul>
<p><b>Lead Agency/Partners:</b> Regional administrations, municipalities, RIEW, independent experts, protected area administrations</p>
<p><b>Duration:</b> 2 years</p>
<p><b>Budget:</b> 500,000 Leva</p>
<p><b>Funding Sources:</b> MOEW Project “Wetlands Restoration and Pollution Reduction” GEF TF 050706 BUL (for Kalimok-Brushlen Protected Locale)</p>

### **Action # 2: Development of Tourism Trails for Visits to the Danube Wetlands by Water**

**Description:**

Providing opportunities for water tourism on the Danube (ecotourism water trails, ship and boat trips on the Danube)

**Justification:**

The destination can offers a number of unused opportunities for the development of attractive tourist trails, which will allow not only income generation through tourism activities but also promotion of the values of biodiversity and traditional culture of the destination.

Boat trips on the Danube river may involve entering lakes along the Danube as well as visits and tours around the Danubian islands. Organizing attractive forms of ecotourism (e.g. establishment of fishing villages, where tourists may observe the making and preparation of fishing nets and other appliances, to participate directly in fishing, to taste fish delicacies, typical for the Vidin region, etc.).

**Territorial Scope:**

Russe Municipality, Slivo Pole Municipality, Tutrakan Municipality, the municipalities from the mouth of Timok river to the town of Vidin (Vidin, Novo Selo, Dimovo, Bregovo)

**Strategic Objective(s):**

5.2, 5.3.6, 5.2.1, 5.2.6

<p><b>Expected Results:</b> Developed and introduced ecotourism water trails</p>
<p><b>Activities:</b> Studying, planning, development, offering, maintaining and promoting ecotourism trails</p>
<p><b>Indicators:</b> New trails and products and number of visits</p>
<p><b>Lead Agency/Partners:</b> Russe Regional Administration, Silistra Regional Administration, Dve Mogili Municipality, Ivanovo Municipality, Russe Municipality, Russe REWI, independent experts, the municipalities of Vidin, Novo Selo, Dimovo, Bregovo, Vidin Regional Administration, NGOs.</p>
<p><b>Duration:</b> 1 year for each trail from 2004 through 2008</p>
<p><b>Budget:</b> 100,000 Leva</p>
<p><b>Funding Sources:</b> International donors, municipal budget, mobilization local resources</p>

### Action # 3: Development of Hiking Tourism Ecotrails

**Description:**

Developing hiking ecotourism trails near:

- Cherven medieval fortress and Orlova Chuka cave
- The municipalities of Vidin, Novo Selo, Dimovo and Bregovo
- The area between the fortress walls from Telegraph Kapia to Top Kapia – Vidin
- Forest parks Pamuk-Kulak and Vetren – Silistra municipality

**Justification:**

The creation of walking trails will diversify opportunities for ecotourism by including currently and insufficiently used resources  
Development and marking with signs and other trail markings on a trail connecting Cherven medieval fortress and Orlova Chuka cave including using the bridges that cross Cherni Lom river. Two tourist attractions are located between the largest bends of the Cherni Lom river. The river makes three abrupt changes in the direction of its flow thus forming marked curves in the canyon through which it runs.

**Territorial Scope:**

- The trail connecting Cherven medieval fortress and Orlova Chuka cave – Dve Mogili Municipality, Ivanovo Municipality, Russe Municipality



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The municipalities of Vidin, Novo Selo, Dimovo, Bregovo</li> <li>• Silistra Municipality (forest parks Pamuk-Kulak and Vetren)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Strategic Objective(s):</b> 5.2, 5.3.6, 5.2.1, 5.2.6</p>
<p><b>Expected Results:</b> Developed and introduced ecotourism hiking trails</p>
<p><b>Activities:</b> Study, planning, development and delivery of hiking ecotourism products as well as their maintenance and promotion</p>
<p><b>Indicators:</b> Number of new trails, products and number of visitors</p>
<p><b>Lead Agency/Partners:</b> Regional Administrations (Russe, Vidin), Municipalities (Silistra, Vidin, Novo Selo, Dimovo, Bregovo, Dve Mogili, Ivanovo, Russe), Russe REWI, independent experts, NGOs, History Museum, Vidin Municipality, Forest Park administrations (Pamuk-Kulak and Vetren)</p>
<p><b>Duration:</b> 1 year for each trail from 2004 through 2008</p>
<p><b>Budget:</b> Approx. 100,000 Leva</p>
<p><b>Funding Sources:</b> MOEW – Environmental Activity Management Enterprise Fund, municipal budget, international donors, national programs</p>

