UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Biodiversity Protection in the North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve

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Final Report of the Terminal Evaluation Mission

September 2009

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Acknowledgements

The Final Evaluation Team would like to thank all the staff and people connected with the North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve Project who gave freely of their time and ideas to make the final evaluation process a success. There are far too many people to mention by name – and hopefully everyone who contributed is included in the lists of names annexed to this report – but special mention must be made of the current National Project Manager Janis Germanis, who gave unstintingly of his time to try and answer every question we asked and to discuss the points we took every opportunity to raise.

Following completion of the Draft Report on 2nd September 2009, review comments were received in consolidated form from the PMU, the UNDP COs, and the Regional Coordination Unit in Bratislava on 9th September 2009. These comments have either been included into the revised text where these related to factual inaccuracies in the draft, or have been reproduced in full and unedited as footnotes to the appropriate text to ensure a fair hearing to all parties. The Final Evaluation Team has made responses to some of the comments. We thank each of the reviewers sincerely for their efforts and insights which have undoubtedly improved this final report.

The views expressed in this report are intended to offer an overview of, and some of the lessons learned from, the North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve Project at its completion. We have tried to balance our thoughts and offer fair perspectives of what was observed and learned from people more knowledgeable about the Project than we will ever be. Our sincere apologies in advance if anyone should take anything written to be anything other than constructive criticism.

PJE would like to express his sincere gratitude to Maija Kurte for her perceptive thoughts and insights, and without whose linguistic skills none of this would have been possible. She was also responsible for organising all of the in-country logistics, and thanks to her the whole evaluation process ran like clockwork. Furthermore, she worked long and hard beyond her ToR to ensure that my welfare was taken care of, and her kindness has been much appreciated. Arvis Vilciņš of UNDP looked after my international travel arrangements and related logistics, for which I am also grateful.

And finally, one of the delights of this sort of work remains coming to new and extremely welcoming countries and going home again having made new friends, seen new things, and witnessed with great admiration the dedication and enthusiasm that so many people bring to their conserving the important places of the world. We, as a team, would like to wish them thanks and every success.

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13th September 2009

ACRONYMS AND TERMS

Currency of Latvia is the lat. At the time of the terminal evaluation, US$ 1 = 0.48 Lat

EoY	End of Year
EU	European Union
FE	Final Evaluation
FET	Final Evaluation Team
GEF	Global Environment Facility
ha	Hectare(s)
JSC	Joint Stock Company
LEP	Landscape Ecological Plan
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
METT	Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool
MoE	Ministry of Environment
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NPM	National Project Manager
NVBR	North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve
NVBRA	North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve Administration
PDF-B	Project Development Facility – Block B
PIR	Project Implementation Report
PMU	Project Management Unit
PSC	Project Steering Committee
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDP CO	UNDP Country Office
US$	United States Dollar
VAT	Value-added Tax

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

KEY POINTS

- *Project overall evaluated as **Highly Satisfactory**.*
- *Implementation on the ground has been excellent and the implementation approach is evaluated as **Highly Satisfactory**.*
- *Project stakeholder participation is excellent and has been evaluated as **Highly Satisfactory.***
- *Project monitoring and evaluation has been evaluated as **Highly Satisfactory**.*
- *The sustainability of the Project is difficult to assess. The global financial crisis has undoubtedly cast a shadow over the short-term sustainability of some of the Project's interventions. Nonetheless, the Project has done everything possible to ensure its sustainability and staff and UNDP continue to work beyond the Project's mandate to safeguard the interventions. Thus, sustainability has been evaluated as **Highly Satisfactory**.*

Key successes – *habitat restoration of 622 ha of floodplain grasslands and 32 ha of river rapids as spawning areas for Atlantic salmon and lampreys* Lampetra fluviatilis *and* L. planeri*; a hugely successful and innovative public awareness campaign headlined by the novel concept of Nature Concert Halls, leading to greatly increased understanding of the values of the Biosphere Reserve; development of an landscape ecological plan whose principles have been included in four legally-binding Municipal Plans and are being incorporated into the working practices for selected important biodiversity areas by the JSC "Latvia State Forests"; development of a GIS and management information system for the NVBRA and other stakeholders; establishment of a public[1] monitoring programme (EcoWatch); development of a small grants programme promoting and demonstrating biodiversity-friendly business practices within the NVBR; significantly increased capacity of the NVBRA to manage the Biosphere Reserve; re-constitution of an Advisory Board with effective stakeholder representation to advise the NVBRA; and establishment of a conflict resolution mechanism which can be used as a precedent within the NVBR.*

Key problem areas – *the obstruction at Staicele to migrating salmon in the Salaca River has not been removed (although the significance of this to salmon may be overstated); the number of fishing violations in the Salaca River has increased, largely due to the deterioration in the economy of the country; and there are difficulties with the implementation of the landscape ecological plan within the forestry sector. There is one other external factor that is affecting Project sustainability adversely, namely that the global financial crisis has caused major cutbacks in Government expenditure and forced a significant re-organisation to the institutional framework of environmental protection within Latvia which threaten to muddle the concept of a Biosphere Reserve with that of other protected areas within Latvia.*

The Final Evaluation (FE) of the Project was conducted over a period of 25 days between 29th July and 2nd September 2009 by a team of one international and one national consultant. The FE was carried out on schedule according to the Project programme. The Evaluation Team's ToR is given in Annex I, its itinerary in Annex II and the list of people interviewed in Annex III. A list of indicators, their mid-term status and expected end of Project achievement level, together with performance rating is given in Annex IV. After receipt of comments on 9th September 2009, which have been added as footnotes to the main text, the report was finalised on 13th September 2009.

[1] The term "*voluntary*" monitoring is used in much of the Project's documentation, but the FET finds this is ambiguous since at best it should be "*volunteer*" monitoring. To avoid confusion, the FET uses the term "*public*" monitoring throughout.

RESULTS

Output 1.1: Available information compiled, analysed, key gaps determined – Highly Satisfactory. Baseline activities providing a foundation for the development of NVBR Information Management System.

Output 1.2: Plan for obtaining ('information acquisition programme') missing information prepared and implemented – Satisfactory. Information management system and a new NVBR web-portal have been made available to both internal and external users. Annual data acquisition being undertaken.

Output 1.3: NVBR Meta-database established and protocols for access and use of information implemented – Satisfactory. Information Management System established with data in four main categories – i) on management (e.g. nature protection plans and management plans); ii) GIS-based data (e.g. base maps, single colour maps for field studies); iii) libraries (e.g. seminars, lists of publications); and iv) environmental state resources (e.g. monitoring data).

Output 1.4: Monitoring programme to meet 'global BR obligations' and management needs of NVBR is developed and implemented – Highly Satisfactory. Integrated monitoring programme established covering 180 abiotic, biotic, and socio-economic indicators derived from scientists and a public monitoring scheme.

Output 2.1: Changes in governing legislation to facilitate NVBR management – Marginally Satisfactory. The Regulation on the NVBR Consultative Board *was accepted by Cabinet of Ministers in February 2007.*

Output 2.2: Changes in legislation to improve compliance and enforcement mechanisms – Marginally Satisfactory. No separate legislation to support Landscape Ecological Plan. Regulation passed to delimit areas within NVBR suitable for locating wind power turbines.

Output 2.3: Integration of biodiversity conservation in regional and municipal development plans – Satisfactory. Landscape Ecological Plan integrated fully or partially into Spatial Plans of four Municipalities.

Output 2.4: Strengthening of NVBR administration – Satisfactory. Capacity assessments made and numerous capacity building activities undertaking resulting in significant strengthening of NVBRA.

Output 2.5: Implementation of a conflict mediation mechanism on a pilot basis – Highly Satisfactory. Three pilot-cases used highly adaptive methods to successfully demonstrated the conflict mediation process for the NVBRA, thereby raising its capacity to provide such a role in the future.

Output 2.6: Re-constitution of the NVBR Advisory Board ensuring effective representation of stakeholders – Marginally Satisfactory. Advisory Board reconstituted and NGO Forums established bi-annually.

Output 2.7: Establishing of EcoWatch programmes – Highly Satisfactory. Establishment of hugely popular public monitoring programme with 408 particiapnts recording 19 criteria.

Output 2.8: Management guidelines for buffer zones and transitional areas, their consistence with municipal plans – Satisfactory. Analysis on gaps in the regulations for biodiversity protection in areas outside protected areas was undertaken in 2006 and the LEP provided guidelines for the management and use of these areas (including buffer zones).

Output 3.1: Analysis of the existing policy guiding resource use in NVBR: gaps and opportunities – Marginally Satisfactory. Analysis of gaps undertaken as part of Output 2.8 also covered policies on resource use, but gaps and opportunities to stimulate sustainable development apparently not made. Sustainable Development Profile was completed using 20 indicators covering environmental, social, economic and institutional thematic groups.

Output 3.2: Analysis of requirements in legislation to ensure biodiversity-friendly resource use – Satisfactory. legislation analysed to determine legitimate habitat management for 74 important habitats within the NVBR.

Output 3.3: Identification of potential incentives and regulations to induce economically and ecologically sustainable development – Satisfactory. Incentives synthesised from Outputs 3.1 and 3.2.

Output 3.4: Development of potential incentive and compensation mechanisms to promote sustainable land-use – Satisfactory. Potential incentive mechanisms to promote sustainable land-use were integral to the demonstration projects – see Output 5.2.

Output 4.1: Analysis and inventory of NVBR area and specification of methodology – Highly Satisfactory. Baseline activity for the Landscape Ecological Plan.

Output 4.2: Identification and determination of significant areas and development of optimal landscape structure – Satisfactory. Nature Protection Plans developed for six areas in cooperation with Latvian Nature Foundation.

Output 4.3: Elaboration of landscape ecological plan for the NVBR – Highly Satisfactory. LEP elaborated for NVBR at 1:50,000 scale covering abiotic, biotic, and cultural values and how to conserve them over a timeframe of 25 years. Comprises 42 landscape areas in NVBR territory divided into seven categories.

Output 4.4: Public hearing on landscape ecological plan – Satisfactory. Public meetings not necessary since no legislative basis given to LEP; but wide stakeholder consultations made.

Output 4.5: Proposals for redefinition of NVBR zoning and development of land and water use guidelines – Satisfactory. NVBR not re-zoned but guidelines developed for wind power generation.

Output 4.6: Institutional matching to support NVBR management arrangements – Satisfactory. LEP integrated into management of State-owned forests.

Output 4.7: Guidelines to implement the NVBR management plan through district and municipality plans – Satisfactory. Methodology for the Integration of the LEP into Municipal Spatial Plans *was developed. LEP integrated into four District and Municipal Spatial Plans.*

Output 4.8: Training and awareness rising of stakeholders on ecological planning issues – Satisfactory. Meetings undertaken and a high quality poster summarising the LEP produced and distributed widely.

Output 5.1: Establishment of micro-grant facility – Highly Satisfactory. Very successful Small grants Programme established to facilitate economic activity conserving biodiversity while encouraging economic development. Total of 41 projects implemented, 66% of which were profitable and 50% employing extra people after 12 months.

Output 5.2: Sustainable alternative livelihood options in forestry, fisheries, involvement in provision of tourism and recreation support services, and biodiversity-friendly agricultural activities are demonstrated through model projects at selected sites – Highly Satisfactory. Seven projects implemented demonstrating innovative management techniques of key habitats while providing additional income streams.

Output 6.1: A Communications Strategy (including general and sector specific content and delivery mechanisms) is prepared and implemented – Highly Satisfactory. An outstanding Communications Strategy developed and implemented, full of innovative ideas targeted carefully to achieve maximum awareness-raising results and develop the NVBR brand. An excellent example of best practice.

Output 6.2: Training, including visits to other Biosphere Reserves, is provided for NVBR Administration and members of the NVBR Advisory Board – Satisfactory. Education Strategy developed for period 2007-2012 involving national and international exchange visits, training, and conferences.

Output 7.1: Aquatic pollution is reduced through the preparation and implementation of a River Basin Management Plan for the Salaca River under the WFD – Satisfactory. Project provided information and assistance to contractors preparing the Salaca River Basin Management Plan.

Output 7.2: The condition of Lake Burtnieki is improved through the removal of weeds and reduction of nutrient run off and siltation – Highly Satisfactory. Weeds removed from approximately 150ha of Lake Burtnieki over three years with assistance and support of local stakeholders.

Output 7.3: Obstruction to migrating salmon in Salaca River at Staicele is removed – Marginally Satisfactory. Perhaps the only on-the-ground failure of the Project in that the Staicele Dam has not been removed. However, the Project has worked hard to overcome the impasse with the Dam's owners and at the time of reporting is continuing to look for new ways to resolve the issue.

Output 7.4: Salmon and lamprey spawning habitat is restored and improved at selected sites – Highly Satisfactory. Restoration of 35 ha of river bed achieved at 70 sites.

*Output 7.5: Exotic species control measures are implemented on a pilot basis and monitored for effectiveness – Highly Satisfactory. The Project has collaborated with State agencies and three municipalities in the licensed harvesting of the introduced signal crayfish (*Pacifastacus leniusculus*); and cooperated with the State Plant Protection Service on the control of the alien invasive giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*).*

Output 7.6: Biodiversity values of meadows are restored and maintained through demonstration projects in meadow management using a combination of mowing and grazing, with links to associated local economic benefits – Highly Satisfactory. In collaboration with the EU LIFE-Nature Project Restoration of Latvian Floodplains for EU Priority Species and Habitats *622.85 ha of floodplain areas, including habitats of EU importance, have been restored and managed.*

Output 8.1: Based on baseline data, indicators and the project's monitoring plan, identification of specific learning objectives for the project to be analysed and adjusted on a twice-yearly basis – Satisfactory. Good internal and impact monitoring of Project activities was done routinely. Numerous reports were produced allowing adjustments to be made.

Output 8.2: Lessons and best practices to be identified on a yearly basis as a part of the Tripartite Review process, and discussed, codified and compiled – No tripartite review; see 8.3 instead.

Output 8.3: Codified lessons and best practices to be reviewed by the Project Steering Committee for use as material for potential training, policy analysis and programme development – Satisfactory. Lessons learned and best practices were reviewed on regularly at PSC meetings.

Output 8.4: Dissemination plan developed and implemented to ensure widest audience for best practices and lessons learned – Highly Satisfactory. Good dissemination of results. Nature Concert Halls replicated in Romania and possibly in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Elements of the EcoWatch programme replicated in Bulgaria, possibly in France, and has been used as a basis for four other schemes in protected areas in Latvia. Programme being expanded to cover whole country by Latvian Nature Foundation and Latvian Ornithological Society.

KEY ISSUES

This Project is an outstanding example of what a GEF project can achieve. Its implementation has been excellent with a particularly well-organised and highly motivated project team overseen by respected managers with strong organisation and leadership skills. Oversight of the Project by the Project Steering Committee has been exemplary and the role played by the UNDP Latvia Office has been efficient and supportive. All but one of the Project's aims have been achieved and all activities have been undertaken on time and within budget indicating high efficiency; the quality of the work and the products produced have been of a very high order; stakeholders have been consulted over, and involved in, all activities; the adaptive management has been very good with innovation a core constituent of the management approach; and the entire Project has been scientifically grounded by the Project's management and its progress closely monitored. In addition, and of particular note, is that the sustainability of all Outputs (and therefore Outcomes) has been given priority throughout, and even where the current global financial crisis has threatened to undermine some of its gains, the Project has gone outside of its initial remit to use its influence and expertise to help shape a changing institutional and financial environment in order to sustain the progress already made.

The Project's Communication Strategy represents a triumph, it having recognised from the outset the importance of mobilising public opinion behind many of the Project's activities. It has combined its own requirements with those of the NVBRA and then developed the strategy to cover the period beyond the Project's lifetime and linking it to other existing projects, e.g. EU LIFE. The development of the NVBR brand has been particularly noteworthy, and through this has encouraged local people to identify with the Reserve, understand its values, and take a sense of pride in the area in which they live because it has something special to offer. Enormous goodwill and respect has been gained from local communities, local stakeholders, and landowners as a result. The Project's awareness-raising component and its activities are truly outstanding. In place of tired old staples like calendars and posters are hugely innovative activities, executed with aplomb – annual multimedia "Nature Concert Hall" events which have caught the public's imagination and reached a national audience; a public monitoring programme which currently involves 400 local people collecting scientific data on subjects that interest them; a series of nature trails with observation towers and informative signs whose impact will last long beyond the Project; a small grants programme to help small local businesses and whose effects are spreading by word of mouth; and demonstrations of different land management techniques and restoration projects that raise awareness and interest for land managers.

Key amongst the issues now facing the Project as it comes to an end are the ramifications of the global financial crisis. While sustainability has been placed at the centre of the Project's interventions throughout, the crisis (which has hit Latvia particularly hard) has come out of the blue and with such rapidity as to potentially undermine much of the work. The institutional reforms being enacted in response to the crisis by the Nature Protection Agency pose considerable risk to many of the Project's gains, but they also present many opportunities. The FET believes that the Project, with the help of the UNDP CO, is responding admirably to the challenges posed, and it is a measure of the regard in which the Project and its staff are held by the Government that the NPA is actively encouraging their cooperation in the reform process and looking to maximise the effect of the Project's achievements. At the local level, many of the Project results are now integrated with local stakeholders' planning and management activities, and relations between these and the NVBRA have been significantly strengthened. Financially, there may be some difficulties ahead in the short-term as the country rides out the crisis, but long-term the Government's commitment to the NVBR appears to have been cemented. The social sustainability of the Project's achievements appear excellent, mainly as a direct result of the awareness-raising activities carried out, while economically the sustainability of the Project's interventions also looks unusually strong, mainly because many of the management actions provided economic benefits to the landowners. Only two issues remain outstanding at the time of reporting, both of which the Project are still attempting to resolve – implementation of the Landscape Ecological Plan at Seda, and removal of the Staicele Dam.

Recommendations and Lessons Learned are listed on pages 54-56.

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

1. The Monitoring and Evaluation Policy at the project level in UNDP/GEF has two overarching objectives, namely to promote accountability for the achievement of GEF objectives through the assessment of results, effectiveness, processes and performance of the partners involved in GEF activities; and to promote learning, feedback and knowledge sharing on results and lessons learned among the GEF and its partners, as basis for decision-making on policies, strategies, programme management, and projects and to improve knowledge and performance. With this in mind, this Final Evaluation (FE) was initiated by UNDP Latvia as the GEF Implementation Agency for the *Biodiversity Protection in the North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve Project* to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of Project activities in relation to the stated objectives, and to collate lessons learned.

