PROMOTING ECO-TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE SAVA RIVER BASIN

Project proposal for ISRBC & U.S. Embassy Zagreb
Developed by REC Croatia, February 28, 2012;
Revised by U.S. Embassy & ISRBC, March 19, 2012;
Revised by U.S. Embassy & ISRBC & REC, March 23, 2012

BACKGROUND

International Sava River Basin Commission (ISRBC) has identified tourism as an area for future work1. The ISRBC Action Plan for the period 2011-2015 already envisages development of a Master plan of nautical tourism in the Sava River Basin. In this framework and in cooperation with regional chambers of commerce from the four Sava countries, two projects were undertaken: development and printing of the Sava Nautical & Tourist Guide, preparation of the Entrepreneurial Atlas of the Sava Region. On the basis of this experience, the ISRBC focused on eco-tourism, especially in Ramsar sites within the Sava River Basin.

There are seven Ramsar sites (wetlands of international importance) in the Sava River Basin – Barđača (B&H), Lonjsko polje and Crna Mlaka (Croatia), Obedska bara, Zasavica and Peštersko polje (Serbia) and Cerknica Lake (Slovenia). The ISRBC’s engagement in the promotion of eco-tourism as a nature-friendly form of sustainable development supports the ISRBC’s mission to foster regional cooperation for sustainable management of the Sava Basin water resources, including protection and improvement of aquatic eco-systems and resolution of conflicts of interest caused by different uses of water.

In 2009, the Lonjsko polje NP Management Authority initiated cooperation with local tourism organisations from B&H to develop a joint project for transferring best practices in eco-tourism between Lonjsko polje in Croatia to the Barđača wetlands area in B&H. This middle Sava area represents a prime example for potential cooperation on cross-border eco-tourism development within the Sava Basin. This project will develop that example as the basis for discussing directions of the future ISRBC work in this context.

MAIN PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Project goals:
• explore tourism-related activities to eco-tourism topics as an area of focus for the ISRBC;
• frame future ISRBC activities on the promotion and development of eco-tourism along the Sava River Basin, with focus on the seven Ramsar sites.

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1 Declaration of the 3rd Meeting of the Parties to the FASRB.
Project objectives:
- define the goals for the ISRBC in the field of eco-tourism;
- draft an outline of Operational Guidelines for the Sava River Basin on eco-tourism, based on best practices, stakeholder consultations and examination of example of the middle Sava area;
- examine best practices in managing eco-tourism with concern for cross-border challenges and opportunities;
- discuss capacity building needs of eco-tourism stakeholders for future management of eco-tourism activities in the Sava River Basin.

EXPECTED RESULTS AND DELIVERABLES

To achieve the project objectives, ISRBC in cooperation with the U.S. Embassy in Croatia and the Regional Environmental Center – Country Office Croatia (REC Croatia) plans to organise several multi-stakeholder consultation events with representatives from the four Sava River Basin countries.

These multistakeholder consultation events should help ISRBC define the goals and directions for further work on eco-tourism in the regional Sava Basin context, and result in drafting the outline of Operational Guidelines and defining its main purpose:

- either as an expert contribution to decision-makers in the countries, aiming for a general definition of, and unified approach to, eco-tourism in wetland areas in all four Sava Basin countries;
- or as a policy-level (strategic) document that can serve as input in national strategic planning of sustainable tourism development,
- and outlining also the scope of work / terms of reference for the preparation of a master plan for development of eco-tourism in the Sava Basin.

The resulting „outline of Operational Guidelines“ is understood to include, as a minimum:

- clear definition of purpose of the document,
- table of contents (list of headings and sub-headings),
- descriptions of content to be developed under each respective heading, including topics to be addressed & methods to address them. The descriptions should be detailed enough to provide ISRBC with a comprehensive guidance how to finalise the document.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES

1. Organising the core expert group for the project (two members per country - one expert from the Ramsar sites, and one from the field of tourism from each country), to be selected by the ISRBC Secretariat
2. Conducting a small preparatory basin-wide meeting to define thematic priorities and directions for further work
3. Identifying and contacting the experts and speakers regarding their contributions and participation in the two regional events
4. Coordination and collection of inputs from experts and speakers
5. Logistic organisation of the two regional events
6. Preparation of working materials for events, in cooperation and agreement with the core expert group
7. Conducting the two regional events targeted to the Sava countries:
   7.1 **Workshop on eco-tourism in cross-border context**, focussed on the Central Posavina region between BA and HR, with majority of participants expected from these two countries, including relevant representatives of RS and SI
   7.2 **Regional conference on eco-tourism in the Sava River Basin**, gathering equal representation from all Sava countries
8. Preparing reports from events and consolidating the outline of Operational Guidelines
9. Final project report preparation

Concept and sequence of the three above mentioned events is described in more detail below:

