

Modernization of “Multiple-Use”: A Forest Resource Protection Concept for Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Introduction

After an assessment of certain forested landscapes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the importance of understanding both the bio-physical environment along with forest use and settlement are factors that influence policies for protected area management. Historical legacies of human uses and settlement must be factors to influence how protected areas are managed today, especially in regions of conflict with complex histories. A new model is needed to bridge the gap between protection in isolation from history and human use in a modern world. The modernization of multiple use can be a new approach to providing policy support to economic development and resource protection in present day Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

Current status of land and people in BiH

Bosnia and Herzegovina today is a relatively new (1992) developing country with a 12,000 year history in southeast Europe. BiH is regionally located in the Balkans and in the former Yugoslavia during the period of 1918 to 1991. It lies in a region of historical conflicts and this history influences its land use policies and economy to this day.

BiH is about the size of West Virginia, (5.1 million hectares). Only about 20% of BiH is considered to be arable land, while 80% is classified as mountainous, karst, steep topography and forested landscapes. Dennison, in a review of the current Bosnian Forest and Wood Sector in 2006, estimates that 50% of BiH is covered by forests, and 80% of that forest is considered to be publically owned (2.1 million hectares). Dennison estimates the forests are (and have traditionally been) managed almost exclusively for timber production and only 6% of all forests are not classified as production forests.

Current population is 4.5 million people, with a growth rate of 1.003% (very low). Birth rates are at 8.8 births per thousand, about average for Europe, but low for developing countries. Estimates are that 1 in 5 of the people lives below the poverty line. The unemployment rate estimated in 2007 is 45%, with the “grey” economy probably reducing that amount to 25–30%. Dennison estimates that 15% of the population (500,000 people) now depends directly on the forest and wood sector for jobs.

No explanation of demographics can be given without some understanding of the complex ethnic population, religious, and language differences. The three major ethnic populations are Bosniaks (48%), Serb (37.1%), and Croat (14.3%). The three major religious groups are: Muslim (40%), Orthodox Christian (31%), and Roman Catholic (15%). The remaining 14% are a multitude of other religious beliefs. Following this tripartite delineation are three languages: Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian.

History and the wars of Yugoslavian succession

Ethnic differences can be partially explained through the rich and complex history of the Balkans. Beginning in prehistory at one time or another, the Illyrians, Greeks, Romans, Slavs, Ottomans, Austrian Hungarians (Hapsburgs), Italians, Nazi Germany, Stalin, and Marshal Tito and his people's republic of Yugoslavia, all tried to rule this harsh land and independent people.

From these complex historical contingencies, a new nation of Bosnia and Herzegovina evolved from the remnants ("rump") of Yugoslavia in 1992. In 1992, ancient conflicts resulted in a confusing modern war. The conflicts were between: Croatia and Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia, and between Bosnia and Serbia. Each had their own reason for fighting. The United Nations had a nebulous "peacekeeping" role, and the European Union wasn't sure if it wanted to be involved. The United States belatedly took the lead in negotiating an awkward peace: The Bosnian Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995. Until the Dayton Peace Agreement, the people and the resources suffered greatly.

The resulting post-Dayton federal government structure is defined as a joint, multi-ethnic and democratic government charged with conducting foreign, diplomatic and fiscal policy. The centralized national structure is characterized by a three member presidency (Bosniak, Croat, and Serb), and each is elected by popular vote for a four year term. The chairmanship of the presidency rotates among the three every eight months. Currently, 2500 joint European Union forces (EUFOR) remain.

A second tier of government below the high federal is comprised of two entities, roughly equal in size: The Bosniak/Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and the Republika Srpska (RS), composed of Bosnian Serbs. The entity level, roughly equivalent to "states", is responsible for most of the day to day government activities and social services. Resource management is the responsibility of the entities.

Assessment of forested resources in 2007: A BiH case study

As a component of United States Agency for International Development (USAID) support to the national government of Bosnia and Herzegovina, I contracted through the implementer of the program (Emerging Markets) in September of 2007 to assess a select group of forested recreation sites and the Sutjeska National Park and make recommendations for management in the context of tourism development.