2. The FE was conducted over a period of 25 days between 29th July and 1st September 2009 by a team of one international and one national consultant. It was carried out on schedule within the final month of the Project programme. The approach was determined by the terms of reference (Annex I) which were closely followed, via the itinerary detailed in Annex II. Throughout the evaluation, particular attention was paid to explaining carefully the importance of listening to stakeholders' views and in reassuring staff and stakeholders that the purpose of the evaluation was not to judge performance in order to apportion credit or blame but to measure the relative success of implementation and to determine learn lessons for the wider GEF context. Wherever possible, information collected was cross-checked between various sources to ascertain its veracity, but in some cases time limited this. A list of people interviewed in given in Annex III. The report was finalised on 13th September 2009 after receipt of comments on 9th September.

3. Full details of the objectives of the FE can be found in the ToR (Annex I), but the evaluation has concentrated on assessing the concept and design of the Project, its implementation in terms of quality and timeliness of inputs, and efficiency and effectiveness of activities carried out, and the objectives and outcomes achieved. Particular attention has been given to the likely sustainability of its results. The FE was constrained partially by the timing of the mission. August is peak vacation season in Latvia and many key people were away during the mission. However, the FET was able to meet most key stakeholders but sometimes a little too briefly and without the opportunity for any follow-up meetings, but the mission was not deemed to have been affected unduly.

4. Wherever possible the FET has tried to evaluate issues according to the criteria listed in the *UNDP-GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy*, namely:

- Relevance – the extent to which the activity is suited to local and national development priorities and organisational policies, including changes over time.
- Effectiveness – the extent to which an objective has been achieved or how likely it is to be achieved.
- Efficiency – the extent to which results have been delivered with the least costly resources possible.
- Results – the positive and negative, and foreseen and unforeseen, changes to and effects produced by a development intervention. In GEF terms, results include direct project outputs, short-to medium term outcomes, and longer-term impact including global environmental benefits, replication effects and other, local effects.
- Sustainability – the likely ability of an intervention to continue to deliver benefits for an extended period of time after completion. Projects need to be environmentally as well as financially and socially sustainable.

5. The FET has evaluated the Project's performance against the revised logframe (see paragraph 26) according to the current six-point evaluation criteria provided to it by the GEF. This is reproduced in Table 1 for clarity.

TABLE 1: CRITERIA USED TO EVALUATE THE PROJECT BY THE FINAL EVALUATION TEAM

Highly Satisfactory (HS)	Project is expected to achieve or exceed **all** its major global environmental objectives, and yield substantial global environmental benefits, without major shortcomings. The project can be presented as "good practice".
Satisfactory (S)	Project is expected to achieve **most** of its major global environmental objectives, and yield satisfactory global environmental benefits, with only minor shortcomings.
Marginally Satisfactory (MS)	Project is expected to achieve **most** of its major relevant objectives but with either significant shortcomings or modest overall relevance. Project is expected not to achieve **some** of its major global environmental objectives or yield some of the expected global environment benefits.
Marginally Unsatisfactory (MU)	Project is expected to achieve **some** of its major global environmental objectives with major shortcomings or is expected to achieve only **some** of its major global environmental objectives.
Unsatisfactory (U)	Project is expected **not** to achieve **most** of its major global environment objectives or to yield any satisfactory global environmental benefits.
Highly Unsatisfactory (U)	The project has failed to achieve, and is not expected to achieve, **any** of its major global environment objectives with no worthwhile benefits.

6. The results of the evaluation were conveyed informally to the National Project Manager prior to the FET's departure. No formal de-briefing meeting was held.

PROJECT CONCEPT AND DESIGN

7. The Project concept arose through increased efforts to strengthen the management of the North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve (NVBR). It recognised five key threats to the NVBR, namely increasing deforestation, habitat fragmentation, habitat degradation, introduced exotic species, and illegal use of natural resources and conflicts among resource users, and designed eight outputs[2] to remedy these covering information, capacity, policy, planning, management, and awareness. In many ways, the design is very typical of many GEF projects in that it attempts to cover all and sundry, the components being largely unrelated except geographically and institutionally, and the Mid-term Evaluation made indirect reference to this when it stated that:

> *"a higher level of results (2-3 outcomes) is missing in the design to bring these 8 outputs ... together."*

However, despite this, the eight outputs were designed with a degree of precision that did address the key issues required to strengthen the management of the NVBR and this has undoubtedly influenced the overall success of the Project. The discrete nature of what the Mid-term Evaluation refers to as "*eight separate building blocks*" enabled the Project to focus its activities and achieve success with what could have been an overly-complex design in a very large land area. Furthermore, the design was very creative with a number of innovative activities such as the establishment of River Watch and Forest Watch programmes (which were subsequently combined into EcoWatch (see paragraph 56 *et*

[2] the initial design of the project was done prior to UNDP implementing its results-based management and hence had only a set of results to be achieved during the lifetime of the project – Outputs – without a set of higher level results – Outcomes; see also paragraph 22.

seq.)) to involve local communities in biodiversity conservation and monitoring, and the development of a landscape ecological plan[3], the first time for such a large area in Latvia.

8. Unfortunately, the strength of the building block approach also had an inherent design flaw. On page 6 of the Project Document when describing its *Programme Conformity*, there is effectively a summary of its aims, thus:

> *"The North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve covers 6% of the territory of Latvia and consists of a network of protected areas – three core zones and 36 other sites designated for special protection – nested in a landscape of productive uses. The project will strengthen the institutional, managerial and financial sustainability of this system of protected areas through legislation and policy analysis, strengthening institutional and stakeholder capacities to improve all aspects of NVBR management, including training of staff. At the same time, the project will implement a set of activities to integrate biodiversity conservation into the planning, management and sustainable use of the Reserve."*

What is key in this description is the focus on strengthening capacities of institutions and stakeholders, and yet from here on, as the Mid-term Evaluation also points out, the Project's design does not place enough emphasis on developing the overall capacity of the NVBRA to manage the Reserve.

> *"The design also did not focus much on the notion of capacity to manage the reserve as opposed to developing management tools for the NVBR Administration. During the first 30 months of implementation, the project developed few state-of-the-art management tools which should strengthen the management of the biosphere reserve. However, the long term sustainability of these management tools and their impact on the reserve will depend largely on the ability of the project to support the development of capacity surrounding these tools. For instance, the adoption of the ecological landscape planning methodology may imply a change of legislation and policy, a change of planning mechanisms and procedures and a change of required skills and knowledge. To succeed in the long run, the project will need to address all the necessary changes to ensure that the NVBR Administration is capable of carrying out these state-of-the-art management tools."*

This point is important because, despite the undoubted success that that the Project has achieved, and despite the Project's management having paid some attention to this issue, in the FET's view the capacity of the NVBRA staff to use the new tools and mechanisms in the absence of the Project remains suspect and perhaps a greater threat to the long-term sustainability of the Project's achievements than the more visible cuts in finance and re-organisation (see paragraph 92 *et seq*.).

9. The STAP review was very light but did indicate that "*The approach proposed has a high probability of achieving the goal and objectives of the project*". What little discussion it did manage to achieve concentrated on the reviewer's own specialist knowledge regarding contingent valuation and agricultural incentive schemes and the need to strengthen the introduction of potential incentive mechanisms. It is interesting to note that almost none of the actions listed in the responses to the STAP review were actually ever undertaken, Output 3 probably resulting in the weakest implementation of any within the Project, e.g.:

> **"***<u>Comment</u>: The proposal is strong on the description of institutional and capacity building measures, but should discuss possible direct regulatory measures*
>
> *<u>Response</u>: The project will implement zoning of the NVBR, produce a management plan, increase efficiency/quality of enforcement, identify gaps in legal/regulatory frameworks (including EU directives and regulations) and identify and propose potential*

[3] The terms "*landscape ecological plan*" and "*ecological landscape planning*" appear to be used interchangeably throughout the Project and its documentation with the former tending to be used for the product and the latter used for the process. The FET has continued to use them in this way although it believe consistency would have been better.

policy, legal and regulatory reforms. Output 3 has been revised to reflect a stronger emphasis on regulatory measures."

10. The original National Project Manager (Dr. Opermanis) also indicated that from the point of implementing the Project, the design was complex, and very general in its description. It provided too little detail in actually describing what the Project needed to do and as a result, a lot of time was spent in clarifying this and developing the Inception Report. The FET cannot concur with this. While a little vague in places, the Project Document lays out a fairly clear description of what is intended and, more importantly, most of the activities necessary to achieve this – certainly it as detailed in this regard as most of the Project Documents that the FET Leader has seen from around that era on other projects that he has evaluated, or even that he designed around that time. This view is supported by the fact that the majority of the activities implemented by the Project are recognisable in the Project Document when re-reading it today. However, the time spent in developing a greater level of detail during the inception period to guide the Project's implementation has certainly paid dividends – see Lessons Learned.

11. To finish on a positive note, the project design does emphasise one extremely important point right at the start of its *Description of the Project Strategy*, where it states:

> *"The Project recognizes two broad groups of stakeholders whose actions affect the conservation of biodiversity in the North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve: those involved in the overall management and governance of the Reserve, … and those living and/or working within the boundaries of the NVBR whose activities (farming, forestry, fishing, tourism) affect the quality of its biodiversity.*
>
> *It will be crucial that these two groups work in a concerted fashion to avoid conflict and maximize potential economic and biodiversity benefits of Reserve management. The project recognizes that while improved enforcement of regulations is fundamental, for project goals to be achieved, it will be indispensable to count upon the firm commitment and support of local and institutional stakeholders of the vision, plans and management strategy of the NVBR."*

The Project's management has appeared to take this point to heart and has worked extremely hard to integrate all its activities in such a way as to build partnerships and gain the commitment of all stakeholders towards greater understanding of the NVBR's values and their conservation. While the work has been done by those implementing the Project, the result is in no small part down to recognition of the need for this within the design.

12. The following are the key objectives formulated for the Project:

Goal

To optimise biodiversity conservation practice in Latvia's protected areas and associated landscapes.

Objective

Secure the globally significant biodiversity values of North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve by implementing a set of initiatives required for integrating biodiversity conservation into the planning, management and sustainable use of the Reserve.

Outcome 1

Improved information on the NVBR and its biodiversity, as well as the information's management and use in decision-making.

Outcome 2

Strengthened institutional capacity and multi-sectoral and participatory mechanisms for governance and management of the Reserve.

Outcome 3

Identification of potential reforms to existing policies, legislation and incentive/regulatory frameworks for resource use, with the aim of stimulating or supporting biodiversity-friendly behaviour.

Outcome 4

Integrated ecological landscape planning for the NVBR.

Outcome 5

Demonstration of alternative biodiversity-supporting economic activities for local communities in forestry, agriculture and tourism.

Outcome 6

Increased awareness of and support for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development among all stakeholders.

Outcome 7

Habitat restoration at selected sites to maintain and enhance globally significant biodiversity.

Outcome 8

Systematic identification and dissemination of lessons learned and best practices through ministerial and NGO channels throughout Latvia.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

13. The concept note[4] for the Project was approved on 26th June 2001 and the PDF-B became operational on 9th May 2002. The Project Document and associated papers were submitted to the GEF Council on 17th July 2003 and, following receipt of comments, a final submission was made on 15th June 2004 with GEF CEO endorsement received two days later on 17th June 2004 as a Full-sized Project under Operational Programme #2 –Coastal and Marine Freshwater Ecosystems and as part of Strategic Priority Biodiversity #1 "*Catalyzing sustainability of Protected Areas*" of the GEF Business Plan. UNDP-GEF signed the Project Document with the Government of Latvia on 14th August 2004, thereby commencing the Project. First disbursements were made two days later. Project inception workshops were organised and the initial Inception Report was produced in November 2004. The Mid-term Evaluation was completed on 26th March 2007.

14. Implementation of the Project has been outstanding with a particularly well-organised and highly motivated project team overseen by respected National Project Managers (NPMs) with strong organisation and leadership skills. All but one of the Project's aims have been achieved and all activities have been undertaken on time and within budget indicating high efficiency; the quality of the work and the products produced have been of a very high order; stakeholders have been consulted over, and involved in, all activities; the adaptive management has been very good with innovation a core constituent of the management approach; and the entire Project has been scientifically grounded by the Project's management and its progress closely monitored. In addition, and of particular note, is that the sustainability of all Outputs (and therefore Outcomes) has been given priority throughout, and even where the current global financial crisis has threatened to undermine some of its gains, the Project has gone outside of its initial remit to use its influence and expertise to help shape a changing institutional and financial environment in order to sustain the progress already made. As a result, the implementation approach is evaluated as **Highly Satisfactory**.

[4] The Project Document carries the number LAT/03/G31/A/1G/99 indicating a start in 1999. Since this precedes ATLAS, no record of this can be found. Unusually the Project did not have a PDF-A, so it has to be presumed that the UNDP-CO allocated monies in 1999 for preparatory activities to deliver the concept note in 2001.

PARTICIPATING AGENCIES

15. The project has been executed under the National Execution (NEX) modality, through the **Ministry of Environment** (MOE), and implemented by the **North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve Administration** (NVBRA). The Ministry authorised UNDP to enter into contractual arrangements with physical and legal persons on their behalf, and to make direct payments against all categories of the project budget, and to manage project funds, including budget planning, monitoring, revisions, disbursements, record keeping, reporting and auditing that all observe UNDP rules. Thus, the Project has been executed in accordance with the standard rules and procedures of the UNDP NEX modality but with direct payments (thereby UNDP is acting as a business agent to provide those services). Some advance payments were made to the NVBRA and a sub-contractor (the Latvian Nature Fund) in 2004, 2005, 2006 with these payments fully accounted for in relevant reports.

16. Project oversight has been undertaken at the strategic level by a **Project Steering Committee** (PSC). This comprises 19 members drawn from the NVBRA, UNDP, and a range of stakeholders from national and local (Districts and Municipalities) governments, government agencies, and NGOs (see Annex V). Interestingly, the chair of the PSC was not the Project Director (as suggested by the Project Document), nor as is sometimes the case, a high-ranking member of the Project's executing agency (in this case the MOE), but instead committee members decided to elect a chairman and this position was held throughout by Mr. Vilmārs Katkovskis, Managing Director of the Western Vidzeme Region of the State Joint Stock Company Latvijas Valsts Meži (JSC "Latvia State Forests"). The FET view the absence of a high-ranking member of the MOE, e.g. State Secretary, or Director of the Nature Protection Department, on the PSC as surprising and believe that such a presence may have facilitated the Project in some of the cases where such political influence would have been beneficial (e.g. implementation of the Landscape Ecological Plan at Seda; Staicele Dam – see paragraphs 113 *et seq*. and 116 *et seq*. respectively)[5]. Nonetheless, by all accounts, the PSC, which met irregularly but at least twice yearly throughout the Project (and three times in 2007) operated extremely effectively, providing advice and decisions that were both timely and relevant. The Project Management Unit provided efficient secretariat services and members praised the fact that issue and agenda papers were thorough and provided adequately in advance of meetings. Although the Project Document also refers to a "Tripartite Review process", since this is no longer compulsory for UNDP projects, such a review was dispensed with.

17. In relation to the North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve Advisory Council, the Project Document stated that:

> "*To avoid the duplication of functions between the PSC and the NVBR Advisory Council, whose membership and role will be reconstituted in the project, and to avoid the creation of additional bureaucratic structures, it would be advisable to subsequently transfer the functions of the PSC to the new Advisory Council. The Advisory Council then in effect would serve as the PSC. This arrangement would also enhance the relevance of the Advisory Council as well as the post project sustainability of this important body*."

In the event, the Advisory Council did operate but although the Project made efforts to bring the functionality of the two bodies together, procedural issues from both UNDP and the MOE prevented their merging. Some persons served as members of both bodies, but ultimately the merging was deemed unnecessary and the Advisory Council was used mainly by the NVBRA in an *ad hoc* way to advise on problems arising beyond the scope of the NVBRA staff and not necessarily connected to the Project.

[5] The FET understands that the Nature Protection Department of the MOE were happy to hand-over management of the project to the Reserve once the project document was signed because at that time the Project's potential was not truly recognised This position probably arose in part from the MOE's previous experience of the much smaller UNDP-GEF enabling activities for developing the national capacities in biodiversity, where the MOE and the Nature Protection Department were the implementing agency.

18. Financing contributions are from GEF (US$2,910,000), UNDP (TRAC) (US$120,000), UNDP (US$30,000), State Forest Service (Govt.) (US$200,000), State Land Service (Govt.) (US$430,000), Ministry of Agriculture (Agri-environment), (US$46,350,000), European Union (ISPA) (US$8,300.000), European Union (SAPARD) (US$900,000), EU Life (US$470,000), European Union (INTERREG) (US$380,000), PIN Matra (US$110,000), UNESCO PP (US$30,000), Baltic Environmental Forum (US$560,000), World Wide Fund for Nature (US$40,000), Salaca Valley NGO (US$20,000), NV waste management (local govt.) (US$30,000), LVAF (Latvian Environmental Protection Fund) (US$1,070,000), Environmental projects Cohesion fund (US$40,000), Recipients of micro-grants (US$34,000), Municipalities (US$20,000), VentEko Environmental Consultancy (US$50,000), European Economic Area and Norway Grants (US$200,000) – total US$ 62.60 million.

19. The Project has worked closely with, and through, a large number of key local stakeholders, notably State institutions (the Ministries of Agriculture, of Environment, and of Regional Development and Local Government; the Nature Protection Agency; JSC "Latvian State Forests"Company; the State Forests Service; the Riga Forests Agency; the Rural Support Service of North Vidzeme Region; and the Latvian Nature Protection Fund[6]), local government (the District Councils of Limbaži, Valka, and Valmiera; the County Councils of Burtnieki and Salacgrīva; and the Municipality/Town Councils of Matīši, Mazsalaca, and Staicele), educational institutions (Faculty of Geography and Earth Sciences, University of Latvia; and Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences), a wide range of the mass media ("Diena"; "Vides vēstis"; "Zaļais īpašums"; "Ziemeļlatvija"; "Auseklis"; "Latvijas Avīze"; "Liesma"; Latvia National Radio; and Radio Star FM), a number of NGOs (Forest Owners' Society; Latvian Ecotourism Association; Latvian Nature Foundation; Latvian Ornithological Society; Valka District Enterpreneuers' Club; Vidzeme Region Tourism Association; World Wide Fund for Nature), commercial organisations, either as contractors or sponsors (DUE; Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian Environment Ltd.; Infosab Ltd.; Platforma Music; and VENTEKO Ltd.), and theUNESCO Latvian National Commission. It has highlighted local participation as a priority, worked tirelessly to raise awareness and win over an initially apathetic or sceptical public, and has already provided all levels of stakeholder with a number of benefits with the emphasis on their sustainability. As a result, the FET evaluates stakeholder participation as **Highly Satisfactory**.

NATIONAL LEVEL ARRANGEMENTS

Project Direction

20. Overall direction of the project has been the responsibility of the **National Project Director** (NPD), a full-time position provided as in-kind contributions by the Government of Latvia, and held throughout the project's lifetime by Mr. Valērijs Seilis, Director of the North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve Administration. He has been responsible for overseeing the execution of the Project on behalf of the Government, for achieving the Project's objectives and has been accountable to UNDP for the use of Project resources.