<p><b>Action # 4: Development and Design of Specialized Trails</b></p>
<p><b>Description:</b> Developing and introducing specialized ecotourism trails including the Kaikusha biking trail, the BDA ornithological trail and the Photo Safari trail.</p>
<p><b>Justification:</b> The creation of walking trails will diversify opportunities for ecotourism by including insufficiently used resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kaikusha biking trail – available natural resources are a prerequisite for developing a trail to the Kaikusha Protected Locale</li> <li>• BDA ornithological trail – the diverse bird fauna is a prerequisite for the development of this trail</li> <li>• Photo Safari trail - available natural resources and the large number of bird species are prerequisites for developing this trail</li> </ul>

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<p><b>Territorial Scope:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kaikusha biking trail – Belene Municipality</li> <li>• BDA ornithological trail – Belene Danube archipelago</li> <li>• Photo Safari trail – Belene Municipality and Nikopol Municipality</li> </ul>
<p><b>Strategic Objective(s):</b> 5.2, 5.3.6, 5.2.1, 5.2.6</p>
<p><b>Expected Results:</b> Developed and introduced specialized ecotourism trails and increased number of visitors without threatening biodiversity in the destination</p>
<p><b>Activities:</b> Study, planning, development and delivery of specialized ecotourism products and their maintenance and promotion</p>
<p><b>Indicators:</b> Number of new trails and products and number of visitors</p>
<p><b>Lead Agency/Partners:</b> Persina Nature park Directorate, environmental and tourism NGOs, businesses from Belene Municipality and Nikopol Municipality, the Municipalities of Belene and Nikopol, tour operators</p>
<p><b>Duration:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kaikusha biking trail – 6 months</li> <li>• BDA ornithological trail – 9 months</li> <li>• Photo Safari trail – 9 months</li> </ul>
<p><b>Budget:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kaikusha biking trail –2,000 Leva</li> <li>• BDA ornithological trail – 3,000 Leva</li> <li>• Photo Safari trail –4,000 Leva</li> </ul>
<p><b>Funding Sources:</b> MOAF the Wetlands Restoration and Biogenic Pollution Reduction Project, NGOs, municipal programs, business sponsors and financing programs – SAPARD, PHARE and local initiatives</p>

<p><b>Action # 5: ‘History, Customs, and Nature of the Danube Region’ Ecotrail</b></p>
<p><b>Description:</b> Developing and introducing ecotourism trails and products</p>
<p><b>Justification:</b> This trail is unique, because in its 200 km it runs through three sites which are under the auspices of UNESCO (1/3 of all such sites in Bulgaria), extremely</p>

<p>diverse nature – from semi-mountain areas to marshes, unique cultural communities – 5 religions, exceptionally rich historic heritage such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historic sites (Ivanovo – rock church; Cherven – the Fortress, Sveshtari – Thracian tomb, Toutrakan – Roman fortress, Roman road, Silistra – Roman basilica and architectural monuments)</li> <li>• Cultural sites (Russe downtown, Toutrakan – downtown and fishing village, Demir Baba – worship center for the Aleani)</li> <li>• Temples (catholic, orthodox, Muslim, (Tataritsa and kazulbashki))</li> <li>• Historical, ethnographic and other museums</li> <li>• Natural sites (Russenski Lom – petrophillic flora and fauna, Orlova Chuka cave, Kalimok wetland, Srebarna – World Heritage site, Maluk Preslavets and Garvan wetlands, Danube islands – flooded forests).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Territorial Scope:</b> Silistra and Russe Regions</p>
<p><b>Strategic Objective(s):</b> 5.2, 5.3.6, 5.2.1, 5.2.6</p>
<p><b>Expected Results:</b> New trails and products, number of visitors</p>
<p><b>Activities:</b> Study, planning, development and offering of specialized ecotourism trails as well as their maintenance and promotion</p>
<p><b>Indicators:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number and quality of new trails and products</li> <li>• Number of visitors</li> <li>• Visitor satisfaction</li> </ul>
<p><b>Lead Agency/Partners:</b> Municipal and regional administrations, tourism companies, historic and ecological organizations, businesses</p>
<p><b>Duration:</b> 18 months</p>
<p><b>Budget:</b> 30,000 Leva</p>
<p><b>Funding Sources:</b> Local businesses and tour operators, projects, NGOs, municipalities, regional development plans by the municipalities of Russe, Razgrad, and Silistra</p>