The assessment built on the *integration* of environmental values, social conditions and economic opportunities (tourism) to create meaningful on the ground strategies for improving the studied areas.

Two approaches based on recent science were developed and applied to the subject areas. First, a general assessment was made of the basic ecological integrity of the areas (absent a definitive inventory and interdisciplinary review of literature for the area). The technique for this assessment is a based on a broad scale assessment of forests throughout Europe (Puhe and Ulrich 2000).

Secondly, current government management efforts to protect forest wildland natural val-

ues were assessed based on a general model of management to provide for sustainable tourism. This general approach is modified from a methodology for developing sustainable tourism, developed by Eagles, McCool and Haines (Eagles et al. 2002).

The final study assessed current ecological status and management policies using the set of developed criteria, applied the criteria to each area (by observational and interview techniques) and then evaluated and observed the existing situation. From both the ecological and management assessments, current status is evaluated, risks to meetings goals is assessed, and opportunities for improving policies and management are provided as recommendations.

Results of the assessment of Bosnia and Herzegovina forested landscapes

Major findings focused on major institutional structural weakness in strategic planning, resource management objectives and budgeting. In addition, confusing categories of resource protection zones in the protected areas (built upon on modifications of IUCN classifications) left on the ground management in disarray in the case of the prototype area (Sutjeska National Park) of the study. Sutjeska was declared a National Park in 1962 by Tito, primarily as the location for one of his major World War II battles and to maintain one of his many hunting lodges. Sutjeska is 10,595 hectares, (26,180 acres) and sits on the border between BiH and the new nation of Montenegro.

The main conclusions of the assessment recommendations were directed towards institutionalizing by government action new policies of sustained, continued traditional use, with a strong component of protected area management. The standards for forest stewardship and sustainability must be elevated.

Effectiveness of existing protected area management was also a major concern. Within the Sutjeska National Park is a relict beech-spruce forest that represents what a significant part of the forested landscape in Europe may have looked like before modern human disturbance. This area is called the Perucica Forest Primeval, and represents one of the largest tracts of “virgin” forest left in Europe. The approximately 1434 hectare forest sits in a hard to access high mountain valley. It sits adjacent to Maglic, the highest mountain in BiH at 2386 meters.

Sutjeska is delineated into five management zones which vaguely relate to protection and direct forest management. One of these zones is the Perucica Primeval forest. It is delineated on paper as a strict protection area, and probably is similar to the category III (National Monument) of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) classifications. It deserves a strict management classification, and tight restrictive management to protect its unique values. For example, forest extraction was not allowed, but hunting and livestock grazing are allowed.

The Perucica appears as an area with high ecological integrity and biodiversity, and management standards should strive to maintain these conditions. The surrounding lands, still labeled as national park, are different. Forest extraction is allowed for example, in these buffer areas. In some of these lands, sustainable use could continue if the focus is on protection of the Perucica. It would make sense to manage the surrounding areas for ecological integrity and the biodiversity of the Perucica, rather than just the illusion of “naturalness.”

The reality for on the ground management is none of the Sutjeska Management zones were actually being managed as a national park per any of the IUCN classifications. The title of national park was a title in name only for 92% of the entire national park. Only the 8% of the area within the Strict Nature Reserve Perucica Primeval Forest designation could nominally be considered to be almost managed as a National Park protected landscape, although a tangible plan for management actions did not appear to exist.

The modernization of multiple use

So what type of land use policies could be used to protect rare and irreplaceable values, be supported by local people, and be supported by higher level government institutions?

The existing BiH approach with its legacy of utilitarian multiple use lacks implementable characteristics. It lacks governmental budgetary and agency support to protect specific lands. It lacks economic development certainty which in turn generates political resistance to protection of forest resources as compared to “open use of the commons.” It lacks standards for sustainability, and base level practices that manage for ecological integrity. Current unplanned multiple use is business as usual, and does not adequately plan for protection of unique resources.