Project Management

21. Day-to-day implementation has been the responsibility of the **Project Management Unit** (PMU), the office of which was housed in the NVBRA headquarters building in Salacgrīva with subsidiary accommodation within the UNDP office in Riga. The PMU has comprised a full-time **National Project Manager** (NPM) and up to a maximum of eight project staff. The position of NPM has been held by two persons, thus:

- Dr. Otars Opermanis – August 2004 to September 2008.
- Mr. Jānis Ģērmanis – September 2008 to August 2009.

The transition of NPMs was apparently undertaken seamlessly with a month's overlap between the two. Undoubtedly, the Project has benefited tremendously from having two strong NPMs. Dr.

[6] the national funding mechanism for nature protection.

Opermanis has a strong scientific background in ecology and wetlands and this is visble throughout many aspects of the Project, while Mr. Germanis is a highly experienced project manger well-versed in the technical requirements of UNDP-GEF projects. The main sub-components of the Project have been dealt with on a modular basis with either task leaders contracted for their implementation and/or a number of specialists hired to assist them or lead part of the tasks. Full technical oversight and supervision has been retained by the NPM and some tasks managed directly by him.

22. The Project's management and implementation have closely followed the logframe throughout. In November 2004, the Project Inception Report was first published, the result of a series of workshops held in June and July 2004 involving NVBRA and UNDP staff, and other experts who were initially involved in preparing the Project proposal. These working sessions took into account latest changes and developments in the project context (e.g. Latvia joined the EU between the preparation of the Project Document and the start of the Project) and thus updated the project activities. Work over the subsequent months involved elaborating the project description and the logframe at a more detailed level. No essential changes in the Project's strategy were made. The only significant change was an introduction of a ninth output where all project management activities (including monitoring activities) and the operation of the PMU were included. This Inception Report was approved by the PSC at its meeting on 8th December 2004. The Inception Report was subsequently amended because of changes arsing from the mission of the international consultant on landscape ecological planning (approved 13th December 2005); and amended a second time in June 2006 (approved 5th July 2006) following revision of the objective indicators during March-May 2006 to make them more quantitative and easier to measure. A second revision was made in July 2007 following recommendations made by the mid-term evaluation (approved 5th July 2007). At some point, the terminology of "Outputs" and "Activities" was changed to "Outcome" and "Output" respectively to conform to UNDP's adoption of results-based management, although the actual wording of each remained unchanged in order to avoid a complicated restructuring of the Project. This current logframe with eight Outcomes, 38 Outputs, and 26 indicators has been used throughout as the basis for the evaluation (see Annex IV).

Project Progress and Financial Assessment

23. Total disbursement of funds to the Project up until 14th August 2009 amounted to US$ 2,735,350 (see Table 2). If Project spending can be taken as a crude measure of the progress of implementation, then the Project has achieved the progress originally envisaged, since this sum represents a very creditable 99.8% of the budget projected in the original annual work plan. This amounts to 96.5% of the GEF budget (almost US 92,000 remaining unspent) and includes extra funding not originally envisaged – US$ 38,440 from UNDP and US$ 48,366 as the recipients' shares of the small grants programme (see paragraphs 75-76). That said, expenditure has not been even across the various outcomes. Project implementation can boast significant efficiency since during the inception phase a new Outcome – Outcome 9 – was established to cover all costs relating to project management. This has come in at only 72% of the original projection, a saving of almost US$ 225,000 which has been spent on other Outcomes. Similarly, spending on Outcomes 2 (capacity building), 7 (habitat restoration), and 8 (expanding knowledge) has been under budget – in part very commendable given some excellent work on public monitoring and habitat restoration, but perhaps a little more questionable in the case of the strengthening of the NVBRA (Output 2.4) whose final indicators fall a little short of expected targets (see Annex IV). Significantly greater spending than was budget for occurred in Outcomes 1 (information) and 6 (public awareness) – the latter where significantly effective activities were undertaken, e.g. concert halls).

TABLE 2: TOTAL DISBURSEMENT OF FUNDS BY OUTPUT BY SOURCE* TO 16TH AUGUST 2009 (US$) AGAINST FULL PROJECT BUDGET AS PER INITIAL ANNUAL WORK PLAN (FIGURES ROUNDED)

	GEF			UNDP			Private			Total		
	Budget	**Actual**	**%**	**Budget**	**Actual**	**%**	**Budget**	**Actual**	**%**	**Budget**	**Actual**	**%**
Outcome 1	241,800	324,502	134.2	0	31,936	+	0	0	0.0	241,800	356,438	147.4
Outcome 2	300,000	182,861	61.0	3,000	11,452	381.7	0	0	0.0	303,000	194,313	64.1
Outcome 3	21,000	56,543	269.3	32,500	0	0.0	0	0	0.0	53,500	56,543	105.7
Outcome 4	178,000	245,003	137.6	18,500	10,015	54.1	0	0	0.0	196,500	255,018	129.8
Outcome 5	299,500	317,448	106.0	0	24	+	0	0	0.0	299,500	317,472	106.0
Outcome 6	371,700	491,310	132.2	13,000	32,378	249.1	0	48,366	+	384,700	572,055	148.7
Outcome 7	410,200	364,752	88.9	0	3,478	+	0	0	0.0	410,200	368,230	89.8
Outcome 8	44,300	37,509	84.7	5,000	0	0.0	0	0	0.0	49,300	37,509	76.1
Outcome 9	794,000	548,615	69.1	8,000	29,156	364.5	0	0	0.0	802,000	577,772	72.0
Total	**2,660,500**	**2,568,544**	**96.5**	**80,000**	**118,440**	**148.0**	**0**	**48,366**	**+**	**2,740,500**	**2,735,350**	**99.8**

* Table excludes co-funding.

SOURCE: UNDP from Atlas. Note, it is outside the scope of the FET to independently verify the financial figures contained in any of the tables and figures presented here through an audit.

24. Table 3 gives the figures for the disbursement of GEF funds by Outcome against budget in each of the project years (note these are not necessarily 12-month periods). Figure 1 illustrates these figures as a percentage of budget disbursed in each period by Outcome, and Figures 2 shows the same but cumulatively. These Figures illustrate a number of points:

a) that expenditure through 2004 and 2005 was generally slow with most Outcomes registering below 50% of budget for the period, but that project management costs were high reflecting the considerable time spent in planning;

b) increasing progress in 2006 with Outcomes 1 (information), 4 (landscape ecological planning) and 6 (public awareness) all exceeding their annual budgets and only Outcome 3 (policy reform) still registering little progress;

c) most expenditure taking place in 2007 and 2008 with particular peaks for Outcomes 4 and 1 respectively when the main contracts were placed;

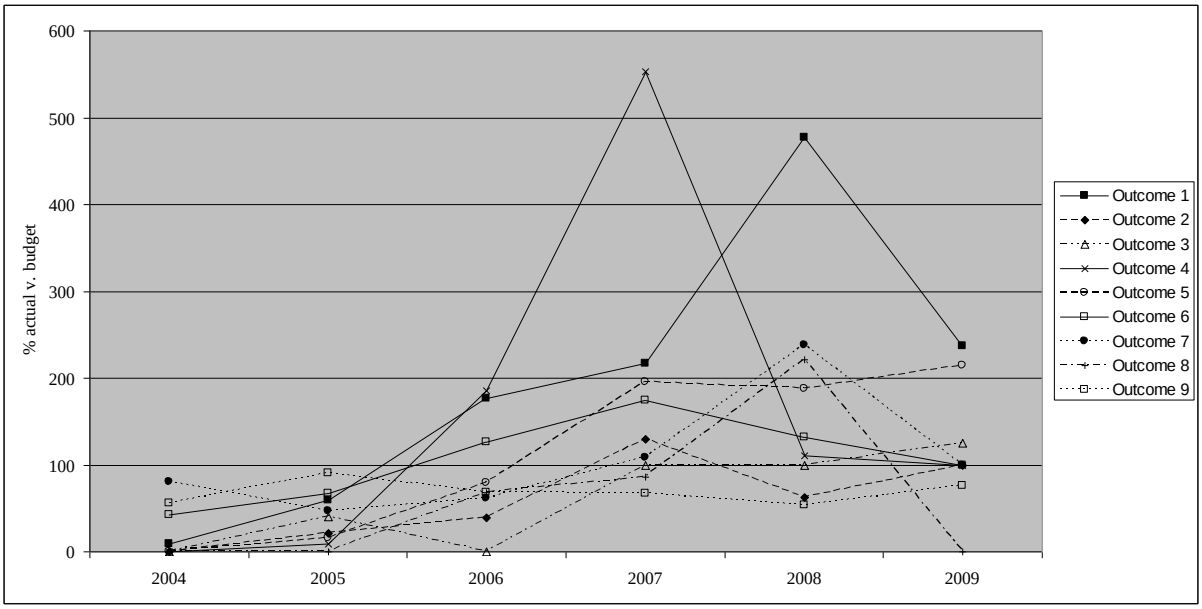
d) work continuing at or above budget throughout 2009 with the exception of Outcome 8 (expanding knowledge) which may be considered a little surprising since the end of a project is usually the time when lessons learned are disseminated – in this case the Project appear to have made considerable efforts to share experiences at an earlier stage.

TABLE 3: TOTAL DISBURSEMENT OF GEF FUNDS (US$) BY OUTPUT BY YEAR AGAINST BUDGET AS PER INITIAL ANNUAL WORK PLAN

	2004			2005			2006			2007			2008			2009		
	Budget	**Actual**	**%**	**Budget**	**Actual**	**%**	**Budget**	**Actual**	**%**	**Budget**	**Actual**	**%**	**Budget**	**Actual**	**%**	**Budget**	**Actual**	**%**
Outcome 1	16,000	1,398	9	125,400	73,911	59	43,000	76,066	177	29,400	63,602	216	18,000	85,796	477	10,000	23,730	237
Outcome 2	0	0	0	107,500	23,089	21	85,500	33,173	39	60,500	78,468	130	46,500	29,187	63	0	18,944	100
Outcome 3	0	0	0	5,000	2,009	40	6,000	0	0	0	16,647	100	0	25,348	100	10,000	12,539	125
Outcome 4	0	0	0	78,000	6,888	9	65,000	120,587	186	15,000	82,896	553	20,000	22,143	111	0	12,488	100
Outcome 5	0	0	0	110,000	16,980	15	60,000	47,359	79	58,500	114,652	196	52,500	98,748	188	18,500	39,708	215
Outcome 6	7,000	2,997	43	158,700	105,885	67	95,000	119,709	126	62,000	108,329	175	49,000	64,498	132	0	89,893	100
Outcome 7	39,100	31,481	81	131,100	60,931	46	130,000	79,503	61	70,000	75,714	108	40,000	95,297	238	0	21,827	100
Outcome 8	0	0	0	0	0	0	10,000	6,860	69	10,000	8,647	86	10,000	22,116	221	14,300	0	0
Outcome 9	46,900	26,159	56	155,100	140,519	91	159,800	108,715	68	167,800	111,934	67	173,800	92,307	53	90,600	68,981	76
Total	**109,000**	**62,035**	**57**	**870,800**	**430,212**	**49**	**654,300**	**591,973**	**90**	**473,200**	**660,888**	**140**	**409,800**	**535,439**	**131**	**143,400**	**287,996**	**201**

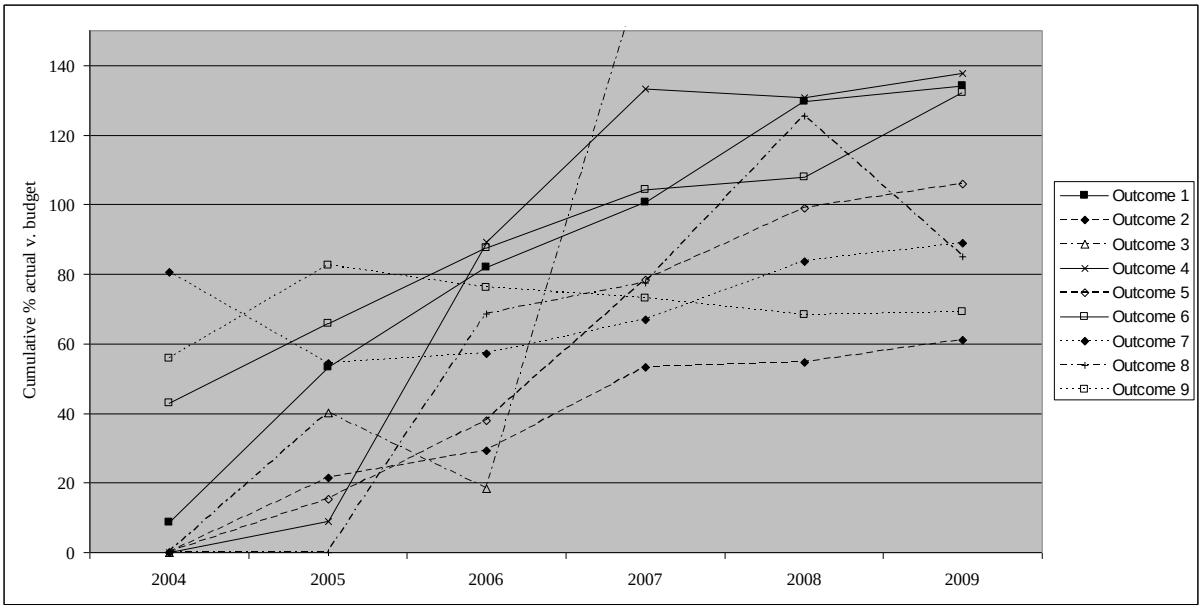
SOURCE: UNDP from Atlas. Note: it is outside the scope of the FE to independently verify the financial figures contained in any of the tables and figures presented here through an audit

FIGURE 1: PERCENTAGE DISBURSEMENT OF GEF FUNDS (US$) BY OUTPUT BY YEAR TO AUGUST 2009 AGAINST BUDGET AS PER INITIAL ANNUAL WORK PLAN



SOURCE: UNDP from Atlas.

FIGURE 2: CUMULATIVE PERCENTAGE DISBURSEMENT OF GEF FUNDS (US$) BY OUTPUT BY YEAR TO AUGUST 2009 AGAINST BUDGET AS PER INITIAL ANNUAL WORK PLAN



SOURCE: UNDP from Atlas.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Internal Project M&E

25. Project monitoring and evaluation has been evaluated as **Highly Satisfactory**. Monitoring and evaluation of Project activities have been undertaken in varying detail at three levels:

i. Progress monitoring
ii. Internal activity monitoring
iii. Impact monitoring

26. Progress monitoring is good and has been made through quarterly and annual reports to the UNDP-CO. The annual work plans for the Project are worked out together by the PMU and the NVBRA along with inputs from the UNDP-CO and are sent to UNDP for formal approval. Monthly reporting is undertaken through meetings between the PMU and the NVBRA. The PMU has also been largely in daily communication with the UNDP CO regarding project, work plan, and its implementation. The PMU has ensured that the UNDP-CO received quarterly progress reports providing updates on the status of planned activities, the status of the overall project schedule, the products completed, problems incurred, and an outline of the activities planned for the following quarter. Neither of these report formats contained quantitative estimates of project progress, just qualitative assessments of progress made. The UNDP-CO generated its own quarterly financial reports from Atlas. These expenditure records, together with Atlas disbursement records of direct payments, served as a basis for expenditure monitoring and budget revisions, the latter taking place annually following the disbursement progress and changes in the operational work plan. The UNDP-CO has also required quarterly delivery projections along with work plans and procurement tables and these have served as an additional monitoring tool, especially for quantitative estimates of the project progress.

27. From the quarterly reports, the UNDP-CO has prepared Quarterly Operational Reports (150-word fixed-format) which have been forwarded to UNDP/GEF Regional Coordination Unit in Bratislava, and in turn submitted to UNDP HQ and to GEF. The major findings and observations of all these reports have been given in an annual report covering the period July to June, the Project Implementation Report (PIR), which is also submitted by the PMU to the UNDP-CO, UNDP Regional Coordination Unit, and UNDP HQ for review and official comments, followed by final submission to GEF. The PIRs have been circulated to the PSC, and one of its meetings each year has been devoted to the PIR and its approval. Since all District Councils are represented on the PSC as well as several national ministries, both local and national government has been kept abreast of the Project's implementation progress. Annual Project Reports (APR) were not prepared because it was felt that this process duplicated the PIR which was produced with the involvement of the PSC. Project risk assessment has been updated once a year together by the project team and the UNDP CO at the time of the PIR. The closeness of the relationship between the PMU and the UNDP-CO means that the project team members meet CO staff once or more a week to discuss project progress and specific outcomes, and the UNDP has also monitored the Project through numerous field visits, e.g. once or more per month through 2008 and 2009[7].

28. Internal activity monitoring has been undertaken by both the NPMs at a number of levels to assess implementation and accomplishments. From the beginning, the Inception Report (and its subsequent revisions) has been used as the over-arching framework guiding the development of each Annual Work Plan (AWP) where the terms for each activity and its milestones have been closely defined. The AWPs have been provided to the PSC for information but have not required formal approval by it. Implementation of the AWP has been run using Microsoft *Project Planner*. Project Planning Meetings have been held each month involving the NPD, NPM, component coordinators and UNDP thereby providing good coordination and feedback between the various components and enabling milestones to be tracked. In addition, twice a year the Project holds planning meetings with the NVBRA to determine a common approach. Each Task Leader has been responsible for running their own team with the monthly milestones taken as the key deliverables. The NPM's assistant has been tasked with chasing Task Leaders with regard to deadlines. The NPM exerts daily control through his involvement with meetings, seminars, discussions, and contracts. External consultants and contractors have been tied to results-based contracts with payments dependent upon satisfactory deliverables or milestones. Those consultants contracted on a time basis (e.g. on site one week every month) have been required to submit report of their missions, the findings, the minutes of any meetings, timesheets, and a plan for the next activities prior to payment being approved. Annual

[7] **2008**: 24, 29 Jan; 12 Feb;14 Mar; 17,22,24 Apr; 30 May, 17-18 Jun; 1, 16, 28 Jul, 9 Aug; 11 Sep; 6 Oct; 5, 13 Nov. **2009**: 21, 27-29 Jan, 3, 5, 27 Feb; 4, 23 Mar, 22-24 Apr, 18-19, 21 May, 15-16, 30 July.

financial audits have been carried out by an independent authorised auditing company selected by tender as part of UNDP's Financial Unit's formal monitoring programme.

29. Impact monitoring by the Project has been particularly strong. The entire basis of all Project work has been given a sound scientific base and the Project has developed a comprehensive integrated monitoring programme covering 180 indicators (biodiversity, air and water quality, land use, and socio-economic) to provide information to direct future decision-making on management (see paragraph ??). In addition, the Mid-term Evaluation provided a recommendation to develop a sustainable development profile and this was carried out by Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (see paragraph ??). Assessment of capacity building activities for the NVBRA has been undertaken through the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) whose scores are one of the formal indicators to assess Project progress. Increases in public awareness as a result of Project activities has been measured through an innovative range of indicators covering practical aspects of Reserve management, the number of people participating in public monitoring programme, as well as through questionnaires to the public and local authorities to assess the support for biodiversity conservation within the NVBR (see indicators 18-20 in Annex IV).