<p><b>Action # 6: A Weekend with the Fishermen from Tutrakan</b></p>
<p><b>Description:</b>                  Developing and introducing a specialized (“fishing”) ecotourism product. This activity builds upon the unique resources of the region (a large navigable river, islands with large beaches) and fishing as a unique and traditional source of livelihood for the local population. It envisages accepting groups of tourists and offering to them to join the daily life of the Danube fishermen and enjoy the nature of the Danube river. The product is comprised of: accommodation, fishermen cuisine (various types of fish cooked in different ways on fire in the open), lunch and supper in the open on the river shore by a fire, boat trip with an opportunity to learn how to drive a fishing boat, fishing with an opportunity to learn fishing through various techniques, an opportunity for tourists to prepare themselves the fish they have caught under the guidance of the fisherman and a visit to a Danubian island with sunbathing and/or wildlife viewing (part of the program could take place on the island).</p>
<p><b>Justification:</b>                  The creation of this product will diversify opportunities for ecotourism by including insufficiently used resources. This will also contribute to income generation for the local community and the promotion of the traditional culture of the settlement.</p>
<p><b>Territorial Scope:</b>                  Kalimok-Brushlen Protected Locale and Pozharevski Ostrovi Protected locale (although this project could be developed at any location along Danube River where fishing is practiced)</p>
<p><b>Strategic Objective(s):</b>                  5.2, 5.3.6, 5.2.1, 5.2.6</p>
<p><b>Expected Results:</b>                  New trails and products, number of visitors</p>
<p><b>Activities:</b>                  Study, planning, development and delivery of a specialized ecotourism product</p>
<p><b>Indicators:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New product</li> <li>• Product quality</li> <li>• Number of visitors</li> <li>• Visitor satisfaction</li> </ul>
<p><b>Lead Agency/Partners:</b>                  Municipalities and non-governmental organizations – local fishermen associations and hotel owners</p>
<p><b>Duration:</b>                  1 year for development, annually for implementation (mid-May, when the fishing</p>

prohibition ends in September)

**Budget:**

20,000 Leva

**Funding Sources:**

Local and regional businesses (hotel owners, etc.), tourism organizations, fishermen organizations, national and international programs

**Action # 7: Development of Ecotourism Infrastructure**

**Description:**

Ensuring conditions for the efficient use of ecotourism trails and products. Making benches, children's playgrounds, fireplaces, fitness facilities, construction of shelters for rainy weather along the roads and tourism trails for hiking and biking ecotourists

**Justification:**

The construction of a ecotourism infrastructure will contribute to the assurance of safe and easy access of nature admirers to attractive territories and sites for the diversification of tourism products

**Territorial Scope:**

Municipalities where ecotourism trails are present

**Strategic Objective(s):**

5.2, 5.3.6

**Expected Results:**

- Creating preconditions for the development of new products
- Increasing the number of visitors
- Visitor satisfaction

**Activities:**

Study, design, construction and marking of the ecotourism infrastructure

**Indicators:**

- Number and type of ecotourism infrastructure elements
- Number of visitors
- Degree of visitor satisfaction

**Lead Agency/Partners:**

NGOs, State Forestries, Silistra Municipality, TA and TO, MOEW, road construction companies

**Duration:**

1 year during the period from 2004 to 2008

<p><b>Budget:</b> 100,000 Leva</p>
<p><b>Funding Sources:</b> MOEW – Environmental Activity Management Enterprise Fund, international programs and projects, municipal and state budgets, mobilizing local resources</p>

