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The Nature Park „Uckermärkische Seen“

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I would like to tell you now something about the system of Large Protected Areas in Germany, about the characteristics of the Nature Park “Uckermärkische Seen” and about our activities there.

In Germany we have three kinds of Large Protected Areas.

A National Park consists mainly of nature reserves. The influence of humans shall be kept low, the natural dynamic high.

The task of Biosphere Reserves is to preserve and to re-establish cultivated areas. Chances for sustainable land use and reasonable economic activities shall be offered.

Nature Parks are also protected land – nature reserves too, but mainly protected landscape areas. These parks provide opportunities for recreation and tourism and, most of all, to support sustainable regional development.

In Germany we have 14 National Parks, 14 Biosphere Reserves and 93 Nature Parks. In the state of Brandenburg there are 3 Biosphere Reserves, 11 Nature Parks and 1 National Park.

The nature park Uckermärkische Seen was established in 1997, and is located about 100 km north of Berlin. The area covers almost 900 square kilometres. The biggest towns inside the park are Templin, Lychen, Zehdenick and Fürstenberg with about 8 000 to 14 000 inhabitants. Boitzenburg – where we go now - is the biggest village.

The landscape was formed during the last ice age. It is only about 15 000 years ago that the last glaciers melted away in our region. They left us with a hilly country and a diversity of structures. The most important habitats in the area are more than 230 lakes, peat bogs and fens, heather, inland dunes, and beech forests.

The climate in the area is moderately continental with an average annual temperature of about 8 degrees Celsius and cold winters. The average annual precipitation reaches about 500 millimetres.

The structure of land use in the nature park area results from these natural conditions. 47 % of the area consists of forests, 40 % are agricultural lands, 7 % of the nature park area are lakes and other water bodies, 6 % are settlements or used by business and industry. Two thirds of the agriculture lands are agriculturally disadvantaged areas because of their low soil quality index.

Nearly the whole area of the park has the legal status of a protected landscape area. Within this area, there are about 20 nature reserves which cover 16 % of the park area. The Kleine Schorfheide of more than 70 square kilometres is the largest nature reserve. The centre of it is a former military training area which was used by the Soviet troops for about forty years. They left open landscapes with dunes, dry grassland and heather.

There is no statistic on Nature Monuments in the Park as yet. However, there are plenty of them. Most are old trees, beautiful alleys, or impressive rocks.

The Nature Park provides good living conditions for a lot of rare species, for example several species of eagles. By the way, the osprey is the heraldic animal of our nature park.

Because of its outstanding nature qualities, the federal nature protection agency declared the nature park an "area of nationally representative importance". Since 1996 a Federal nature protection project, supported by WWF, has been carried out in the nature park region. The aims of this long-term project are the improvement of the water quality and the stabilisation of the hydrologic balance of the landscape, as well as the restoration of habitats of endangered species. You will hear more about this from Dr. Mauersberger in Boitzenburg.

The Nature Park is of high importance even on the international scale. Two thirds of the area are part of the European NATURA 2000 network (council directives on the conservation of wild birds and on

the conservation of habitats and of wild fauna and flora). Not all of the NATURA 2000 areas in our park are protected in nature reserves yet.

The nature park "Uckermärkische Seen" is a rural area. With 22 inhabitants per square kilometre, the region is one of the most sparsely populated areas in Germany. Following the political change of 1989, there has been a strong decline in population. The reasons are a decreasing birth rate as well as a high population drain caused by a lack of employment opportunities and infrastructure. The main source of income of the inhabitants of the nature park area is in processing industries and in the service sector. The number of people employed in the agricultural sector has drastically decreased over the last fifteen years. However, it is still above the German average. With an unemployment rate of about 22%, the region of the nature park "Uckermärkische Seen" is among the regions with the highest unemployment rate in the state of Brandenburg. Women are particularly affected.

Several factors lead to a very difficult situation: economical underdevelopment and high unemployment on the one side, and a high level of protection which implies limitations for land use on the other.

Therefore, following an initiative by WWF and the nature park administration, important stakeholders of the region came together in 1998 with the aim to resolve conflicts, to find ways of constructive co-operation, and to develop a common strategy for the future of the region. By now, nine of these work meetings have taken place. The results are impressive: strengths and weaknesses of the region were analysed, a vision for sustainable development in the area was elaborated, and a Local Action Group was founded. Members of the group are local businesses, societies and associations representing different interests, and executives from local, regional and state administrations. There is a consensus that the future of the region has to be seen in a sustainable development which equally respects economic, social and ecological aspects, and which conserves for future generations a loveable and liveable region.

In this sense, project ideas have been developed which are suitable to realise the common vision. A project office for sustainable regional development was opened as the office of the Local Action Group to co-ordinate the process.

The results of the workshops and of all efforts and initiatives for sustainable regional development were integrated into a Regional Development Concept, with which the nature park region participated in the LEADER+ contest in the state of Brandenburg. Our region was the winner of this contest and so we began in the year 2002 with the realisation of our vision.

Since that time we could support more than 50 projects with a total amount of nearly 2.400.000,- €. Aims of all these projects are the development of sources for new income, sustainable tourism and marketing of regional products. In this way we could reach impressive results:

- 42 new products were developed and produced
- 35 new services are offered
- 9 new little enterprises were founded
- more than 20 new jobs were created
- about 160 jobs are saved
- 47 new attractions for visitors were developed
- 22 new markets, 27 rest places and 45 info-points were built
- and another important result of the LEADER-process are the 320 new co-operations between the members of the local action group and the 300 new external partnerships

So we are three strong partners in this region: the administration of the nature park, WWF Germany and a society of people for development of the region Feldberg-Uckermärkische Seen. This society is the responsible body for the federal conservation project and also for LEADER+. Together we work in the fields of nature conservation, sustainable tourism and regional development.