PROJECT RESULTS

DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE INDICATORS

30. The indicators relating to the Project's Development Objective have all been fully approved.

- Increase of core areas to represent 5% of the NVBR area
    - Core areas increased from 4% to 7.7%

The increase has been achieved by the legal designation of Strictly Protected Areas within the NVBR under the *Law on North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve 1997*. These cover the most important nature conservation sites outside the original Nature Protection (core) Zone of the NVBR, but no re-zoning has taken place.

- Populations of key indicator species maintained at [or above] the baseline level
    - Number of wolf *Canis lupus* increased from 29 to 45
    - Number of European lynx *Lynx lynx* increased from 102 to 210.
    - Smolt production of Atlantic salmon *Salmo salar* in the Salaca River increased from 10,000 to 25,000.
    - Number of Great Snipe *Gallinago media* leks with more than one male increased from 6 to 7.

All species indicators show strong population increases. However, as with all such indicators, it remains unclear as to whether these responses stem directly from Project's activities or from external conditions, e.g. a series of good migration years in the case of Atlantic salmon or Great Snipe.

- Areas (ha) of threatened habitats under conservation management:
    - Floodplain grasslands increased from 0 to 622 ha.
    - River rapids increased from 0 to 32 ha.
    - Woodland key habitats increased from 409 to 2,276 ha.

The increases in floodplain grasslands and river rapids have arisen from the five-year management agreements signed under the Project's habitat restoration scheme, while woodland key habitats automatically come under conservation management by the State Forest Service.

- Improved management effectiveness of NVBR administration; METT score
    - METT score increased from 42 to 67.

Target (METT score 70) achieved except for minor discrepancies relating to the proportion of time staff spend on various functions, this in part arising from still too few staff, and in part from a prioritization in their mandate for internal administration over research, education, and partnerships.

SUMMARY EVALUATION

31. Overall, the Project entitled *Biodiversity Protection in the North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve Project* has achieved and exceeded all of its major global environmental objectives and has yielded substantial global environmental benefits, without any major shortcomings. Since the project can be presented as "good practice", the FET evaluates it as **Highly Satisfactory**. In making this evaluation, it is important to recognise that while the implementation of the Project has been of a very high order throughout, and while the Project has been undertaken in a country whose level of development enabled it to join the European Union between conclusion of the PDF-B and the signing of the Project Document, the external enabling environment has not been wholly conducive to efficient implementation with low capacity within the NVBRA and other stakeholders, and an initially low level of public awareness towards the aims of the Biosphere Reserve and the Project itself. Furthermore, much of what the Project has attempted to do has been for the first time in Latvia, e.g. landscape ecological planning, and this, together with the rather poor design of the Project, e.g. overly complex and inadequate details, have presented significant challenges.

32. Key Project achievements include:

- habitat restoration of 622 ha of floodplain grasslands and 32 ha of river rapids as spawning areas for Atlantic salmon and lampreys *Lampetra fluviatilis and L. planeri*;
- a hugely successful and innovative public awareness campaign headlined by the novel concept of Nature Concert Halls, leading to greatly increased understanding of the values of the Biosphere Reserve;
- development of an landscape ecological plan whose principles have been included in four legally-binding Municipal Plans and are being incorporated into the working practices for selected important biodiversity areas by the JSC "Latvia State Forests";
- development of a GIS and management information system for the NVBRA and other stakeholders;
- establishment of a public monitoring programme (EcoWatch);
- development of a small grants programme promoting and demonstrating biodiversity-friendly business practices within the NVBR;
- significantly increased capacity of the NVBRA to manage the Biosphere Reserve;
- re-constitution of an Advisory Board with effective stakeholder representation to advise the NVBRA; and
- establishment of a conflict resolution mechanism which can be used as a precedent within the NVBR.

33. The main problem areas identified by the FET are that:

- the obstruction at Staicele to migrating salmon in the Salaca River has not been removed (although the significance of this to salmon may be overstated);
- the number of fishing violations in the Salaca River has increased, largely due to the deterioration in the economy of the country; and
- there are difficulties with the implementation of the landscape ecological plan within the forestry sector.

There is one other external factor that is affecting Project sustainability adversely, namely that:

- the global financial crisis has caused major cutbacks in Government expenditure and forced a significant re-organisation to the institutional framework of environmental protection within Latvia which threaten to muddle the concept of a Biosphere Reserve with that of other protected areas within Latvia (see paragraph 92 *et seq*.).

34. Chief among the issues that confront the Project as it draws to a close are how to safeguard the sustainability of its interventions in the light of the global financial crisis and the Government's ensuing reforms (see paragraph 92 *et seq*.); how to ensure implementation of the Landscape Ecological Plan at Seda (see paragraph 113 *et seq*.); and how to resolve the impasse over the demolition of the Staicele Dam (see paragraph 116 *et seq*.). In addition, the FET believes that UNDP needs to look at registering the Nature Concert Hall concept as an international brand.

35. A summary evaluation by Project Output is given in Table 4 and a more detailed summary of the level of achievements made against the indicators of success contained in the logframe is given in Annex IV. Results are discussed below by Project Outcome and key sectoral or cross-cutting issues are then discussed in the ensuing section.

TABLE 4: EVALUATION OF THE END OF PROJECT SITUATION AS PER THE REVISED LOGFRAME

Component		Evaluation*					
		HS	S	MS	MU	U	HU
Output 1.1	Available information compiled, analysed, key gaps determined	■					
Output 1.2	Plan for obtaining ('information acquisition programme') missing information prepared and implemented		■				
Output 1.3	NVBR Meta-database established and protocols for access and use of information implemented		■				
Output 1.4	Monitoring programme to meet 'global BR obligations' and management needs of NVBR is developed and implemented	■					
Output 2.1	Changes in governing legislation to facilitate NVBR management			■			
Output 2.2	Changes in legislation to improve compliance and enforcement mechanisms			■			
Output 2.3	Integration of biodiversity conservation in regional and municipal development plans		■				
Output 2.4	Strengthening of NVBR administration		■				
Output 2.5	Implementation of a conflict mediation mechanism on a pilot basis	■					
Output 2.6	Re-constitution of the NVBR Advisory Board ensuring effective representation of stakeholders			■			
Output 2.7	Establishing of EcoWatch programmes	■					
Output 2.8	Management guidelines for buffer zones and transitional areas, their consistence with municipal plans		■				
Output 3.1	Analysis of the existing policy guiding resource use in NVBR: gaps and opportunities			■			
Output 3.2	Analysis of requirements in legislation to ensure biodiversity-friendly resource use		■				
Output 3.3	Identification of potential incentives and regulations to induce economically and ecologically sustainable development		■				
Output 3.4	Development of potential incentive and compensation mechanisms to promote sustainable land-use		■				
Output 4.1	Analysis and inventory of NVBR area and specification of methodology	■					
Output 4.2	Identification and determination of significant areas and development of optimal landscape structure		■				
Output 4.3	Elaboration of landscape ecological plan for the NVBR	■					
Output 4.4	Public hearing on landscape ecological plan		■				
Output 4.5	Proposals for redefinition of NVBR zoning and development of land and water use guidelines		■				
Output 4.6	Institutional matching to support NVBR management arrangements		■				

Component		Evaluation*					
		HS	S	MS	MU	U	HU
Output 4.7	Guidelines to implement the NVBR management plan through district and municipality plans		■				
Output 4.8	Training and awareness rising of stakeholders on ecological planning issues		■				
Output 5.1	Establishment of micro-grant facility	■					
Output 5.2	Sustainable alternative livelihood options in forestry, fisheries, involvement in provision of tourism and recreation support services, and biodiversity-friendly agricultural activities are demonstrated through model projects at selected sites	■					
Output 6.1	A Communications Strategy (including general and sector specific content and delivery mechanisms) is prepared and implemented	■					
Output 6.2	Training, including visits to other Biosphere Reserves, is provided for NVBR Administration and members of the NVBR Advisory Board		■				
Output 7.1	Aquatic pollution is reduced through the preparation and implementation of a River Basin Management Plan for the Salaca River under the WFD		■				
Output 7.2	The condition of Lake Burtnieki is improved through the removal of weeds and reduction of nutrient run off and siltation	■					
Output 7.3	Obstruction to migrating salmon in Salaca River at Staicele is removed			■			
Output 7.4	Salmon and lamprey spawning habitat is restored and improved at selected sites	■					
Output 7.5	Exotic species control measures are implemented on a pilot basis and monitored for effectiveness	■					
Output 7.6	Biodiversity values of meadows are restored and maintained through demonstration projects in meadow management using a combination of mowing and grazing, with links to associated local economic benefits	■					
Output 8.1	Based on baseline data, indicators and the project's monitoring plan, identification of specific learning objectives for the project to be analysed and adjusted on a twice-yearly basis		■				
Output 8.2	Lessons and best practices to be identified on a yearly basis as a part of the Tripartite Review process, and discussed, codified and compiled						
Output 8.3	Codified lessons and best practices to be reviewed by the Project Steering Committee for use as material for potential training, policy analysis and programme development		■				
Output 8.4	Dissemination plan developed and implemented to ensure widest audience for best practices and lessons learned	■					

* Note: HS = Highly satisfactory; S = Satisfactory; MS = Marginally satisfactory; MU= Marginally unsatisfactory; U = Unsatisfactory; HU = Highly unsatisfactory.

PROJECT OUTPUTS

Outcome 1: Information.

Output 1.1: Available information compiled, analysed, key gaps determined

36. A database on information already existing within NVBRA was created in September 2004. A seminar was organized in December 2004 on the data and information needs of stakeholders and data keepers from which a gap analysis was carried out at two levels, i) the information needs of the NVBRA for decision-making, and ii) the information needs of a wide range of stakeholders in the NVBR for various purposes. These baseline activities served as a foundation for the development of NVBR Information Management System.

Output 1.2: Plan for obtaining ('information acquisition programme') missing information prepared and implemented

37. Based on results from Output 1.1, an information management system assessment was undertaken in May 2005 and the strategy for the information management system was developed.

Technical equipment and software were purchased and the information management system was installed. However, some technical problems occurred due to the electronic security of the system and a change in October 2007 in personnel responsible for it. Hence, the NVBR website and the information management system did not start work until January 2008. Both the information management system and a new NVBR web-portal have been made available to both internal and external users. While development of the system and the subsequent maintenance of the databases has been undertaken on a daily basis by Project and NVBRA staff, all technical consultation and system maintenance has been contracted to a computer service company. Annual data acquisition for the system is being undertaken according to an "information acquisition programme" and no major problems have yet been encountered. Data gaps are being filled, e.g. through research on sites appropriate for wind power generation, on tourism activities, and a inventory of households within the NVBR has also been made.

38. As part of the NVBR Communication Strategy (see Output 6 – paragraph 78), the information management system was introduced to stakeholders through a highly successful information campaign organised in September 2008. All librarians and schools within the NVBR were involved in order to raise awareness about the system and to ensure its widespread introduction at the local level.

Output 1.3: NVBR meta-database established and protocols for access and use of information implemented

39. The meta-database was developed by a contractor supervised by Project and NVBRA staff and completed in January 2007. Software for the meta-database was installed on the NVBRA server, and additional technical equipment was purchased to install the documentation management software. Five meta-databases are allocated – i) information (useable); ii) administration and management (useable); iii) users (awaiting data); iv) survey information (useable); and v) news (pending). Once the information system was established, a training and introduction plan was developed in February 2008 for NVBRA and external users. The User's Manual, prepared in February 2007 by a contractor (Alise Ltd.), was edited by the Project's Expert on Capacity Issues in order to make it more "user-friendly", and seminars were held in February 2008 involving a total of 87 participants. Another seminar was organised in September 2008 to update stakeholders on the information available in the information management system as part of the NVBRA capacity strengthening activities (see Output 2.4 – paragraph 49 *et seq.*).

40. Although much delayed, implementation of the information management system can be viewed as a success since it is clearly linking the provision of information to the needs of decision-makers and has raised the awareness of the decision-makers as to the need to base their decisions on available information. However, doubts were expressed to the FET from both inside and outside the NVBRA as to whether the capacity of all staff was sufficient to use all the data available in the information management system effectively, and the FET remains concerned over the NVBRA's ability and commitment to maintaining the system[8] and to ensuring full data safety activities (see paragraphs 122-123).

Output 1.4: Monitoring programme to meet 'global BR obligations' and management needs of NVBR is developed and implemented

41. In 2005 the integrated monitoring programme was developed as a part of the NVBR information system. The programme involves 180 different indicators selected to cover biodiversity, air and water quality, land use, and socio-economics, integrated to cover different types and level observations into the one system. Indicators are assessed regularly according to a defined methodology to provide an overview of the existing situation and trends within the NVBR. This will enable the NVBRA to meet its obligations in reporting internationally on NATURA 2000, water

[8] PMU/UNDP comment: "*Project and UNDP CO has discussed with NPA regarding centralising development and maintenance of information management system for whole NPA. Recent development shows that NPA has considered this and within this year already there will be common web page for whole NPA as a start. Former staff member of NVBR Andris Soms who has been working with information management system in NVBR is now responsible for this task in NPA*."

quality (European Commission) and to participate in the UNESCO *Man and Biosphere* programme as well as providing it with a solid foundation for decision-making in managing the NVBR and in providing data for municipalities and inhabitants of the Reserve. A significant part of the monitoring system involves local people in the data collection process through the public monitoring programme which in turn helps to raise awareness and understanding of the NVBR values and their conservation (see Output 2.7).

42. The monitoring programme is highly innovative and represents the first time in Latvia that environmental (abiotic and biotic) and socio-economic components have been merged into one monitoring programme. The main principles of developing the system were defined by the international biosphere reserve monitoring expert Brian Craig and involved identifying the existing types data and those necessary for future management prior to making an assessment of the usability of the data already available. A special working group (which met six times between February and June 2005) which included representatives of the Project, the NVBRA and experts covering seven themes (four biotic themes – rivers and lakes, forests, bogs and coasts, meadows and agricultural lands; landscape; abiotic environment; and socio-economics), guided and coordinated the work undertaken by INFOSAB Ltd.. Recommendations of state institutions involved in the organisation of national monitoring, and municipal spatial planners were taken into account during the whole process of the development of the programme. Development of the system was closely linked to the daily management needs of the NVBRA for which monitoring data is necessary and its documentation (together with that of the Valmiera Regional Environmental Board) was reviewed in order to identify these. Management issues and were linked to indicators and related parameters were set. Information on existing available and planned monitoring data sources was gathered, and data was prioritised such that minimum and maximum monitoring programme were developed – the former comprising mainly the most significant ecosystem, biotopes and species of the NVBR.

43. Implementation of the monitoring programme is linked to the state institutions (Latvian Environment, Geology and Meteorology Agency; State Forests Service; Rural Support Service; State Health Agency; Central Statistical Bureau), municipal institutions, NGOs (Latvia Ornithology Society; Latvian Nature Foundation), scientific institutions, and public monitoring within the NVBR territory. To ensure cooperation between the data providers and the monitoring organizers, two seminars were arranged and the principle established of maximising the use of existing data from State monitoring system to prevent duplication of work, to ensure the data exchange[9], and to make the programme technically and financially effective. Two levels of data have been established – i) scientific monitoring undertaken by field researchers with experienced guidance and held within the existing State monitoring system, e.g. NATURA 2000 site monitoring, research institute observations, and scientific observations; and ii) voluntary or secondary monitoring done by NVBR inhabitants and interest groups.

44. For distributing the monitoring results, three main interest groups were identified namely: i) State institutions responsible for managing and monitoring the NVBR territory; ii) NVBR municipal authorities; and iii) schools and other interest groups. To help disseminate the data, the NVBRA has developed a section in its website www.biosfera.gov.lv, which includes the results of the public monitoring scheme (EcoWatch – see Output 2.7; paragraph 56 *et seq*.) and particular State monitoring programme reports. In 2009 a popular science report was prepared by the Latvia Nature Foundation on NVBR integrated monitoring programme and its results.

45. While the monitoring programme is undoubtedly innovative, integrated and interdisciplinary and combines professional and public components, the main purpose of monitoring is to reflect change and hence it is still to early to say whether it can (or will) be used to help make management decisions. However, the FET has some concern that the evaluation of the monitoring programme made by an independent contractor for the Project (not the FE) indicated that monitoring is still not seen as a priority task of the NVBRA and that neither financial provision nor a separate staff position has been

[9] there were initial problems over ownership of professional data.

allocated to it. With the current reforms to the Nature Protection Agency (NPA) and, accordingly to the NVBRA, the future of the programme appears to lie in the balance between being lost in the financial cutbacks or in being replicated throughout the protected area system of the country. It is encouraging to note that even at this late stage, the Project and UNDP continue to lobby the NPA to encourage it to understand the central role that such a programme has in managing all protected areas, not just the NVBR.

Outcome 2: Institutional capacity

Output 2.1: Changes in governing legislation to facilitate NVBR management

46. As part of the country-wide process of amending all protected area Advisory Boards, the NVBR Consultative Board was developed in December 2005. In February 2007, the *Regulation on the NVBR Consultative Board* was accepted by Cabinet of Ministers. The aim of the Board, which now comprises 20 representatives from the NVBR territory including state and municipal institutions, NGOs, UNESCO "Man and Biosphere Programme" and private structures, has been to coordinate environment protection and socio-economical development issues in the NVBR. The Board meets at least twice a year, usually on a *ad hoc* basis. Cooperation contracts with various institutions (e.g. University of Latvia (Riga) and JSC "Latvia State Forests" (Riga) have been signed to improve cooperation and information exchange. Seminars with the Valmiera Regional Environmental Board and other institutions on functional coordination and conformity have been held regularly since 2007. These events have been considered to be successful and fruitful and the NVBRA intends to continue this development of cooperation further.

Output 2.2: Changes in legislation to improve compliance and enforcement mechanisms

47. In April 2008, a meeting with several Ministry of Environment representatives was held to look at recommendations on providing the Landscape Ecological Plan (LEP) with a legislative base. It was decided not to establish a separate law but to include the LEP in various amendments to existing environmental legislation. This decision not to make the LEP a legally binding document has led to difficulties for its implementation, with state, municipal and private institutions all viewing it with a certain amount of indifference as a result. The Project continues to work with the local governments and the JSC "Latvia State Forests" to implement this – see Output 4.6 – paragraph 72. However, one issue within the LEP has received legal status, that of wind power. In December 2008, the Amendment to Cabinet of Ministers Regulation N^{o}. 353 "*On individual protection and use of the NVBR*" was accepted which allows wind turbines to be located in only certain areas of the NVBR where their impact on biodiversity (particularly birds) will be minimal. A detailed map resulting from Project research delimits these areas.