<p><b>Action # 8: Construction of Resting Sites and Bivouacs for Water Regattas</b></p>
<p><b>Description:</b> Construction of resting sites along the Danube river coast and on the islands, which would create conditions for developing a ‘water regatta’ tourism product</p>
<p><b>Justification:</b> An ecotourism infrastructure needs to be established that provides opportunities for bivouacking water regattas along the Danube river</p>
<p><b>Territorial Scope:</b> Danube river coast between Nikopol and Belene</p>
<p><b>Strategic Objective(s):</b> 5.2, 5.3.6, 5.4</p>
<p><b>Expected Results:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing the number of visits and visitor satisfaction</li> <li>• Creating local development opportunities</li> <li>• Piloting and multiplying the establishment of such an infrastructure along the Danube river coastline</li> </ul>
<p><b>Activities:</b> Study, design, construction and marking of an ecotourism infrastructure for bivouacking on the Danube river coast</p>
<p><b>Indicators:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number and type of ecotourism infrastructure elements</li> <li>• Number of visitors</li> <li>• Degree of visitor satisfaction</li> </ul>
<p><b>Lead Agency/Partners:</b> Persina Nature Park Directorate, NGOs, Municipalities of Belene and Nikopol, sponsors</p>
<p><b>Duration:</b> 12 months</p>
<p><b>Budget:</b> 30,000 Leva</p>



**Funding Sources:**

MOAF, Wetlands Restoration and Biogenic Pollution Reduction Project, NGOs, municipal programs, business sponsors, financing programs – SAPARD, PHARE and local initiatives

**Action # 9: Construction of Specialized Bird-Watching Sites**

**Description:**

Construction of specialized bird-watching sites (facilities and approaches) along the Danube river coast and on the islands within protected and non-protected locales which create conditions for accommodating larger groups of tourists.

**Justification:**

Increased interest in bird-watching and an increased number of visitors raises the risk of uncontrolled access to regions where the birds might be disturbed, which could lead the relocation of these bird to different habitats and even to their extinction. The establishment of an overall system of information signboards, trails, marking and specialized facilities (viewing towers, shelters, plots) will provide tourists opportunities to have visual contact and more information about the site while at the same time resolving to a large extent the issues related to site preservation.

**Territorial Scope:**

Danube river coast between the towns of Nikopol and Belene

**Strategic Objective(s):**

5.1.2, 5.2, 5.3.6

**Expected Results:**

- Bird-watching infrastructure established
- Availability of appropriate conditions for access of large numbers of tourists to protected areas
- Increase of visitors
- Preservation of bird habitats

**Activities:**

- Designing the ecotourism facility network
- Construction of the designed ecotourism infrastructure at all sites
- Monitoring the impact of the existing facilities and the number of visitors

**Indicators:**

- Number and type of ecotourism infrastructure elements
- Number of visitors
- State of biodiversity

<p><b>Lead Agency/Partners:</b> Persina Nature Park Directorate, environmental NGOs, business sponsors</p>
<p><b>Duration:</b> 3 months</p>
<p><b>Budget:</b> 4,000 Leva</p>
<p><b>Funding Sources:</b> MOAF, Wetlands Restoration and Biogenic Pollution Reduction Project, municipal organizations, business sponsors, NGOs and financing programs - SAPARD, PHARE and local initiatives</p>

<p><b>Action # 10: Establishment of a Visitor Center</b></p>
<p><b>Description:</b> Establishing a center with the following functions: administrative, information and coordination services for residents and visitors to Persina Nature Park</p>
<p><b>Justification:</b> Opportunities need to be offered for providing information services to the visitors of Persina Nature Park</p>
<p><b>Territorial Scope:</b> Belene Municipality</p>
<p><b>Strategic Objective(s):</b> 5.2, 5.3.6</p>
<p><b>Expected Results:</b> Visitor center established as well as increased tourist numbers and visitor awareness</p>
<p><b>Activities:</b> Study, design, construction and operation of a visitor center, maintenance and promotion</p>
<p><b>Indicators:</b> Number and quality of services offered</p>
<p><b>Lead Agency/Partners:</b> Wetlands Restoration and Biogenic Pollution Reduction Project, Persina Nature Park Directorate, tourism associations</p>
<p><b>Duration:</b></p>

36 months
<b>Budget:</b> 100,000 Leva
<b>Funding Sources:</b> MoEW – Wetlands Restoration and Biogenic Pollution Reduction Project

**Action # 11: Development of a Database with a Register of the Natural, Cultural and Historical Heritage Sites and Protected Areas**

**Description:**

Studying, developing database and promoting the flora and fauna species composition of the Vidin Region protected areas and wetlands:

- All inland water basins (e.g. Dubravka dam)
- Danube river coastline (from the mouth of Timok river to the end of Skomen island)
- All Danubian islands (e.g. Golya, Golyam Bliznak, Malak Bliznak, Dovlek, Dobrina, Skomen)
- Studying, enriching and promoting the flora and fauna species composition within the Krepostta Protected Locale, and forest parks Pamuk-Kulak and Vetren

Information will consist of a narrative section and listings for the existing tourism infrastructure, which is needed both for biodiversity conservation management, and for ecotourism development.