### Event 1: Small basin-wide consultation meeting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal of event:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defining priorities and directions for further ISRBC work on eco-tourism</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Target group: the core expert group. These experts should participate in both subsequent events as the core group, i.e. as resource persons during the events, and to assist in identifying priority topics and other expert contributors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Organiser: ISRBC</td>
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<td>• REC Croatia and US Embassy representatives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cca 10-15 people</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Duration:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Half-day meeting</td>
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<tr>
<th>Event description &amp; indicative program:</th>
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<tr>
<td>• agreement on topical priorities of the two regional events and designing the agendas</td>
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<td>• agreement on the main purpose of the outline of Operational Guidelines</td>
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<td>• agreement on the distribution of tasks during event preparation (preparing working materials, identifying experts and speakers etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• agreement on the cross-border area which will be used as a case example for eco-tourism – suggestion is to focus on Lonjsko polje (HR) and Bardača (BA) wetland areas, as the area in which joint cross-border planning activities were recently initiated.</td>
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<th>Venue and timing:</th>
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<td>Zagreb (premises of ISRBC)</td>
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<td>May 3rd, 2012, tentatively</td>
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### Event 2: Workshop on eco-tourism in cross-border context (CBC workshop)

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<tr>
<th>Goal of event:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Exchange experiences of various types of eco-tourism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discuss eco-tourism opportunities and challenges in a cross-border area</td>
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</table>
Participants:  
- Target group: national environmental, water and tourism authorities (ministries/agencies) and local authorities from the Sava Basin; environmental NGOs; tourism agencies and associations – mainly from BA and HR; plus 3-4 representatives of RS and SI institutions including the core project group members  
- Resource persons: eco-tourism experts; ISRBC representatives  
- Organiser: REC Croatia event facilitation and logistics  
- US Embassy representatives  
*Cca 40 people*

Duration: 2 days

Event description & indicative program:  
The workshop should tackle both the commercial and protection aspects of eco-tourism. Main agenda points:  
- opportunities and challenges for eco-tourism in sensitive Ramsar sites  
- experience with different types of eco-tourism from other regions/countries (e.g. Danube Delta, US examples etc.)  
- discussing the concrete experience/examples from Lonjsko polje (HR) & Bardača (BA), possibilities of cross-border eco-tourism cooperation  
- half-day excursion to Bardača wetlands to illustrate the discussion  

Process methodology:  
- Start with theoretical introduction (content presentations), followed by a combination of interactive exercises (small group work) and panel discussions  
- Interactive exercises and panel discussions should cover topics like raising awareness of eco-tourism benefits; participation of local communities in the planning and management of eco-tourism businesses; specific skills for eco-tourism management in sensitive Ramsar sites etc.  
- Conclusions/report from the workshop will serve as input for the preparation of the case study Lonjsko polje/Bardača, to be discussed at the next regional conference

Venue and timing:  
Slavonski Brod or Županja  
End of June or the 1st week of July, 2012  
*Possibly to be organised back-to-back with one of the events organised along the Sava River in Croatia, in the framework of the Sava Day celebrations (to be confirmed)*

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**Event 3: Regional conference on eco-tourism in the Sava River Basin**

Goal of event: Finalizing the outline of the Operational Guidelines for ISRBC on eco-tourism; Agreeing on the framework for finalizing the Operational Guidelines

Participants:  
- Target group: Experts and policy-level representatives from all four Sava countries (national environmental, water and tourism authorities, local authorities; environmental NGOs; tourism agencies and associations), equally representing all Sava countries
**ROLES OF IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS**

ISRBC and U.S. Embassy in Croatia have engaged REC Croatia to support the implementation of the above described activities, given the REC's long-standing experience in facilitating multi-stakeholder consultation and public participation processes in CEE region on various environmental topics. These three organisations will jointly discuss all important steps in the process (together with members of the core expert group when relevant), and participate in all project events and project planning activities through their nominated representatives.

**ISRBC**
- Selection and contacting of experts from the Sava countries who will form the core expert group for the project
- Organisation and coordination of preparatory meeting in Zagreb, May, 2012
- Identification of experts and speakers for regional events
**US Embassy**
- Identification of experts and speakers for regional events
- Providing financial support to project implementation
- Providing DVC resources as needed

**University of South Florida, USA**
- Cooperation with Prof. Crisman
- Contribution of two graduate students of hydro-ecology (6-weeks internship) to researching and drafting the outline of Operational Guidelines

**REC Croatia**
- Communication with identified experts and speakers, coordination and collection of their inputs for the two regional events
- Suggesting additional speakers and other relevant resource persons
- Logistic organisation and facilitation of the two regional events (cross-border workshop and regional conference), including venue arrangements and inviting/communicating with participants
- Technical support in the preparation of working materials for regional events (copying, printing etc.)
- Preparation of reports from both regional events according to formats/requirements agreed within the core project group

**PROJECT TIMELINE**

Project duration: 6 months (April 15 - October 15, 2012)

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<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Month</th>
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<th>May</th>
<th>Jun</th>
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<th>Sep</th>
<th>Oct</th>
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<td>1 Organising the core expert group</td>
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<td>2 Core expert group meeting</td>
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<td>3 Identifying and contacting experts/speakers</td>
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<td>4 Coordination/collection of experts/speakers inputs</td>
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<td>5 Logistic organisation of events</td>
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<td>6 Preparation of working materials</td>
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<td>7.2 Regional conference</td>
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<td>8 Preparing event reports, consolidating draft Operational Guidelines</td>
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<td>9 Final project report</td>
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