Output 2.3: Integration of biodiversity conservation in regional and municipal development plans

48. The Project provided support to municipal planners and decision-makers by providing them with seminars and with data and information on biodiversity issues through the information management system (Output 1.1 – paragraph 36). After its development in August 2007, the landscape ecological plan was distributed to all municipalities with territory inside the NVBR, thus providing a complete picture for the first time rather than fragmented information. The pilot project for the integration of the LEP in a Municipal Spatial Plan[10] was made in Aloja municipality. However, all municipalities of the NVBR have been informed as to the use of the LEP and the advantages of introducing biodiversity issues into their Spatial Plans. All levels of regional administration received materials on the LEP, on the methodology for its integration into Municipal Spatial Plans, and were invited to seminars – see also Output 4.7 – paragraph 73.

Output 2.4: Strengthening of NVBR administration

49. An *Analysis of functions of the NVBR Administration* was commissioned by the Project in 2005 to describe the institutional context of the NVBRA and its mandated functions, estimate the allocation

[10] Smaller municipalities refer to these as Development Plans.

of staff time, finances and resources for implementing each of these mandated functions, identify the activities of other institutions which perform similar functions, profile the strengths and weaknesses of the NVBRA, and make recommendations to strengthen its capacity and mitigate the weaknesses. As a result, the NVBR development strategy was produced in June 2006 and a number of changes ensued to the organisational structure, strategic planning, management approaches, and administrative procedures of the NVBRA, all of which yielded increased efficiencies and better alignment with the regional and global objectives of the Biosphere Reserve. These changes included an increase in staff from 8 to 13; establishment and staffing of a Development and Research Division (see Output 1.3) whose functions include environmental education and research; development of a Strategic Action Plan, individual Nature Protection Plans and the Landscape Ecological Plan (Outcome 4) to guide the NVBRA activities; study tours to, and information sharing with, other biosphere reserves; development of a visual identity and communication strategy for the NVBR; and many of the other Project activities, e.g. implementation of a number of restoration projects in NATURA 2000 sites; development of an information management system; and public monitoring programme.

50. The Mid-term Evaluation recommended a capacity assessment of the NVBRA be undertaken and this was subsequently done in June 2008 at three levels of the NVBRA, including self-assessment and expert assessment components. At the individual level, the staff complement, skills and competencies required to perform the activities identified in the NVBRA Strategic Action Plan were evaluated, while at the organizational and systemic levels capacities evaluated included that to conceptualise, formulate and implement policies, legislation, plans, strategies and programmes; to engage, and build consensus among all stakeholders; to mobilize information and knowledge; and to monitor, evaluate and learn. A designated UNDP-GEF Project Unit staff member was directly responsible for facilitating the capacity assessment process, with technical support provided by a contractor. The underlying principle guiding the assessment was that of self-assessment. The current systemic, institutional and individual capacities of the NVBRA were measured using a generic capacity development indicator scorecard that has been developed for protected areas by the UNDP-GEF (2003). This highlighted capacity constraints in a number of areas – i) involvement of the broader local public in the planning, management, monitoring and review of the NVBR; ii) human and financial resources; iii) strategic thinking and adaptive management; iv) implementation of local (nature protection) plans. As part of the capacity assessment process, the draft *Strategy of Action of the NVBR Administration: 2007-2012* was reviewed and updated in workshops, working sessions and meetings with NVBRA staff and other stakeholders. The overview of the capacity of the NVBRA to implement the Strategic Plan highlighted a different set of constraints, namely i) staff numbers and skills base; ii) dependency on, and coordination of, external donor funded projects; iii) integration with land use and sectoral planning; iv) communication and awareness; v) information management; vi) cooperative governance between institutions; vii) financial sustainability.

51. The Mid-term Evaluation also recommended a capacity analysis of the NVBRA's major implementation partners to supplement function analysis undertaken in 2005. This was undertaken in March-April 2008 of five partner institutions that agreed to participate – i) Nature Protection Board; ii) Valmiera Regional Environmental Board; iii) Latvian State Forest Service; iv) State Joint Stock Company "Latvia's State Forests"; and v) Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences. As a result, recommendations were developed to address the capacity development needs of the NVBRA and the partner institutions and to provide a framework for further capacity development and monitoring. The main recommendations included – i) ensure the NVBRA increases its financial sustainability in order to decrease its dependency on external donor funded projects; ii) staff number and skills sets remain insufficient to ensure the effective functioning of the NVBRA; iii) increase the awareness of institutions and the public about the NVBR goals and objectives; iv) improve the NVBRA strategic management of the Reserve; and v) amend enabling policy/legislation.

52. In terms of project implementation, this capacity assessment and strengthening process has been undertaken very well, though the FET remains somewhat unclear as to exactly what strengthening activities have been undertaken as a result of the capacity assessments recommended by the Mid-term

Evaluation. Also, the implementation of the NVBR development strategy still appears to be constrained by exactly those weaknesses mentioned in the capacity assessment.

Output 2.5: Implementation of a conflict mediation mechanism on a pilot basis

53. This Output caused the Project some difficulties since neither the NVBRA nor UNDP could actually explain what the designers had in mind here. This was in some ways exacerbated by the fact that there was a reluctance to admit that there would be any conflicts, let alone that the NVBRA could take on the role of mediator. However, the Project became creative and used a ground-up approach which became quite successful. Three major cases occurred where the Project served as conflict mediator over a dispute:

i) The first, in 2005, involved the Latvian BirdLife International Partner taking the JSC "Latvia State Forests" to court for not implementing the environmental impact assessment procedure over forest exploitation of a NATURA 2000 site within the NVBR. The Project got all sides around the table and got agreement for independent experts to undertake a survey for which GEF funding was used. A management plan specific for the site at dispute was drawn up which involved only limited cutting, and the court case was dropped.

ii) In the second case, a brown bear *Ursos arctos* was visiting remote houses within the NVBR. Valmiera Council contacted the NVBRA to manage the issue, but the NVBRA has no staff with the requisite training to re-locate bears. Eventually the Estonian authorities who have numerous such cases annually were contacted for help. The Project then set about developing a scheme of action to deal with bears in the NVBR and developed a multi-agency action plan involving the fire and rescue services, the JSC "Latvia State Forests" and the NVBRA. It also produced an information book for the northern municipalities on how to react to such cases and how to manage waste management to reduce the risk of such incidents.

iii) The third was already an initiative of the NVBRA involving a long-standing conflict between the sports anglers and the professional fishermen on Lake Burtnieki. The idea of a commercial fishing ban was postponed while the NVBRA commissioned a scientific study of fishing resources. Progress is being made even though the dispute remains, but both sides are still talking around the table – something that had not happened prior to the Project's intervention.

These three pilot-cases used highly adaptive methods of conflict mediation and successfully demonstrated the conflict mediation process for the NVBRA, thereby raising its capacity to provide such a role in the future – a role the FET believes it can now carry out for itself.

Output 2.6: Re-constitution of the NVBR Advisory Board ensuring effective representation of stakeholders

54. The NVBR Advisory Board was reconstituted in 2007 with revised functions and an increase in local stakeholder representation to 80% of members. It now comprises 17 members:

- one representative from each of: Limbaži District Council[11]; Valka District Council; Valmiera District Council; Vidzeme Development Agency; Nature Protection Agency; the State Nature Monument Protection Inspectorate; Latvia's branch of the UNESCO "Man and the Biosphere" Programme; Rīga Regional Development Agency; Northern Vidzeme Regional Agricultural Department;
- two representatives from each of: the State Forest Service; and the JSC "Latvia's State Forests"; and
- one representative from each of three societies or foundations, activities of which are associated with environmental protection or nature protection or environmental education.

The Board has two main functions, i) to facilitate participation of stakeholders in the planning and management of the NVBR; and ii) to promote the exchange of information between, and cooperation

[11] Note that this representation will have to change again as a result of completion of the local government reforms involving removal of Districts and the merging of Municipalities into larger Counties.

with, stakeholders in order to implement the objectives of the NVBR. The Board meets at least once a year to consult the NVBRA in the improvement of its performance; to participate in the enforcement of, and compliance with, regulations and plans of the NVBR; and to participate in addressing NVBR environmental protection and economic development issues.

55. In addition, in November 2005, the first NVBR NGO Forum was organised but unfortunately at that time there were very few NGOs involved with the NVBR and only 14 participated along with ten municipalities and one State institution[12]. The forum lasted two days and mainly shared information about the Project. One of results from this forum was information acquired on possible models for the Advisory Board and its possible impact on the operation of NVBR. These results were fed into the NVBR Consultative Board Concept which was prepared in December 2005. Since the first Forum was very under-developed, the next forum was organised in a different way with active people from a variety of stakeholders as well as NGOs invited with the main aim being to build "social capital". Fifty-eight participants attended and had discussions on coastal construction works; the development of environmentally-friendly management; and other issues related to biodiversity. The second day involved excursions to see SGP projects, nature trails, and other Project activities.

Output 2.7: Establishing of EcoWatch programmes

56. In 2005, as part of the design of the overall monitoring system for the NVBR, an enquiry was organised to determine the biodiversity and environment components (species, clean water, landscape) valued by the local population and for which people feel responsible. More than ten potential subjects were identified with 317 responses from individuals and/or interest groups within the NVBR territory. To maintain public interest until launching the first survey season in 2006, an inventory survey of five components was organised in 2005 which produced valuable information, e.g. the distribution of giant hogweed in the NVBR area (see Output 7.5; paragraph 85).

57. In 2006 the public monitoring programme called EcoWatch was launched in the NVBR with the twin aims of increasing public involvement in environmental and nature protection and in the long-run providing monitoring data to help interpret environmental trends within the territory. Scientists developed protocols to use simple recording methodologies and the Project created a support group by identifying one person in each of the 44 municipalities within the NVBR to act as coordinators for their municipality. Introductory seminars were held for all municipalities and school librarians and a publicity poster entitled "*Let's do it together*" was published and distributed to all the schools and libraries in the NVBR. A two-part handbook of public monitoring was prepared, the first outlining the theory, describing each species, and specific conditions relating to monitoring (place, time, instruments needed, methodology, work safety); and the second part containing simple, easy-to-complete, protocols to be used while carrying out monitoring. A total of 67 practical and theoretical seminars on public monitoring were held over a three-year period for over 700 participants.

58. The public monitoring system works by involving local residents, schoolchildren and teachers in collecting data on a voluntary but regular basis on 19 indicators which potentially provide information on the state of the environment in that area (see Annex VI for complete list). The involvement of local people brings many benefits – foremost it is a way of collecting data which can be used for making environmental or development management decisions; however additional benefits include the establishment of partnerships between different stakeholder groups, sectors and jurisdictions which brings meaningful collaboration between citizens and the local governing bodies,

[12] UNDP comment: "*I fully agree, however, at that time I recall there was an extensive discussion on what exactly is an NGO and whether community interest groups can/do fulfil this role or not. At the time, the Community and PR working group leader, in preparing invitations to the 1st NGO forum took the classical approach of a registered NGO with concrete principles/tasks in its statutes related to the environment, sustainability. Over time, I believe that we were all more open to accepting that the rural areas do not perhaps need NGOs per se to fulfil the functions of a typical NGO. This role was (and becomes even more increasingly) filled by community groups of teachers', women's clubs and other active groups in the small towns and rural areas. This more open view towards potential partners made it possible to reach the degree of community involvement in environmental and sustainability issues that I believe was achieved across the communities by the end of the project*."

increases citizens' knowledge about their environment, and builds the social and intellectual capital of the participating communities. The involvement of scientists and researchers has also been important in some cases to counter scepticism about such public monitoring and the ability of the general public to collect valid and meaningful data. Engaging the scientists from the outset has allowed them to participate in the selection of the data which they feel could be managed by such a public initiative. Monitoring has been highly successful with 408 people participating and 837 protocols received. Most of the protocols received have related to white stork (*Ciconia ciconia*) and the hermit beetle (*Osmoderma eremite*). The programme continues to gather interest from the local population and the number of people involved is increasing. The Latvian Nature Foundation and Latvian Ornithological Society are expanding the operation of the programme[13] to cover the whole of Latvia using an internet portal to record data[14] (www.dabasdati.lv).

Output 2.8: Management guidelines for buffer zones and transitional areas, their consistence with municipal plans

59. An analysis of the legislative gaps regarding the regulations for biodiversity protection outside protected areas was undertaken in 2006. This information was used in the preparation of the LEP which itself analysed and provided guidelines for the management and use of areas outside of the protected areas (including buffer zones).

Outcome 3: Reforms in existing policies

Output 3.1: Analysis of the existing policy guiding resource use in NVBR: gaps and opportunities

60. This activity does not appear to have been carried out according to the aims of the Inception Report which states:

> "*3.1.1. Perform analysis of existing legislation determining natural resource use. Identify existing gaps and/or opportunities that would stimulate sustainable development. Identify any potential policy differences with respect to state (municipality) owned lands and private owned lands. The analysis could be based on 2 legal reports prepared in the project preparation phase of this project but substantial update of the current situation, considering all newest legal acts and acts in preparation, is required. The reports should be reviewed also in light of ongoing changes in institutional structure within MoE system. This activity should be done in parallel with activity 3.2.1.*"

What analysis of existing policy that was carried out was done on an *ad hoc* basis, e.g. in order to introduce demonstration projects (Output 5.2, see paragraph 77), policy was analysed on controlled burning and pine-cutting. Following the recommendation made in the Mid-term Evaluation, a new activity was added this Output, and a Sustainable Development Profile was completed by Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences in March 2008. As part of this, a survey of local residents was carried to identify the local residents' understanding of sustainable development. Using the existing NVBR monitoring programme, 20 indicators were recommended for the description of the current situation and for the future development of NVBR sustainable development profile. These indicators were divided into four thematic groups; environmental, social, economic and institutional. The report outlines three scenarios for sustainability and recommend that the NVBRA Operational Strategy for 2007 – 2012 adopt a strong sustainability scenario. The decision on the most relevant scenario for the NVBR sustainable development profile is to be taken by the NVBRA in cooperation with its partners.

[13] UNDP comment: "*Not sure this can be considered expanding the programme, as the principles of dabasdati is to record "sightings" and the PMP is trying to establish annual collection and systematic for analysis*."

[14] PMU comment: "*This is expanding of programme's reach from NVBR to whole country as well as provide easier access and submission of recordings to those who have internet at home*."

Output 3.2: Analysis of requirements in legislation to ensure biodiversity-friendly resource use

61. Between March and November 2005, while developing guidelines for the demonstration projects in Output 5.2, the experts of the working group "*Community Involvement and Alternative Economic Development*" collected and analysed experience of existing demonstration projects. The team, comprising four biologists, a lawyer, and experts from the State Forestry Service, MOE and NVBRA analysed the legislation to determine what types of habitat management are legitimate within different parts of the NVBR with a view to developing a list of potential ideas for demonstration projects. A total of 74 important habitats were identified whose conservation was dependent upon human activities/management.

Output 3.3: Identification of potential incentives and regulations to induce economically and ecologically sustainable development

62. The existing policy analysis (Output 3.1) and the biodiversity-friendly resource use analysis (Output 3.2) were synthesised to identify potential incentives and recommendations on possibilities to facilitate biodiversity protection by changes in legislation. No legislative changes were recommended. The incentives were demonstrated through the demonstration projects in Output 5.2.

Output 3.4: Development of potential incentive and compensation mechanisms to promote sustainable land-use

63. Meetings with the MOE were held within the process for Output 3.2 to identify if any changes to, or additional, legislation was needed. No specific changes in legislation were identified as being necessary. A more detailed analysis of legislation was made within the ecological landscape planning process (see Outcome 4). Potential incentive mechanisms to promote sustainable land-use were integral to the demonstration projects in Output 5.2 (see paragraph 77).

Outcome 4: Ecological landscape planning

Output 4.1: Analysis and inventory of NVBR area and specification of methodology

64. The analysis and inventory of the NVBR territory in relation to developing a Landscape Ecological Plan (PEP) and the specification of TOR was undertaken in October 2005 by an international consultant (Mr Fernando Potess). The goal of this planning exercise was to define a set of prescriptions and initiatives required for integrating biodiversity conservation into the planning, management, and sustainable use of the NVBR. Although the Output was carried out successfully, the TOR required reviewing when development of the LEP started because of local issues not foreseen by the international consultant.

Output 4.2: Identification and determination of significant areas and development of optimal landscape structure

65. Between 2005 and 2007, and in cooperation with the Latvian Nature Foundation, four Nature Protection Plans were developed – Rūja floodland, Vidusburtnieks area, Burga, and Burtnieki meadows. The Project also funded the development of Nature Protection Plans for Lakes Dziļezers and Riebezers by the Latvian Ornithological Society. Unfortunately, despite this success, the NVBRA has little or no control over their implementation as the affected land is under the jurisdiction of individual landowners or other agencies/institutions. The NVBRA lacks the capacity and resources to sustain the investments into, or ensure the continued maintenance, because of the lack of their legal mandate. In addition, the current national level policies do not provide incentives (e.g. tax benefits) for landowners and agencies to implement the Nature Protection Plans, and there is no State level system for auditing, monitoring or reviewing the implementation of the Nature Protection Plans.

Output 4.3: Elaboration of landscape ecological plan for the NVBR

66. The LEP was elaborated by a contractor Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian Environment Ltd. (ELLE) and completed in July 2007. This was the first time that an LEP had been developed for such a large territory in Latvia, although ELLE had already completed the first LEP in Latvia – that for

Razna National Park in 2003. It had intended originally to elaborate the one for the NVBR at the same scale of 1:10,000, however, the area of the NVBR proved too large to make this practical and the plan was elaborated at 1:50,000 – a decision which was later to cause problems (see paragraph 113). Work on the LEP was not straightforward and collaboration with the NVBRA staff proved a little difficult since those staff were already stretched and ELLE had tight deadlines, hence the NVBRA often came up with ideas too late in the process. Part of this was also undoubtedly down to differing levels of understanding, since as the NVBRA began to understand more, the more ideas they came up with, but often to late for ELLE to take full advantage of. In addition, the plan involved the top Latvian experts for many subjects (e.g. ornithology, landscape, biology), some of whom appear to have been very strong and opinionated personalities. While this was good for the plan's quality, it appears it was initially a little overwhelming and intimidating for the NVBRA staff to counter any views held by these experts until they themselves had gained more confidence about the plan. A number of problems presented themselves, key amongst which were i) ELLE's TOR specified the inclusion of certain types of information but a lot of time was wasted searching for much of this which proved unavailable; and ii) the level and quality of information available varied markedly across the NVBR territory, e.g. a lot of useful information was available on State-owned forests but was poor, too little, or missing for private-owned forests. However, there was very good interactions with JSC "Latvia State Forests" who showed great interest and lots of their ideas were taken on board. ELLE engaged the same biological experts as they had used in Razna National Park and their inputs were crucial. From an initially huge range of indicator species, a few key ones were selected.