**Justification:**

The creation of a data base will contribute to the maintenance of updated information for all sites included and more effective use for the purposes of tourism development

**Territorial Scope:**

All Danubian municipalities

**Strategic Objective(s):**

5.2.1, 5.3.1, 5.3.5, 5.4.1, 5.3.7

**Expected Results:**

- Databases established
- Increased awareness
- Improved planning and management

**Activities:**

- Identifying existing regional surveys
- Conducting new surveys
- Collecting data
- Design and development of databases for the region or in parallel with

those for the country (the national geographic information system)

<p><b>Indicators:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Available databases</li> <li>• Number and quality of database indicators</li> <li>• Frequency and volume of use</li> <li>• Degree of user satisfaction</li> </ul>
<p><b>Lead Agency/Partners:</b> Regional administrations, REWI, independent experts, TO and TA, NGOs, municipalities, state forestry authorities</p>
<p><b>Duration:</b> 2 years</p>
<p><b>Budget:</b> 15,000 Leva</p>
<p><b>Funding Sources:</b> MoEW – Environmental Activity Management Enterprise Fund, municipal and state budget, national programs, international donors</p>

<p><b>Action # 12: Repairs and Maintenance of Road Infrastructure and Bringing it to Compliance with Technical Standards</b></p>
<p><b>Description:</b> Repair and maintenance of road infrastructure and bringing it in compliance with the technical standards in forest parks Pamuk-Kulak and Vetren</p>
<p><b>Justification:</b> Access needs to be ensured to forest parks Pamuk-Kulak and Vetren</p>
<p><b>Territorial Scope:</b> Silistra Municipality</p>
<p><b>Strategic Objective(s):</b> 5.3.6</p>
<p><b>Expected Results:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving infrastructure</li> <li>• Increasing tourist visitation</li> <li>• Visitor satisfaction</li> </ul>
<p><b>Activities:</b> Study, design, construction and maintenance of infrastructure</p>
<p><b>Indicators:</b> number of visits and visitor satisfaction</p>

<p><b>Lead Agency/Partners:</b> MoEW, Silistra Municipality, international institutions, NGOs, road construction companies</p>
<p><b>Duration:</b> 1 year</p>
<p><b>Budget:</b> 100,000 Leva</p>
<p><b>Funding Sources:</b> Municipal budget, international programs, state budget, sponsors – Tourism Associations and Organizations</p>

<p><b>Action # 13: Restoration and Maintenance of Biological Diversity</b></p>
<p><b>Description:</b> Preserving biological and landscape diversity, as well as cultural and historical sites while developing ecotourism through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restoration and maintenance of the biological diversity in Srebarna Maintained Reserve</li> <li>• Involving the local population in the preservation and maintenance of natural and historical attractions in Russenski Lom Nature Park and their interpretation through tourism</li> </ul>
<p><b>Justification:</b> In Russenski Lom Nature Park there is a need for the conservation, restoration, and protection of biological diversity to ensure sustainable use of biological resources, to expand the boundaries of the Nature Park, to develop tourism trails, to organize a permanent protection policy at each site in accordance with visitation volumes. Also needed is recreational zoning, development, coordination and introduction of regimes for cultivation of agricultural land within the Park, establishment of compost heaps and use of manure, the development, promotion and introduction of agro-technologies in the private agriculture sector, the stimulation of specific ecological agriculture and the preservation and renewal of land resources.</p>
<p><b>Territorial Scope:</b> Silistra Municipality (Srebarna Maintained Reserve) and the Russe Region (Russenski Lom Nature Park)</p>
<p><b>Strategic Objective(s):</b> 5.1.2, 5.1.5</p>
<p><b>Expected Results:</b> Conserving biodiversity and utilizing it for ecotourism development</p>