To make on the ground management effective, a broader array of protection and use needs to be developed. These broader categories can take into account the historical uses of the forests, along with the needs to protect the unique Perucica. For example, the IUCN category VI areas (74% of the forested area) could be supported by a consensus based plan that assures sustainable forest management and protection of unique values, like the Perucica. Development of this plan should be general enough to assure continued utilitarian use (to get support of local communities), but specific enough to have standards of sustainable forestry, that provides for bio-diversity, protection of watershed and soils. The trick to this would be to get a consensus of the local communities (which represents forest products industries), and international park stakeholders and the international scientific community.

The new paradigm

Adrian Phillips, a British expert in protected areas, has proposed a new paradigm for protected areas in the 21st century, and expands upon the logic of practitioners that has evolved over the last 30 years. He proposes a variety of criteria that reflect changes in thinking for protected areas that provides for more human use, and understanding of the historical role of indigenous people. His approach liberalizes the spectrum of the IUCN classes, more in the category VI areas. His new paradigm articulates clearly what is needed for BiH protected landscapes, and is reinforced by the complex history of the long used forested landscapes. In areas with a long history of use and subsistence, the difference between protection and use should be narrowed, not expanded, and not separated by illusions of what may or may not be “natural” conditions.

Conclusion: Current geopolitical contingencies

Bosnia and Herzegovina is planning for the future. International pressure is focused on protecting unique areas that they have now, and internal pressures is to take care of economic

development. A critical part of the potential future success in Bosnia and Herzegovina will be to develop policies that take into account their complex histories, the complex demands of their multi-ethnic cultures, and using their emerging democratic institutions develop plans that work for them. A modernized concept of use should provide that difficult balance between human use and protection of irreplaceable values. The modernization end game is to join the European Union (EU), and realize economic development opportunities EU acceptance would generate.

Currently, the independent nation of Kosovo is proposed from parts of Serbia. Kosovo would be an ethnic Albanian enclave, surrounded by the nation of Serbia. The Bosnian Serbs in the Repulika Serpska (RS) (where Sutjeska National Park is located) have threatened that if Kosovo can become independent, then they will demand their independence. Conflict never seems far from current events in the Balkans.

When I visited the Sutjeska National Park and observed the majesty of the surrounding mountains straddling the border between BiH and Montenegro, the populist idea of a “peace park” seemed like an overwhelming opportunity. I naively proposed the concept, and was surprised by a cool reception for the idea. I concluded the concept of a transborder peace park needs work, and must be approached with a great deal of sensitivity. The idea must deal with the complexity of governance, and history. It can’t be a simplistic approach.

In a comprehensive study of “peace park” feasibility, Ali acknowledges the political context that supports furtherance of the idea. He argues for the pragmatic over the naïve, by concluding that “Environmental issues can be an important entry point for conversation between adversaries, and can also provide a valuable exit strategy from intractable deadlocks because of their global appeal. However, they cannot be taken in strategic isolation and are usually not a sufficient condition (by themselves) for conflict resolution. It seems apparent that the United States has lost any moral authority it may have had to be promoting the idea. International cooperation is good, but the arrogance of the idea of a peace park is problematic.

Recently BiH has taken another major step forward. The World Bank in 2008 funded a program to institutionalize BiH protected areas, and merge the protected area approach into the government structure. They are starting to plan, draw lines on maps, and work with local government structures and people. Hopefully this approach will be broad based (locally, regionally and internationally) and not just a cookie cutter approach by an arbitrary application of one size fits all IUCN categories.

Practices for protected areas in regions of conflicts can be advanced by practical decisions about current land use. Sutjeska National Park can be a model for progressive protected area management. People looking for agreements could find something to agree upon. The results could be local communities that agree about future jobs in the forests. Others could agree upon economic development through sustainable forest practices, forest protection or tourism. Improved management of Sutjeska could generate support, and support could translate to more positive cross-border relationships.

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