67. The basic structure of the NVBR LEP, which looks to determine the key abiotic, biotic, and cultural values and how to conserve them over a timeframe of 25 years, comprises 42 landscape areas in NVBR territory divided into seven categories:

1. Biocentres of international importance (5 areas);
2. Corridors of international importance (5 areas);
3. Biocentre of national significance (1);
4. Inland waters' and wetlands' corridors of national significance (3);
5. Landscape zones with special requirements for environmental protection (7);
6. Landscape zones with high cultural, historical, and aesthetic value (13); and
7. Landscape zones without special requirements for environmental protection or land use (8).

For each of the 42 landscape areas, the following were described: i) development goal; ii) biodiversity characteristics; iii) structure of landscape and land-use; iv) aesthetic and cultural values; v) trends in landscape development and the factors affecting them; vi) current protection status on landscape and impact on its structure; vii) desirable landscape structure and elements; viii) landscape management necessary to achieve short- and long-term goals; and ix) proposals for changes in the NVBR.

Output 4.4: Public hearing on landscape ecological plan

68. During elaboration of the LEP, presentations were made at a large number of public events. However, the feedback was fairly poor[15], particularly since ELLE's expectations were much higher. It would seem that because ecological landscape planning is not yet legally binding in Latvia, it still has a low priority. Also, because there were so many events, "event fatigue" appeared to set in and attendance dropped away in later meetings.

69. Between October 2007 and June 2009, an expert was hired to implement the LEP. An implementation plan was developed and state administration authorities and local governments were contacted. Because the LEP did not achieve a legal status, public hearings into it were not required.

[15] UNDP comment: "*One of the main limiting factors, both for the administration and the public events, was that the concept of the ecological landscape plan, i.e. what it could serve to do and what it meant, was not fully understood. … The calls to the public hearings were formal and to my mind did not give enough understanding to the public on what the ecological landscape plan was, nor its purpose, so the low involvement from planners and municipalities was certainly affected by people not realising that this strange "ecological landscape plan" relates to them or their work/interests*."

However, municipalities' plans do, hence the Project prepared some of the explanatory parts of a number of local government territory plans. Meetings were held with representatives of the MOE, State Forest Service, Valmiera Regional Environmental Board, JSC "Latvia State Forests", and representatives of local governments to introduce the LEP and explain its concepts. Vidzeme and Rīga planning regions were sent full information on the LEP in electronic format, and the LEP was presented to those institutions with potential interest in spatial planning issues. A booklet "*Introduction of landscape ecological plan into local government territory planning*" was provided to local administrations as practical help to apply the LEP.

Output 4.5: Proposals for redefinition of NVBR zoning and development of land and water use guidelines

70. The NVBR was not re-zoned, since the work involved in drawing up legal agreements with all the relevant landowners was deemed too onerous. Instead, the zones of the LEP were considered to be in addition to, and to overlay, the existing legally defined zones of the NVBR. The LEP contains detailed management and utilisation requirements for its two most valuable zones, i.e. biocentres and corridors of international importance. In addition, areas suitable for wind power generation have been identified and legally defined (see Output 2.2; paragraph 47) which have taken into account the probable impact of turbines on bird migration and the landscape.

Output 4.6: Institutional matching to support NVBR management arrangements

71. The NVBRA was represented in the task group established and coordinated by the Ministry of Regional Development and Local Government to elaborate a framework for the national landscape policy, thereby enabling the basic issues of the NVBR LEP to be considered. Suggestions for the draft document "*Framework of the National Landscape Policy for years 2009–2015*" were developed and submitted.

72. The Project is working with the JSC "Latvia State Forests" on the implementation of the LEP in forests with high biodiversity values. Maps of these forest areas, whose management requires integration of the LEP, have been prepared and approved by the company. The two most important areas are at Augstroze and Seda, but the LEP has not been attempted to be integrated into the management of the core area at Skalu. At Augstroze, significant technical difficulties were experienced since the LEP is elaborated at a scale of 1:50,000 while forestry management compartment maps are drawn at 1:10,000. A long and complex period of engagement is now drawing towards a successful conclusion. However, work at Seda proved much more difficult no agreement has yet been possible – see paragraph 114 for further discussion.

Output 4.7: Guidelines to implement the NVBR management plan through district and municipality plans

73. In 2008, the *Methodology for the Integration of the LEP into Municipal Spatial Plans* was developed. When the spatial planning process begins in municipalities within the NVBR, planners are being informed about the LEP. During the Project's lifetime, only one municipality was developing its Spatial Plan from scratch, and a contract was signed between the Project and Aloja Municipality[16] for it to act as a pilot for the full integration of the LEP into this plan. In addition, the LEP has been integrated into recent amendments[17] of Valmiera's and Valka's District Plans and into Ērģeme and Ēvele Municipalities' Spatial Plans. At present, the LEP is considered only as a recommendable document and its introduction into various planning documents is regarded merely as good practice. The current legislative framework in Latvia does not hinder the introduction of the NVBR LEP but beyond a doubt, providing it with a legal basis and making it a requirement would facilitate its introduction and foster LEP development and introduction in other parts of the country.

[16] Prior to it expanding and becoming Aloja County during the local government reforms towards the end of the Project.

[17] In many cases, old and new municipalities or Counties are using existing plans with amendments because the financial crisis means there is no money for them to prepare new ones.

Output 4.8: Training and awareness rising of stakeholders on ecological planning issues

74. In April 2008, the LEP was presented to the MOE and separate meetings with officials were also held in May 2008. A high quality poster with a map and associated information on the different zones of the LEP has been produced and made available to any interested person or body. Information on the LEP was also shared during meetings of the task group established and coordinated by the Ministry of Regional Development and Local Government to elaborate a framework for the national landscape policy (see paragraph 71).

Outcome 5: Demonstration projects

Output 5.1: Establishment of micro-grant facility

75. The initial aim of the Small Grants Programme (SGP) was to facilitate economic activity that would conserve biological diversity while encouraging balanced economic development in the NVBR. Businessmen in spheres such as agriculture, forestry, hunting, fisheries, crafts, and tourism could apply for financing of up to a maximum of US$ 5,000 but had to match this with three times the amount in cash or in-kind contributions (i.e. 25% grant : 75% own contribution). The criteria for applicants were:

i) the business had to be officially registered in the State's Business register or under the State Revenue Service;

ii) the business had to be located within the borders of the NVBR;

iii) the business had to employ no more than 50 people;

iv) the project had to be implemented within a 12-month period;

v) the proposed activity had to maintain or increase biodiversity levels;

vi) the activity had to result in an increase in income[18];

vii) the activity had to maintain or increase employment (either seasonal or year-round) to counter emigration form the NVBR; and

viii) no application could be made by a member of the Project team, UNDP, or the NVBRA[19] or their relations.

Application forms were made available at a seminar, via the internet, e-mail or ordinary mail. Notes with examples for filling in the forms were provided and any further questions were answered by the Task Leader. Submissions had to be submitted by a deadline and all were registered. Each proposal submitted was evaluated technically by two people independently checking that all forms had been filled in properly with all annexes supplied. Any inconsistencies between these two evaluators meant a check by the Task Leader. All accepted submissions were then assessed within four weeks of receipt against 11 criteria by nine experts from the Project, UNDP, NVBRA, WWF-Latvia, the Tourist Information Centre, the Rural Conservation Office, a biologist from the Latvian Nature Foundation, and two persons from the Municipalities – a regional development expert and an economist. Any questions were relayed back to the proposer and back to all evaluators by the Task Leader. The evaluations resulted in points being given under the 11 criteria with a threshold of 250 points required. In addition, a successful applicant had to reach a minimum level against the two key criteria – biodiversity and new employment. Any submission making 250 points but not reaching the minimum level on these two required a ⅔ majority from three more different evaluators independently assessing against these two criteria only. The PSC made the final approval based on all evaluators comments and sometimes would approve but exclude payment for certain items. Although complex, the procedure between submission and a final decision never took longer than 10 weeks. Grant payments

[18] It is unclear to the FET whether this meant turnover or profit, or both.

[19] The NVBRA was inexplicably missed from the first tranche and one application was received which was referred to the UNDP-GEF RTA in Bratislava for a decision. The application was allowed to proceed, the grant made (but the project failed), and the mistake was rectified in the second and third tranches.

were always made direct to suppliers on receipt of invoices; never to the grantee. An added advantage of this was that the Project could claim back VAT.

76. Grants were let in three tranches, two in 2006 and one in 2007, during which 60 applications were received, 43 of which were approved, and 41 were implemented evenly across the NVBR – 18 in Limbazi District, 12 in Valmiera District, and 11 in Valka District; see Annex VII. Grantees had to submit a mid-term evaluation on their finances and a final self-evaluation after 12 months, irrespective of the length of the grant-aided activity. The entire SGP was evaluated independently by two evaluators hired by open tender. According to this, 95% of beneficiaries' activities have promoted biological diversity; 66% of the beneficiaries show positive economic growth; and more than half have employed additional people. Thus, although the target for positive economic growth was set at 75%, this Output is still evaluated as highly successful because the results have to take into account the deteriorating economic conditions prevalent at the end of the third tranche of grants in 2008, but the SGP has had additional benefits in raising local awareness and reaching people that otherwise would not have been reached. The SGP has huge replicability with neighbours copying ideas and some SGP activities acting as demonstrations even though there are no more grants available. The SGP has also facilitated the cooperation of businesses in the NVBR with several businessmen and farm owners establishing cooperation with representatives of other businesses in the region and widening the activities that were supported initially by the SGP. This tendency proves that entrepreneurial activity in the NVBR is becoming more active and that environmentally-friendly management methods are taking root. The success of the SGP, considering the small amounts of grant on offer and the 25:75% gearing has surprised many economic commentators.

The FET recommends that the Project/UNDP supports the NVBRA in repeating the Small Grants Programme by seeking funding from the EU (Leader Plus programme?) and other sources, using the success of this Project's SGP as evidence of its effectiveness.

Responsibility	***Task***	***Time frame***	***Deliverable***
UNDP/NPM	Review availability of funds from multilateral and bilateral sources to run another SGP.	By end of Oct. 2009.	List of available funding sources for SGPs
UNDP CO/ NVBRA	UNDP to advise and assist NVBRA with application(s) for further funding of another SGP.	As soon as feasible.	Funding obtained for new SGP
UNDP CO/ NVBRA	UNDP to guide NVBRA in establishing and implementing a new SGP.	When funding available.	Implementation of a new SGP

Output 5.2: Sustainable alternative livelihood options in forestry, fisheries, involvement in provision of tourism and recreation support services, and biodiversity-friendly agricultural activities are demonstrated through model projects at selected sites

77. Implementation of this output may not have been what the designers had in mind, but being innovative, the Project discarded typical projects such as bee-keeping and craft-making and instead concentrated on demonstrating alternative management methods of important habitats that could also provide additional income streams. The initial aim was to test innovation in the management of various habitats so that the best results could be introduced into future practice. The main target group was private landowners, so it was important to ensure that the demonstration projects provided visible and high-quality demonstrations of the advantages of the given economic activity; could be replicated in the NVBR and elsewhere in Latvia; and could be used for educational purposes. Initially, an expert working group assessed 74 values of nature (see Output 3.2), including all the habitats found in Latvia and referred to in the EU Habitats Directives but selected eight proposals for demonstration projects, of which seven were implemented[20]:

- cutting of second-layer and undergrowth trees in boreal forests;
- cutting of second-layer and undergrowth trees in boggy forests;
- cutting of pines in virgin high bogs;

[20] One idea of using fire as a management tool in forests was deemed not to be replicable – but it has been adopted by another project since.

- cutting of pine clusters on forested coastal dunes;
- mowing of grass and grazing of cattle for the maintenance and conservation of meadow biotopes;
- renovation of parks and alleys by preserving structures essential for biological diversity; and
- clearing of growth on the banks of brooks and lakes to improve their scenic value, thus creating opportunities to use these places for tourism and recreation.

Each demonstration had its own expert group tasked with establishing the specific selection and monitoring criteria applicable and subsequently in selecting its exact locality. Important considerations were that the selected landowner had to agree to continue the management for at least five years and to subsequently show interested groups around the demonstration site. Seminars were held on the results for private landowners, JSC "Latvia State Forests", and the Municipalities. Each of the demonstration projects has achieved its aims of demonstrating an innovative approach to habitat management, being replicable, and constituting a valuable lesson for other interested parties. However, while the assessment of the non-forest demonstrations may be readily apparent, the final assessment of the results of the forest demonstrations will probably not become apparent until at least five years time. The FET puts some store in the comment received that while the selection of the ideas for the demonstration projects was based on good science, more should have been made of what landowners wanted and the current issues managers face.

Outcome 6: Public awareness

Output 6.1: A Communications Strategy (including general and sector specific content and delivery mechanisms) is prepared and implemented

78. The Project's Communication Strategy was developed towards the start of the Project in 2005 Initially the idea was to develop this purely for the Project but this proved to be impossible since the Project and the NVBRA were too intertwined. Having undertaken a gap analysis and recognised that capacity was limited, a number of activities were distilled during seven revisions of the strategy made with the NVBRA and the PSC. Originally the Project had budgeted US$ 200,000 to hire a public relations company to undertake the work, but this was changed so that Project and NVBRA staff could carry it out thereby enabling greater daily input and greater sustainability. In keeping with the Strategy's development objective to increase the general public's and specific target audiences' awareness to support conservation of globally significant biodiversity in the NVBR, a set of sub-objectives were developed, a) to increase the level of available and adequate information for different target audiences; b) involve inhabitants in nature protection actions; c) spread information on the nature-friendly business practices; and d) support knowledge-based decision-making. To achieve these, the Strategy had three main components:

i) public relation support – wide publicity (press visits, press releases, press conferences, press kits) on habitat restoration activities in the Salaca River and Lake Burtnieks, on the manual for the control of invasive species, and similar Project activities;

ii) support to the environmental education and research activities – close cooperation with the EcoWatch programme, creation of an international scientific conference in cooperation with Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (held in 2006 and 2008 with one planned for 2010), and a multimedia "Nature Concert Hall" event held annually since 2006 in cooperation with leading national nature scientists, poets and musicians;

iii) enhancement of the NVBR identity through development and implementation of a strong visual identity. The development of a *Visual Identity Manual* for the Reserve was followed by demonstrations using nature trails at the Randu Meadows, Dauģēni, and Vīsrags. Implementation of the visual identity was expanded and this now takes place at the local level where there is a strong uptake of the NVBR "brand".

The initial Communications Strategy covered the period 2006-2009 while a second one covered the period 2009-2012 It is of particular note that the Project has supported the Strategy to run beyond its

own lifetime and commendably has integrated it to cover such things as the EU LIFE project and the NVBRA's communications with other State organisations.

Output 6.2: Training, including visits to other Biosphere Reserves, is provided for NVBR Administration and members of the NVBR Advisory Board

79. In 2007, the NVBR Education Strategy was developed which defined objectives, activities and indicators for the education of the NVBRA and other main target groups for the period 2007-2012. Annual training plan are developed according to the strategy and the available budget. This includes national and international experience exchange visits (e.g. river management and small grant scheme exchange to France in 2008), training classes (e.g. English, accounting, GIS software use), seminars and conferences (e.g. World Biosphere Reserves Congress held in Madrid in 2008). While this output has been successful during the Project's lifetime, some of the goals for training may not be achieved over the rest of the strategy's lifetime because of limited financial resources stemming from the global financial crisis.

Outcome 7: Habitat restoration

Output 7.1: Aquatic pollution is reduced through the preparation and implementation of a River Basin Management Plan for the Salaca River under the WFD

80. In July 2006, a River Basin Management Plan for the Salaca River was prepared by international contractors (Jacobs), funded by ISPA (an EU Pre-Accession Structural Instrument) under national activities carried out for the introduction of EU Water Framework Directive (WFD). Detailed information on the existing situation, sediment loads, and environmental quality in basin sites was elaborated and a development analysis for 2006-2015 was made. The Project provided data and information for the development of the Plan.

Output 7.2: The condition of Lake Burtnieki is improved through the removal of weeds and reduction of nutrient run off and siltation

81. Between 2006 to 2008, twice a season aquatic and marginal vegetation was removed from Lake Burtnieks with the use of special equipment and the help of local stakeholders to i) decrease the above-water vegetation; and ii) to demonstrate the removal process to local inhabitants who would continue the removal work after the end of the Project. On average 50 ha per year were cleared of weeds. In general, the response of local landowners and Lake Burtnieks' management institutions (municipalities) was positive – the landscape was uncovered, the quality of spawning places increased, and water circulation through the lake improved.

Output 7.3: Obstruction to migrating salmon in Salaca River at Staicele is removed

82. In summer 2006 drifted wood in the Salaca River was cleared from the vicinity of the Staicele Dam to facilitate the migration of fish upstream. Moves were also made in concert with the MOE to have the Staicele Dam demolished because it is assumed to be a barrier to migrating Atlantic salmon *Salmo trutta*. When this proved difficult, it was proposed to construct fish migration structures to facilitate migrating fish, but the structural integrity of the Dam was found to be suspect and this idea was abandoned. See paragraph 116 *et seq*. for a more detailed discussion.

Output 7.4: Salmon and lamprey spawning habitat is restored and improved at selected sites

83. In 2005, potential salmon habitat was inventoried in the Salaca River and mapped in order to select sites for habitat restoration. Seventy sites totalling 35 ha were selected and between 2006 and 2008 restoration activities were carried out in both the Salaca and Jaunupe Rivers, by involving local inhabitants and volunteers. Rivers were cleared of debris, clogging weeds, and the gravel bottom was raked to provide a favourable spawning ground. A repeat inventory of the rivers was made in 2008. The Output was particularly successful because it attracted local people to the practical conservation of biodiversity. NVBRA staff were invited to Sweden to present methodology.

Output 7.5: Exotic species control measures are implemented on a pilot basis and monitored for effectiveness

84. Since 2007, the NVBRA have participated in the licensed harvesting of the introduced signal crayfish (*Pacifastacus leniusculus*) in collaboration with the Latvian Fish Resources Agency, the Latvian Crayfish and Fish Farmers Association, and three municipalities – Salacgrīva, Ainazi, and Staicele. This species carries a fungal disease (*Aphanomyces astaci*) commonly known as the crayfish plague, to which it is immune, which results in the death of the native crayfish *Astacus* spp. The project has been attempting to involve local landowners within the harvesting scheme by disseminating information and organising licensed harvesting of signal crayfish in the Salaca River and other places, as well as providing legal support to stakeholders. Annual monitoring by the Latvian Fish Resources Agency showed that in 2007 and 2008 there were more than 16,000 signal crayfish were harvested, and in 2008 native noble crayfish (*Astacus astacus*) and narrow-clawed crayfish (*Astacus leptodactilus*) were again found during the harvesting and were returned unharmed to the rivers.

