
Summary of the audit carried out on the environmental protection of the Lake Fertő Region

Lake Fertő is the third biggest lake of Central Europe, the major part of its surface lies in Austria, almost a fifth is in Hungary, and it is the habitat of several internationally protected animal and plant species. In 1994, the two countries linked together their national parks, which were established with the intention of protecting natural values and sustainable use. Both countries joined numerous international agreements aiming to preserve the flora and fauna of natural water habitats, for example the Ramsar agreement.

In the framework of auditing the execution of the Ramsar agreement, the audit of the use of public money spent on environmental protection and nature conservation of Lake Fertő was performed on the basis of the agreement between the Presidents of the two countries' Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs). The objective of the audit was to evaluate whether the legal regulations and organisational background of environmental protection and nature conservation supported effectively and efficiently the nature conservation of the region, the protection of its values, the fulfilment of obligations undertaken in international agreements, and whether the resources were used efficiently, economically and effectively.

On the basis of the audit, it was found that the nature conservation in Hungary is an issue of high priority. The joining of international agreements was published by law and by decrees of legal force; the obligations undertaken in the agreements were included into provisions of law and into tasks of concerned organisations. The act on general protection of natural values and regions has been published; the National Environmental Program and - as its part- the National Nature Conservation Basic Plan were prepared according to the provisions of the act.

The nature conservation of Lake Fertő was ensured by various budgetary appropriations and by international resources besides the financing of operational expenditures of organisations performing nature conservation. In the examined period 14.486,4 million HUF national and 1.476,5 million HUF international

resources were used for tasks related to nature conservation of the audited region; from this amount 289,3 million HUF was utilised directly for nature conservation purposes, the rest was spent on transport-development reducing air pollution and on the construction of a cycle track. The sum of money spent on development and research is ascertainable, but the audit found as a shortcoming that the operational expenses of particular executive organisations couldn't certify the expenditures spent on professional tasks accomplished in the audited region.

The tasks related to nature conservation of Lake Fertő are divided, and were accomplished effectively, in line with the founders' expectations. The indication of natural, preserving and circumambient zones was performed on the basis of the conception of a study made in 1990, but the list of indicated territories has not been published in legal regulations. Management plans have been prepared for the protected territories, but the accomplishment of regulations came into effect only in 2003, by the amendment of the LIII. Act on nature conservation of 1996. The legal provisions - regulating the subsidies provided for the validation of protection and the order of reimbursement - will be expectedly published by the end of 2003.

In the audited period, with the expenditure of 114 million HUF, 686 ha. nature conservation area has become public property by acquisition, in the course of which several smaller areas managed on the basis of the same principle were formed expediently. The budgetary resource decreased annually, thus the acquisitions progressed slower than it was planned. The plans still provide for the acquisition of about 1430 ha. nature conservation area.

International obligations in connection with the maintenance of water habitats and of the Ramsar Agreement are fulfilled continuously. The quality of the water is appropriate due to continuous examinations and dredging. Fauna- and flora surveying were performed in the frame of monitoring and research, and a task plan serving the management and maintenance of the nature conservation areas has been elaborated as well, but without a financial plan. The establishment of two filtering plants at one mouth, the stream Rákos, can resolve the additional filtration of the lake. With the

aim of maintaining the water fauna and flora, habitat reconstruction was carried out near the canal Hanság, extending to 430 hectare.

The Directorate of Fertő-Hanság National Park acquired the hunting-rights for managing the stock of game of the lake and its surroundings; expedient fish management can be ensured by the actual acquisition of fishing rights. The establishment of a professional reed management requires the issuing of a central regulation. The public organisations owning management rights attempt to acquire the common right of reed-growing.

In the audited region, the management of waste-water was fulfilled by local governments in line with international regulations, except for the case of three waste water treatment plants; the waste-water is diverted from the watershed area of the lake, and is led back after cleaning to streams –laying further from and - feeding the lake. The re-establishment of the natural state of former mine fields has started in the frame of mine-reconstructions. The activation of the re-established properties between the Ministry and the concerned local governments has not been carried out yet. With the aim of maintaining the peacefulness of nature, cycle-paths were constructed, as well as teaching-paths to facilitate eco-tourism.

The professional tasks have been performed effectively by the audited organisations; the number of disclosed nature-damaging cases has decreased; however the environmental audit of the protected regions is not efficient, because one nature conservation guard has to supervise an area of double size as specified in the regulations.

The Austrian and Hungarian national parks and Water Conservation Authorities work together in order to accomplish the above-mentioned tasks. The cooperation between the Hungarian and Austrian partner organisations, the Hungarian-Austrian National Park Committee, and the Austrian-Hungarian Water Committee is excellent. In the field of water conservancy, besides the exchange of data, the quality of the water is controlled in a specific system.

On the basis of the audit findings, the establishment of a uniform legal regulation related to reed beds, and the publishing of a decree on reimbursement were recommended to the government. Several recommendations were made to the Minister regarding the management and preparation of a complex nature conservation plan. In connection with the mine-reconstructions, the SAO drew the Ministry's and concerned local governments' attention to the accomplishment of the activation.