<b>Activities:</b> Studying, planning, conservation, restoration and preservation of biodiversity
<b>Indicators:</b> The visible state of biodiversity
<b>Lead Agency/Partners:</b> MoEW, Silistra Municipality, international institutions, NGOs, MoEW – Russe RIEW, NGOs Russenski Lom Nature Park Directorate, Russe Regional Forestry Board, Russe Regional Administration, Russe RIEW
<b>Duration:</b> 2004-2008
<b>Budget:</b> 20,000 Leva
<b>Funding Sources:</b> MoEW – Environmental Activity Management Enterprise Fund

**Action # 14: Reducing the Illegal Felling of Forests along the Danube River Coastline**

**Description:**

- Ensuring permanent protection to eliminate the illegal felling of forests along the Danube river coastline
- Eliminating illegal felling and other illegal activities, ensuring permanent guarding of Krepostta Protected Locale and forest parks Pamuk-Kulak and Vetren

**Justification:**

Illegal felling has to be reduced in order to preserve local forests

**Territorial Scope:**

- From the mouth of Timok river to the end of Skomen island
- Krepostta Protected Locality and forest parks Pamuk-Kulak and Vetren

**Strategic Objective(s):**

5.1.2

**Expected Results:**

Reducing illegal felling preserving opportunities for development of ecotourism products

<p><b>Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Studying the situation</li> <li>• Analysis and development of a strategy</li> <li>• Exercising efficient control</li> </ul>
<p><b>Indicators:</b> Improved control of logging activities</p>
<p><b>Lead Agency/Partners:</b> MOAF, Vidin Regional Administration, municipal administrations, MOEW, State Forestry, Vidin Police Department, TA and TO, Bulgarian Hunting and Fishing Union, NGOs</p>
<p><b>Budget:</b> 40,000 Leva</p>
<p><b>Funding Sources:</b> MoAF, municipal budget, international donors and programs, national programs</p>

**Action # 15: Development of a Marketing Strategy for the Development of Ecotourism Together with Cultural Tourism**

<p><b>Description:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of a marketing strategy for ecotourism development and promotional materials for cultural and historical monuments within the region</li> <li>• Development of marketing activities and advertisement for all natural, cultural and historical sites and of existing accommodation and dining facilities within Silistra Municipality</li> </ul>
<p><b>Territorial Scope:</b> Silistra Municipality – along the Danube river coast and the islands, in Srebarna Maintained reserve, and forest parks</p>
<p><b>Strategic Objective(s):</b> 5.2.5, 5.2.6</p>
<p><b>Expected Results:</b> Development of competitive tourism products reaching all markets and consumer groups</p>
<p><b>Activities:</b> Study demand and supply, Develop products Active delivery of products</p>
<p><b>Illustrative Indicators:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number and quality of products developed</li> <li>• Increase in visitation</li> </ul>



- Tourist expenditure and satisfaction levels

**Lead Agency/Partners:**

The municipalities of Vidin, Novo Selo, Dimovo and Bregovo, TO and TA, NGOs  
Silistra Municipality

<b>Duration:</b> 5 years
<b>Budget:</b> 80,000 Leva
<b>Funding Sources:</b> MoEW, municipal budget, international donors and national programs, Tourism Associations and Organizations, NGOs

<b>Action # 16: Connecting Ecotourism with Visits to Cultural and Historic Monuments</b>
<b>Description:</b> Restoration and conservation of Baba Vida Castle and Ratsiaria
<b>Justification:</b> Connecting ecotourism with visits to cultural and historic monuments
<b>Territorial Scope:</b> Vidin and Dimovo Municipalities
<b>Strategic Objective(s):</b> 5.1.2
<b>Expected Results:</b> Increase of the number of tourists and visitor satisfaction
<b>Activities:</b> Studying, planning, restoration and conservation
<b>Indicators:</b> Number of visits and visitor satisfaction
<b>Lead Agency/Partners:</b> Vidin and Dimovo Municipalities, Tourism Associations and Organizations, scientific institutions, NGOs
<b>Duration:</b> 2004-2007
<b>Budget:</b> 60,000 Leva
<b>Funding Sources:</b> Municipal budget, international donors, national programs