85. In May 2007, the Project organised a seminar in cooperation with the State Plant Protection Service to provide information on the current situation in Latvia of the alien invasive giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) and the National Programme on Removal of Hogweed. The seminar was targeted at EcoWatch participants and regional stakeholders (farmers, State Forest Service, Rural Support Service, MOE, and others). The results of the public monitoring on the extent and location of sites of giant hogweed in the NVBR were provided by the Project.

Output 7.6: Biodiversity values of meadows are restored and maintained through demonstration projects in meadow management using a combination of mowing and grazing, with links to associated local economic benefits

86. Activities under this output were implemented by the Latvian Fund for Nature under a cooperation agreement made in December 2004 and linked to the EU LIFE-Nature Project *Restoration of Latvian Floodplains for EU Priority Species and Habitats* and directed at the restoration of floodplains in five sites within the NVBRA: i) Vidusburtnieks meadows; ii) Burga meadows; iii) Meadows of Seda river; iv) Ruja flooplains; and v) Burtnieki meadows. Between 15th December 2004 and 30th June 2008, 622.85 ha[21] of floodplain areas, including habitats of EU importance, were restored and managed. These included northern boreal alluvial meadows, Fenno-scandinavian wooded meadows, and Fenno-scandinavian lowland species rich grasslands. Contracts were signed with 40 landowners who were paid to restore their grasslands under guidance from the Project thereby ensuring the ownership of the results and encouraging future management of the restored floodplains. Farmers have been encouraged and supported in applying for EU Agri-environmental support to ensure further maintenance of restored areas. Information boards have been provided at some sites; booklets have been produced on various aspects of management and meadow wildlife; and a handbook on meadow management has been produced using 12 cases studies from the NVBRA and other restoration sites in Latvia. This activity has also had an important role in changing the attitude of the general public from looking at the protected floodplain as a piece of useless land with lots of restrictions, to seeing it as a rich natural area with economic value accessible through EU direct subsidies.

Outcome 8: Expanding knowledge

Output 8.1: Based on baseline data, indicators and the project's monitoring plan, identification of specific learning objectives for the project to be analysed and adjusted on a twice-yearly basis

87. This Output is closely linked to the internal and impact monitoring activities described in paragraphs 28-29. Over 168 Project reports have been produced and many of these have been used to

[21] These hectares are cumulative hectares, including overlapping restoration methods.

provide feedback and enable adjustments to be made to the Project. The Mid-term Evaluation provided recommendations that were acted upon. A Sustainability Development Profile with indicators for the NVBR was made in 2008 and updated in 2009.

Output 8.2: Lessons and best practices to be identified on a yearly basis as a part of the Tripartite Review process, and discussed, codified and compiled

88. Tripartite Reviews were not undertaken, instead this output was carried out under 8.3.

Output 8.3: Codified lessons and best practices to be reviewed by the Project Steering Committee for use as material for potential training, policy analysis and programme development

89. Lessons learned and best practices were reviewed on regular basis during the meetings of PSC. In July 2009, all stakeholders were invited to a Project Closing Event at which lessons learned were presented.

Output 8.4: Dissemination plan developed and implemented to ensure widest audience for best practices and lessons learned

90. There is no indication that a specific dissemination plan was developed. However, in 2006 and 2008 conferences for Latvian and international scientists were organised in cooperation with Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences and the proceedings were printed and disseminated both locally and internationally. The ideas of the EcoWatch programme has been adopted by the Latvian Nature Fund and a simplified version was being launched across the whole country through the internet (www.dabasdati.lv) at the time of the FET mission in August 2009. Also at the time of the FET mission, a handbook entitled *Planning and Management of Biosphere Reserves: Manual and Reference Book for Practitioners and Managers* was being prepared by the NVBRA in cooperation with UNESCO and the Project including complete overview of lessons learned and case studies from the Project. A high quality final draft was made available to the FET. UNDP and the Project are carrying out a capacity assessment of all staff of the Nature Protection Agency (see paragraph 93 iii) using the same methodology used by the Project to undertake a similar assessment of the NVBRA staff (see paragraph 50). Finally, a mission is being prepared by the MOE in cooperation with the NVBRA to go to Georgia and Azerbaijan in September-October 2009. UNDP representatives have been invited to share experience mainly on communications issues (e.g. Nature Concert Hall), the Small Grant Programme, and the public monitoring scheme (EcoWatch).

KEY ISSUES

91. As can be seen from the foregoing part of the evaluation, the FET believes that this Project has been outstanding, achieving or exceeding its stated aims and fully represents an example of best practice. The aim of this section is to concentrate on key, and often cross-cutting, issues that still affect the Project in its closing stages, and over which action may still be possible in some cases. The difficulty for the FET in trying to write this report is that there are very few key issues to report on!

THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Institutional Reforms

92. The global financial crisis has forced the Governments of many countries to adopt reforms and spending cuts, and the Government of Latvia is no exception. Along with cuts in projected expenditure, the factor most affecting the Project as it draws to a close is the reform of the environmental protection sector, and primarily the re-organisation of the Natural Protection Agency under which the NVBRA operates. This reorganisation was active at the time of the FET field mission so its results were not apparent to the team. However, a number of issues can be raised:

i) The NPA is looking to centralise rather than decentralise many of its functions in order to cut costs. This potentially has a number of ramifications detrimental to the NVBRA, chief of which

is a general loss of capacity since activities such as strategic planning and management planning are likely to be done centrally with the regions simply being involved in their implementation. With this will come the requirement for information management to be similarly centralised because the regions will not need it since they will be removed from the decision-making process.

ii) The goals and objectives of a Biosphere Reserve are very different from that of a more traditional protected area with a much greater focus on socio-economic development in harmony with biodiversity conservation. Also, most of Latvia's protected areas are on State-owned land governed by detailed regulations and much of the management role carries a policing functional element. However, the management of the NVBR has to be much more society-oriented not least because its management requires the agreement of a whole swathe of different landowners. As a result, the management requirements of the NVBR are markedly different from that of conventional protected areas, as is the ethos of the management team. With centralisation of functions comes a real risk that these differences will be lost, especially so when the tradition of conventional protected areas is very strong in Latvia, the leadership of the NPA is drawn from such a background, and the Biosphere Reserve is greatly out-numbered by such areas.

iii) Staff are being asked to do much more. Firstly, there is a new demarcation being introduced throughout the NPA between "experts" and "rangers". While at the time of reporting it was unclear exactly how these functions would differ or be assigned, it was apparent that the "ranger" function included more time in the field, nominally with a greater enforcement role. Also, the management teams of all protected areas with such teams are being required to take on the management function for the unmanaged protected areas within a wider geographic area. In the case of the NVBRA, they are now to be responsible for all protected areas along the entire border with Estonia and for all transboundary management functions with that country. Two issues result: a) that there will be an increasing loss of identity between the NVBRA and the NVBR itself as its staff are forced to attend to a larger area thereby spending less time on the issues pertaining to the Biosphere Reserve; and b) that there is a real risk that long-term staff may leave because of the extra work or because there work is no longer centred of the NVBR[22]. If this were to happen, much local knowledge will be lost and with it much of the public credibility to manage the NVBR since local people like to deal in specifics and tend to cease to relate closely to people who lack this ability.

93. So that is the downside. Reasons to be cheerful are multiple.

i) When interviewed, the Chairman of the NPA indicated that although the NVBRA could not take on additional costs at present, the existing quota of eleven staff would not be cut in the foreseeable future, although they would have to cover the management of additional land. The possibility of adding new staff to help cover the transboundary issues would be reviewed.

ii) The Chairman of the NPA displayed an encouraging appreciation and understanding of the negative issues outlined in the previous paragraph but instead of seeing them as the costs associated with reform, he viewed them as opportunities, and specifically as opportunities to integrate and replicate the Project gains within the wider system. For example,

   a) Many of Latvia's protected areas need to have greater engagement with the public and to simplify their detailed regulatory approach, and the NVBRA and the Project have the necessary experience in society-focussed management to benefit those areas.

[22] The incentive for many people working in protected area management is their closeness to the wildlife of a particular locality and the body of local knowledge that they can acquire through their own "research". They are often willing to accept low pay and difficult working conditions because they have enough "spare" time to do that research while working. If that incentive is taken away, because of changes in working practices, a reduction in time to do research, or a requirement to move away from their local area, then some may reconsider their options.

b) The new "rangers" need not only to undertake an enforcement role but will be required to provide an educational and awareness-raising function which is largely new to most. Again, the experience of the NVBRA will be crucial.

c) Similarly, the Project produced very good results with human resource capacities, unusual for the MOE which is mainly concerned with finance, equipment and transport issues, and the experiences could be replicated.

d) The database and information management needs of the NPA are set to increase since previously it had a staff of 12 who had only a coordination function in the management of some 10% of the 300+ protected areas in the country and now it is set to have a staff of 134 with a central management role in all of them. Again the model developed by the Project will be used as the basis and adapted as necessary.

iii) The Project and the UNDP CO are fully abreast of all of these issues and have established a strong working relationship with the NPA. Some of the Project's remaining resources as well as some from UNDP are being used to extend the NPM's time, and pay for the Head of the UNDP CO, to work with the NPA to integrate many of the Project's gains into the wider remit of the NPA thereby ensuring their sustainability within the NVBRA and replicating them more widely. Again at the time of reporting, UNDP were undertaking a capacity assessment of the newly reformed NPA units throughout the whole of Latvia, using the methodology used by the Project, to identify how needs can best be met. A decentralised centre of excellence concept is being promoted whereby those management teams with particular strengths and/or experience can be used *in situ* to provide a centralised function to the entire NPA or to provide advice or training to achieve such an end.

The FET is aware that risks to the Project gains remain, but none of these are of their own making. Furthermore, the Project and UNDP appear to be doing all they can to influence the reform process to safeguard and even replicate the gains achieved, for which they are to be congratulated. For further discussion, see the section on Sustainability (paragraphs 101 *et seq.*)

Implementing Agency as Chief Beneficiary

94. One of the more unusual aspects of the Project's design was the fact that the NVBRA was appointed as the Project's implementing agency as well as being the Project's chief beneficiary – clearly the possibilities for a conflict of interest loom large. However, the FET is pleased to be able to report that no such conflicts appear to have arisen during the Project, a testament to the integrity of the NVBRA's leadership and to the oversight of the PSC. By and large, having the chief beneficiary as the implementing agency has worked extremely well with staff being very highly motivated, wanting to be involved and achieve good things. It is apparent that this motivation is one of the key factors in making many of the Project's activities a success.

95. What is interesting to note is that difficulties did arise from a more unexpected quarter, notably a clash in management styles between the NPD and the first NPM. The NPD became Director of the NVBRA after the Project had been designed, and it appears the idea of the Project was not necessarily good in his eyes. The NPD has had no formal environmental education having come from a tourism background and is reported to have a very formal management style; vertically structured and wary of taking risks which caused some conflict with the innovation and creativity which has been key to the Project. Given that the two teams (Project staff and NVBRA staff) were co-located in the same office, there was some conflict over who controlled the Project staff – the NPD or the NPM. It appears that there was also some difficulties over the deployment of resources and time with NVBRA staff often asking Project staff to assist with non-Project work but work which nonetheless could be construed as sharing experience. The issues here are not raised as criticism of the NPD, but merely noted so that if this type of implementation arrangement is repeated in a future project, it may be better to appoint the NPD from an organisation separate from the implementing agency, e.g. in this case the NPA or even the MOE.

Communication Strategy

96. The Project's Communication Strategy represents a triumph. So often in GEF projects, communications are relegated to a low priority issue, start late, and/or fail to understand the power they have to mobilise public opinion behind many of the Project's activities. In this Project, not only did the Project hire a Communications Specialist from near the outset, it also changed the initial strategy stated in the Project Document of hiring a public relations consultancy to one of bringing the responsibility for communications inside the Project, thereby making it much more cost-efficient, more responsive to the Project's needs, and more sustainable. The communications team recognised from the outset the challenges inherent in the Project – that it was a risky project with many innovative ideas; that it was covering a very large area, some 6% of the country; and that the position of the Biosphere Reserve was unclear to most of the public with initial awareness levels running at only about 30% of respondents. Furthermore, the team also recognised that trying to develop a strategy for the Project which was in someway separate from the NVBRA was pointless and hence combined the two, but then went further in developing the strategy to cover the period beyond the Project's lifetime and linking it to other existing projects, e.g. EU LIFE.

97. For the FET, two issues are particularly noteworthy. The first is the development of the NVBR brand. The development of a Visual Identity Manual setting out how and when to use the NVBR logo, and what colours to print leaflets and other materials in, is actually pretty boring stuff, but it is vital in developing the identity of the Reserve and, crucially, in getting local people to a) recognise, and b) identify with it. The importance of this cannot be over-stated – getting local people to identify with the Reserve, understand its values, and take a sense of pride in the area in which they live because it has something special to offer, is at the centre of gaining the respect of local communities and local stakeholders and landowners on whose goodwill much of a project's success may lie. This approach lies at the core of successful conservation actions by the NGO RARE's Pride campaigns – see www.rareconservation.org and to see the some of the same ideas implemented independently here is heartening. The second issue is that concerning awareness-raising – see next paragraph.

Awareness-raising

98. If the Project's communication strategy was a triumph, the awareness-raising component and its activities are nothing short of a revelation. Gone are the tired, old staples of producing calendars (which have little impact and last only for a year) and glossy posters (which tend to be found only on the walls of offices of organisations whose awareness of the issues is already very high) and matchboxes or similar trinkets (whose value is at best dubious and which seem to be produced solely to show some form of activity). Instead, this Project has produced annual multimedia "Nature Concert Hall"[23] events which have caught the public's imagination and reached a national audience; a public monitoring programme which currently involves 400 local people collecting scientific data on subjects that interest them from their local area which they know will help with management decisions that will help conserve the very thing that they value; a series of nature trails with observation towers and informative signs whose impact will last long beyond the Project; a small grants programme to help small local businesses but whose effects through demonstrations of "how to" are spreading by word of mouth; demonstrations of different land management techniques and restoration projects that raise awareness and interest for land managers; and international scientific conferences organised with the help of national academics thereby raising the profile of the NVBR and its values within the national and international scientific communities.

99. The FET is delighted to learn that many of these ideas are already being replicated both nationally and internationally. The public monitoring programme has been used as a basis for four other schemes at other protected areas within Latvia – Kemeri National Park, Gauja National Park,

[23] Nature Concert Halls are award-winning, open-air, multi-media events that combine scientific educational materials (panels, leaflets, scientists describing species and habitats and their interactions as well as answering questions), art, live music played by nationally-respected musicians, poetry and light shows to generate an educational and emotive response in the audience. Each Concert has a theme and a "hero" (a central character), e.g. birds and the Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus colybita*); or woodlands and lichens.

Nature Society Kruzes (Vidzeme region), Zemgale Nature Management Authority – and the Director of the MOE's Nature Protection Department called the programme "excellent" and would look to replicate it further once money and staff became available. The concept of Nature Concert Halls has been replicated successfully internationally in Maramures National Park, Romania, and is understood to be being considered in UNDP-GEF projects in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, while a consortium of visitors from the Sept Vallees College, the Artois Picardie Agency, and the Canche Water Agency in France made a visit to Latvia to learn more about the EcoWatch programme. Elements of the EcoWatch programme have also been incorporated into the GEF *Conservation of Globally Significant Biodiversity in the Landscape of Bulgaria's Rhodope Mountains Project.*

THE PLANNING CONTEXT

Project Oversight

100. Oversight of the Project by the Project Steering Committee has been exemplary. The PSC has had wide representation of all major stakeholders, has met regularly throughout the five years and, according to the unanimous agreement of the PSC members interviewed and the Project staff, operated effectively and efficiently in dealing with the issues placed before it. As stated in paragraph 16, as if to prove innovation was not confined to the project management team, rather than take the NPD as the Chairman of the PSC, its members elected the Chairman from amongst themselves at its first meeting – although no reason for this was ascertained by the FET. Nonetheless, it proved successful. The only improvement that could have, and should have, been made was to have included a much higher ranking official from the Project's executing agency (the MOE) or from the controlling organisation of the NVBRA, namely the Nature Protection Agency. A State Secretary, the Director of the Nature Protection Department, or the Chairman of the NPA on the PSC would have undoubtedly helped to resolve, or at least guide the Project more assuredly, in those cases requiring political understanding or influence, namely implementation of the LEP particularly at Seda and the stalemate over the Staicele Dam (see paragraphs 113 *et seq*. and 116 *et seq*. respectively). It should have been recognised at an early stage that junior members of the Nature Protection Department from the MOE could not offer the political leverage that any project requires at some point during its lifetime.

Sustainability

101. The biggest problem for the FET in evaluating this Project has been in evaluating its sustainability. How should the FET evaluate a project that has prioritised the sustainability of its interventions throughout only to find that the global financial crisis (which has hit Latvia particularly hard) has come out of the blue and with such rapidity as to potentially undermine much of that work? Should the FET rate the Project on its efforts to ensure sustainability of its interventions, or on the likelihood of them being sustained in actuality? The FET favoured the former, believing that the rapidity of the onset of the financial crisis and the depth of the ensuing recession effectively rendered it, in the words of one interviewee, as a *force majeure*. This, the FET believes, is the key point – the speed and effects of the crisis were not foreseen by anyone, save a few investment gurus, and hence the issue was never picked up as a risk, so no management response could be derived to mitigate the risk. The FET discussed these issues with the UNDP-GEF RTA in Bratislava and found common ground throughout. For this reason, and based on the evidence presented below, the sustainability of the Project is evaluated as **Highly Satisfactory**.

Institutional Sustainability

102. The institutional sustainability of the Project appears strong despite, or perhaps because of, the current reforms being implemented by the Government of Latvia. The main beneficiary of the Project has been the NVBRA, and undoubtedly this institution has been strengthened – it is more visible, it has new tools and equipment with which to manage the NVBR effectively, and the number of its staff and their capacity to fulfil their remit have been increased, although certain weaknesses may remain (see next paragraph). While the current reforms of the NPA may be seen as threatening the sustainability of the Project's gains, rooted as they are in the requirement for increased efficiency,

reduced costs, and economies of scale, they do in fact offer clear opportunities to embed the Project's interventions more widely in the protected area system of the country (see paragraph 93). Importantly, the Project and UNDP have jointly recognised these opportunities and are working with the NPA to try and embed many of the projects gains, e.g. the management information system, an expertise in ecological landscape planning, habitat restoration methodologies, within the new institutional structure. The FET also understands that decisions taken during workshops concurrent with the FE mission guaranteed that the NPA would make no cuts in the current number of NVBRA staff, even if the NVBRA staff will now be required to cover management of other protected areas outside of the NVBR itself. The NPA also appears to be open to the Project/UNDP's inputs to influence the current reforms, e.g. UNDP undertaking a capacity assessment of all protected area staff in the country, which bodes well in terms of the institutional sustainability. UNDP and the NPM intimated that it would be helpful if the FET could come up with recommendations for ensuring the sustainability of the Project. The FET cannot, since it deems the current actions of the Project and UNDP in working beyond the norm and the Project's lifetime to be exemplary and, while it may appear weak, simply recommends that they continue with the current course of action. If the current course of action is exactly the right one, why change it?

