

Introduction

The **Vidusburtnieks** (the **Middle Burtnieks**) Nature Reserve is a Natura 2000 site, which spreads over parts of the Vecate, Burtnieki, Jeri and Sēļi parishes. The Vidusburtnieks boasts a high diversity of habitats and species; in the reserve, broad forest areas lie next to floodplain meadows, rivers, oxbows and marshlands. In its current borders, the Natura 2000 site was established in 2004 as a result of joining together the wooded nature reserve zone of the North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve, the Vidusburtnieks, with the Burtnieks and Rūja floodplain meadows situated on the right bank of the Rūja River and the Seda floodplain meadows found on the left bank of the river. Expansion of the territory was based on the fact that the site hosts a number of EU and Latvia priority species such as the great snipe *Gallinago media*, the corncrake *Crex crex* and the hermit beetle *Osmoderma eremita*.

Management plan for the Vidusburtnieks Natura 2000 site was developed in 2005, and the following experts took part in this work: Jānis Gailis (management plan coordinator, editor and invertebrates expert, Latvian Fund for Nature (LFN)), Inese Cera (invertebrates expert, LFN), Mārtiņš Kalniņš (hydrobiology expert, Nature Protection Board), Aivars Petriņš (ornithologist, LFN), Ainārs Auniņš (ornithologist, LFN), Inese Silamiķele (botanist, LFN), Aija Mežaka (botanist, Faculty of Biology, University of Latvia), Aija Karlivāne (woodland key habitats expert, LFN), and Baiba Strazdiņa (cartographer, LFN).

The management plan is developed in compliance with the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development (now - Ministry of the Environment) Order No. 120/04.07.2002 on Recommendations for Drawing Management Plans. Seasonal inventory of biological values of the area was carried out in 2005. Additionally, the available published and un-published data about the territory along with information from various project reports has been compiled. Mapping for the plan was done using data from the Republic of Latvia State Land Registry, the State Joint Stock Company (SJSC) Latvian State Forests, and the State Forest Service.

Developing the management plan for the Vidusburtnieks Natura 2000 site is one of the many activities carried out within the project on Restoration of Floodplain Meadows administered by the Latvian Fund for Nature (LFN). Management plans for 15 specially protected nature areas will be drawn as part of the project; all of the sites host valuable floodplain meadows and protected species. Aside from developing the management plans the project also finances activities necessary for restoration of floodplain meadows and increase of their biodiversity, e.g., clearing bushes and initial mowing of meadows. The project on Restoration of Floodplain Meadows is set to run until 2008.

Inception of the management plan was marked by a number of information meetings: on 28 January 2005 in the Burtnieki Parish Council, on 11 February in the Sēļi Parish Council, on 25 February in the Vecate Parish Council, and on 8 April in the Jeri Parish Council. Lists of participants and minutes of the meetings are found in Annex 1.1. During these meetings owners or managers of the land situated within the site along with representatives of the plan's supervisory board were introduced to the planning process, contents and functions of the plan, and the planned studies of the reserve; the participants were also given information on the availability of financing from the project on Restoration of Floodplain Meadows to support management of meadows. Landowners were encouraged to actively take part in developing the plan.

After the meetings a supervisory board for development of the management plan was established; the board comprises representatives of the municipalities, the SJSC Latvian State Forests, the State Forest Service, Regional Environmental Boards of the State Environment Service, the Nature Protection Board, the LFN, and landowners (see Annex 1.2)

In the course of developing the plan four supervisory board meetings were called, and the first draft of the plan was put up for public hearing. These meetings were used to discuss the contents of the plan and the management activities prescribed for the area. After the public hearing, the first draft was submitted for approval to the Vecate, Burtnieki, Jeri and Sēļi Parish Councils. Minutes of the meetings are found in Annexes 1.3., 1.4., 1.5., 1.6. and 1.8., excerpts from the minutes of the parish council meetings for approval of the plan are found in Annex 1.7.

Summary

The management plan for the Vidusburtnieks Natura 2000 site includes comprehensive information on its nature and socio-economic situation. The document contains objectives for the preservation and management of the territory, and the recommended management activities for achieving the objectives. There are three long-term or ideal objectives for the preservation and management of the territory: conservation of the Vidusburtnieks biological value, its landscape and cultural heritage; reestablishment of the hydrological regime of the floodplain meadows and balancing of economic and nature conservation interests (see Ch. 3.1). These objectives are dictated by the presence of nationally and internationally protected habitats and species here, and by such socio-economic features as extensive agriculture and the potential for tourism and recreation, among others.

There are several aspects that negatively affect the nature values of the territory. Meadows are affected by termination of management; as a result, the meadow vegetation has changed, and the meadows have overgrown with bushes or even trees. Additionally, niches for rare and protected animal species disappear and the landscape value diminishes. Meadows are also affected by forestry activities that foster proliferation of spruce monocultures – a biologically inferior habitat that lessens the appeal of the landscape and fragments habitats.

The entire Vidusburtnieks site is threatened by the invasive species - the giant hogweed (*Heracleum sosnowskyi*). Currently it is found in a small area on the Eastern side of the protected area. Certain aspects of the presence of this species cannot be eliminated over a short period of time, e.g., full removal of the hogweed population from the site would require long-term action. The management plan prescribes precise management activities that would help prevent or minimize the threats that various factors pose for the nature values of the area.

The management plan for the Vidusburtnieks Natura 2000 site contains draft regulations for individual protection and utilization of the site. The regulations establish functional zoning of the area, and indicate the permitted and the forbidden activities in each of them.

The plan is valid for a period of 10 years, and ideally its implementation should be started right after the plan has been approved. Implementation ought to be completed within 5 years unless chapter 4.1. prescribes otherwise. Recurring management activities and monitoring should be carried out over the remaining five years. If financing for the implementation of the plan is limited then management activities assigned a high priority should be carried out first.