The FET recommends that the Project/UNDP continues to engage with the NPA to attempt to embed the Project's gains into the new institutional framework resulting from the current reforms.			
Responsibility	***Task***	***Time frame***	***Deliverable***
UNDP/NPM	Maintain close collaboration with the NPA and undertake actions as necessary and that can be agreed with the NPA to optimise Project gains in a national context.	For as long as funds are available	Institutional reforms

103. One of the few areas of weakness apparent to the FET at the end of the Project is that the capacity of the NVBRA staff may still not be as high as it could, or should, be, despite the indicators almost reaching target levels. A number of sources indicated some concerns, chiefly that there remains an inadequacy with regard to staff's use of the information management system; that nurturing has left a slight degree of dependency on outside support; and that there is a slight uncertainty over staff's willingness (or freedom) to continue to operate as effectively once the Project ends. Certainly staff have not yet realised the potential of the information management system (see paragraph 40), something that those responsible for need to address, but concern was also expressed over whether the NVBRA staff could organise activities such as the Nature Concert Halls, the EcoWatch programme, or update the Landscape Ecological Plan on their own. Also, the communications functions, part of the Project that was particularly successful, may with the Project's ending become hamstrung by lack of staff, since it requires the skills of designers and artists and only the manager remains. With the financial cutbacks, it is unlikely that funds will be available to out-source these skills. Finally, there seems to remain a strong culture of vertical management in an institution that requires a much more horizontal touch, particularly for staff dealing with stakeholders. This undoubtedly comes from the Director of the NVBRA himself, and while the Project has managed to work around this difficulty, Project staff remain unsure as to how things will develop in their absence.

104. At the local level, the Project has worked hard with a number of stakeholder institutions.

i) Local governments – the District and Municipality Councils – have been seen as intimate partners to many of the processes. Perhaps the most important of these was the Landscape Ecological Plan which has been integrated into the District Spatial Plans and four of the Municipalities' Spatial Plans. While reform of local government (a process that commenced well before the current financial crisis which has provoked many other government reforms) means that the District Councils and their plans are no longer, and the 41 Municipalities covering the NVBR have been merged to become ten Counties, some of the losses are more than offset by the gains. Fewer Councils, each covering a larger territory, means that full implementation of the LEP will be quicker and easier to achieve, and although the work done with Districts may have been lost, the Counties now have to adopt their own Spatial Plans. Representatives of those Counties interviewed by the FET indicated that they would adopt

current plans from their old constituent parts and merge them to form a new Plan. This would also involve bringing older Plans from some areas into line with newer Plans for other areas to provide consistency of approach throughout – and as part of this process, clearly the LEP will become integrated into updated Plans and cover a greater land area as a result.

ii) Educational institutes and libraries – all librarians and schools within the NVBR were included in an information campaign to raise awareness about the new Information Management System and to ensure its widespread introduction at the local level. This appears to have been successful and facilities are still operating. The FET checked one library at random – that of the Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences in Valmiera – and were directed immediately to a librarian responsible for assistance with the system.

Financial Sustainability

105. This is the crux of everything. The long-term financial sustainability of the Project's interventions and of the NVBRA is almost certainly assured, even if perhaps not at the levels originally targeted in the Project's indicators (see indicator #10, Annex IV). The Government continues to show commitment to nature conservation to meet it's international, particularly European, obligations and the NVBR falls within these. The hugely increased public awareness of the NVBR and increasing identity of it, both significant Project successes, mean also that there is increased public demand to maintain adequate financing of its Administration. However, the short-term muddies all and combines potentially serious short-falls in funding for an indeterminate period with significant influence over how the NVBR is managed in the long-term through the current reforms precipitated by the global financial crisis. Previously, the NVBRA had an independent budget supplied through the MOE, but from hereon funding will come from the centralised budget of the NPA. While, as indicated above, current staffing rates of the NVBRA appear to be guaranteed, the EcoWatch public monitoring programme appears to be more under threat. The job of the scheme's organiser was largely paid for by Project funding, and although an application for continued funding for the post has been made through the Government's Latvian Environmental Protection Fund, this seems at best to still be uncertain and at worst to be unlikely. Non-governmental sources of finance may have to be sought to keep this extremely successful and popular activity running. The other headline success of the Project, the Nature Concert Halls, would appear already to break-even or possibly be profitable. It remains to be seen who will take over the organisation of these events, but if it is the NVBRA, this may provide a small alternative source of finance[24] (see paragraph 110).

Social Sustainability

106. The social sustainability of the Project's achievements appear excellent. Key to this has been the combination of high profile activities such as the nature concert halls and public monitoring programme, and the lower profile but equally important work on branding the NVBR and getting local people to identify with the Reserve's values. There is clear evidence that the promotion of the NVBR brand has found a resonance amongst some local people who now see themselves as being part of a special place, e.g. the number of applications to use the NVBR logo on local people's or group's promotional materials have grown significantly; the number of respondents being aware and understanding the concept of the NVBR has risen from 30% to 80%, and the support by the general public on NVBRA activities for biodiversity conservation had risen to 86% of respondents by 2008 (see indicator #20 in Annex IV). The number of people attending the Nature Concert Hall events has risen year on year to the present level of about 2,000 per concert and provided they continue to be organised post-Project, they are already apparently financially sustainable. So to the public monitoring scheme, EcoWatch, which has had to stop adding new parameters suggested by the public for monitoring in order to concentrate on consolidating monitoring of the existing parameters. Although the funding for the organisation of the scheme is at risk, the public's commitment to participate is extremely strong.

[24] UNDP comment: "*One of the main principles is that this concert is for free and thus the concert can only go ahead through the generation of sponsors. Currently we do not foresee this event making any profit, financially in the next 2-3 years. It is true, though, that it breaks-even.*"

Economic Sustainability

107. The economic sustainability of the Project's interventions also looks unusually strong. These interventions are at three levels. At the first level, attempts have been made to integrate the Landscape Ecological Plan into the JSC "Latvia State Forests" 's operations in two areas – Augstroze and Seda (see paragraphs 113 *et seq*.). While these have yet to come to full fruition, the JSC "Latvia State Forests" has recognised that the approach is viable, if technically difficult, and may bring economic benefits through sustainable forests certification schemes such as that run by the Sustainable Forestry Initiative. There would also appear to be interest within the Company to extend the concept of landscape ecological plans to other areas but these would have to be developed in a different way and at different scales in order to be more practical to forestry needs. At the second level, the Project has demonstrated a number of habitat management techniques for landowners that are both good for biodiversity and provide economic benefits, e.g. forest thinning in the coastal belt, and river bank management. While the demonstration plots are small in scale, they have wide relevance and have generated interest among some landowners since they will provide a profitable return from land that otherwise generates almost no income. At the third level, the Project's Small Grants Programme (SGP) has been very well received and of the 41 grants made, 27 (66%) have been evaluated by an independent team as showing positive economic growth, i.e. they have increased income against the period prior to implementation of the grant, while more than half of the beneficiaries have employed additional people. At least half of the projects plan further development (new activities, cooperation with other enterprises, new projects), while less than 10% of the beneficiaries showed negative economic growth. Although the amount of additional employment created under the SGP's projects is small and seasonal, the projects have largely enabled existing levels of employment to be maintained, and to have facilitated joint activities of various generations. This is considered very positive given rapidly rising unemployment in the country as the financial crisis bites.

THE MANAGEMENT CONTEXT

Country Driven-ness and Coordination

108. There has been considerable country buy-in to the Project by the Government of Latvia with State support being offered through a variety of funding mechanisms, increased staff levels for the NVBRA, and political support in the face of difficulties such as the Staicele Dam. Although funding for the NVBRA has been cut as result of the financial crisis (from US$ 331,290 in 2007 to US$ 273,610 in 2008), it still remains significantly above the baseline level of US$ 111,920 even allowing for inflation. Furthermore, while the acid test of country buy-in will be the level of continued funding for the NVBRA after the Project ends and during the next couple of years of financial stringency, the FET is pleased to be able to report that several of the State's institutions, particularly the Nature Protection Agency and the JSC "Latvia State Forests" , are continuing working closely with the Project and UNDP to embed its gains in institutional reforms and new management regimes.

Project Management

Project Management Team

109. The FET finds that the Project has been blessed with two remarkably good national project managers whose innovation, scientific approach, and excellent management skills have provided a solid grounding for the Project and the high quality work of other national team leaders and international team experts. Technically the Project team appears to have been extremely competent, with most activities implemented within solid conceptual frameworks, focussed clearly on the targets at hand, and delivered in a cost-effective manner, largely on time. Team members interviewed appear mostly to have been happy, efficient and dedicated to the Project's aims, despite the challenges they often have had to meet. In fact all seem to have been highly motivated; indeed one of the best compliments that the FET can pay them is that they all seem to have cared about what they were doing. This in turn has paid dividends with the stakeholders, almost all of whom seem to hold the

"Project" in high esteem. We say "Project" because in many cases the local stakeholders do not, or have not been able to, differentiate between the Project and the NVBRA staff, and while in some projects this lack of project visibility has had negative connotations, here it has the advantage of raising the standing of the NVBRA with local stakeholders and hence increasing the long-term sustainability of the Project's interventions and subsequent NVBRA activities.

Innovation

110. The undoubted single most prominent feature of this Project has been its innovativeness. Some of this stems from the design and the decisions there to introduce new concepts to Latvia, e.g. the Landscape Ecological Plan and the public monitoring schemes (later combined as EcoWatch). Much of the rest has arisen from the inventiveness of the Project team, e.g. the Nature Concert Halls. While the LEP represents a new technique in Latvia, and public monitoring programmes are commonplace elsewhere, e.g. the bird atlases run by a number of NGOs across Europe, the Nature Concert Halls really are a new concept. They are clearly popular events with an increasing audience, make, or have the potential to make, small profits and, therefore, appear to have a long-term future. But there are concerns over that future. Who is going to organise them in the future? Within Latvia, are they just applicable to the NVBRA or could they be applied to other protected areas, e.g. the national parks? There is some talk of them becoming privatised, i.e. organised and run by the private sector where derivation of profit will become one of the aims, perhaps over-riding that of public awareness. This then raises the very real issue of ownership. Given that UNDP is already exporting the idea to other GEF projects in other countries, what happens if the new private sector organisers lay claim legally to the concept and register it as theirs? At best this may result in a prolonged legal wrangle and at worst mean that UNDP cannot use the idea in other countries. The FET do not claim to be lawyers, but it would seem reasonable for UNDP to find a way to register the concept or brand legally, to prevent there being any future restriction placed on the use of what is, after all, an outstanding vehicle for public awareness-raising. Again, given that it is planned to close the UNDP Latvia office fairly soon, such registration may need to be with an international organisation rather than being nationally-based. The FET also believe that once registered, the option of franchising the concept/brand should be examined as a means of enabling the long-term sustainability of its use in other countries after those projects where it is introduced have closed.

The FET recommends that the concept or brand of the Nature Concert Halls be legally registered internationally to defend the freedom of its current use; and the possibility of franchising it should also be examined.

Responsibility	***Task***	***Time frame***	***Deliverable***
UNDP CO/NPM	Review options, steps, and costs of registering Nature Concert Halls as a brand, perhaps through hiring legal advice, and review franchising options.	Before Project end.	Recommendations for registration and franchising.
UNDP CO and UNDP-GEF Bratislava or UNDP HQ.	Register Nature Concert Halls as an international brand	By mid 2010 but certainly prior to entering any agreement with private sector	Registration of brand.

Adaptive Management

111. The adaptive management displayed by the Project has been exceptional, but perhaps this is not so much of a surprise given such an innovative team. No problem the Project has faced has been seen as insurmountable, and even where a change of approach or a new idea has failed to bring the desired result, another has simply followed. In addition to the innovative ideas described immediately above, two examples best illustrate this approach:

i) Landscape Ecological Plan – in the absence of obtaining a legislative base for the Plan, the Project worked closely with the JSC "Latvia State Forests" to pilot its implementation in two areas of forest important for biodiversity; Augstroze and Seda. At Augstroze this was largely successful despite some technical difficulties with map scales because the LEP was made at 1:50,000 and the forest compartment maps were at 1:10,000. Nonetheless, experts from both

sides spent a lot of time working through the difficulties so that the principles of the LEP could be used by the foresters. However, at Seda, there was clearly an irreconcilable difference between the amount of forest that the LEP wanted to conserve, and the amount that the JSC "Latvia State Forests" required to cut. Not to be thwarted, the Project hired two national experts to make an LEP specifically for Seda, based on a completely different method from the main LEP i.e. no zoning, and a new method for the country, i.e. one based on natural age structure of forests. The situation is not yet fully resolved, having moved onto another problem, but there appear to be ways and means around that one too (see paragraph 115).

ii) Staicele Dam – where negotiations over demolishing the dam became deadlocked over the amount of compensation payable by the MOE. In the face of this, the Project commissioned a Swedish fish migration expert to find an alternative to removal, e.g. one involving the construction of fish ladders or similar. While technically possible, there was a question mark over the structural integrity of the dam and bridge, so again the Project contracted experts to undertake a study – which showed the dam and bridge to be unsafe. Still not to be beaten, the Project passed this information on to the Ministry of Regional Development and Local Government to get Staicele Municipality to act on an unsafe structure. This situation is also not yet fully resolved, but the Project continues to influence the decision-makers (see paragraph 117).

Although both these examples are of as yet unresolved issues, there are many other cases where flexibility and creativity in approach have led to successful outcomes, e.g. the Mid-term Evaluation recommendation for capacity assessments of the NVBRA and the Project/UNDP first meeting this and then using the approach in its dealings with the NPA. Much of this must be marked down to the drive, creativity, and management skills of the two NPMs.

UNDP Role

112. The FET Leader is frequently critical of the seemingly unnecessary UNDP bureaucracy that blights the implementation of many UNDP-GEF projects. Almost all the Project teams and managers that he has encountered complain about this aspect of project implementation and how the procedures and the time involved cause major delays and difficulties with implementation. This Project is the exception that proves the rule – the one that shows that although the rules and regulations apply to all Country Offices, it is the "how" rather than the "what" that is important in their implementation. Almost uniquely, the FET heard no complaint from either NPM about UNDP being seen as an impediment to Project progress; rather the opposite, simply praise for their solid and efficient support. The FET can find no obvious reason for the difference; perhaps the UNDP CO staff in Latvia are of a higher quality than normal, though this seems extremely unlikely since almost all UNDP staff encountered by the FET Leader have been of an extremely high calibre. Only two things stand out on this Project as being different i) the closeness of the relationship between the Project staff and the UNDP CO, not least arising from the fact that one of the PMU offices was actually based in the UNDP CO; and ii) the UNDP CO had very few other projects to deal with and hence may have been able to devote proportionally more of their time to this Project than other UNDP COs can. While the Project has gone to some lengths to document its lessons learned, the FET believes that those relating to UNDP support will have slipped through the net because for this Project it is considered normal. It is not. The FET recommends that the Project and the UNDP CO document the strengths of their working relationship as a case study in a format appropriate for sharing with other UNDP COs implementing GEF projects. Perhaps this could be distributed by UNDP's Energy and Environment Network.

The FET recommends that the efficient and supportive role played by the UNDP CO in Latvia to the Project and the reasons behind it be documented and the lessons learned shared with other UNDP COs implementing GEF projects.

Responsibility	***Task***	***Time frame***	***Deliverable***
UNDP CO/ NPM	Document working practices and reasons for efficient UNDP support to the Project.	Before Project end.	Brief case study highlighting key issues and lessons learned
UNDP-GEF Bratislava	Distribute case study to other UNDP offices in region with GEF projects.	By end of 2009 ?	Approve distribution – possibly by EE-Net.

Technical Management Issues

Implementation of the Landscape Ecological Plan

113. The Landscape Ecological Plan has been successfully integrated into four current District and Municipal Spatial Plans. Work has also been proceeding with State forest company JSC "Latvian State Forests"to integrate the plan into forestry operations into two areas of high biodiversity value – Augstroze and Seda. In the former, the pragmatic decision taken by ELLE Ltd. to elaborate the LEP at a scale of 1:50,000 rather than 1:10,000 has come back to haunt the Plan's implementation. The FET does not find that the decision was wrong – the large size of the NVBR pretty much dictates that a scale of 1:50,000 had to be used and most of the local governments' spatial plans are also elaborated at 1:50,000. However, it would have been apparent at an early stage that JSC "Latvian State Forests"were going to be a major, if not the single biggest, user of the LEP and perhaps their requirements should have been looked at more closely – they did apparently recommend elaboration of the plan at 1:10,000 but feel they were ignored. In the event, this has happened anyway, if retroactively, since to integrate the LEP with the forestry compartment maps at Augstroze the management prescriptions of the LEP have had to be painstakingly converted to each forest compartment at a 1:10,000 through careful, cooperative, but immensely slow and time-consuming discussion. The process is now very close to its successful completion but question marks now hang over whether the company will agree to go through the same process for other areas. The belief is that while the overall zoning is useful in terms of identifying key areas for different management approaches, the management prescriptions themselves are far too closely defined for the 1:50,000 scale. In short, from a forestry viewpoint, either the plan should have been elaborated at 1:50,000 with more loosely defined management prescriptions, or at 1:10,000 at which scale the existing detail in the prescriptions may have been appropriate – but of course the latter course of action would have involved immensely more work at the outset. Perhaps a combination of approaches may have worked better.

114. At Seda, there was much greater conflict over the LEP's prescriptions with, from JSC's "Latvian State Forests" viewpoint, far too much territory requiring total or partial restrictions on tree-cutting and no initial agreement over the LEP's implementation could be reached. To overcome this, in March-June 2009 the NPM involved two independent national experts to make an ecological management plan specifically for Seda, based upon work commissioned by JSC "Latvian State Forests"using a Swedish expert for another area in 2004. Instead of using zones, this method involved basing cutting regimes on trying to get as close as possible to an optimal natural age structure and is favoured by foresters since it is relatively simple to implement. Although both sides appear to be happy with the outcome of this new approach, agreement has still not been possible although the reasons are not clear-cut. JSC "Latvian State Forests" seem to indicate that they do not believe it is possible to proceed without the authorisation of the MOE, although they admit that they do not require such authorisation since they come under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Agriculture and within that they operate pretty much autonomously. Furthermore, they argue that they do not think that the green NGOs in the country will accept the approach. On the other hand, the Project claim that company has simply withdrawn from the process because they want to develop their own LEP for all state forests using GEF methods but one that fits their own economic needs more closely, especially given the global financial crisis which has resulted in the Government requiring timber production to be increased.

115. The FET believe that agreement over implementing the new ecological management plan at Seda is very close and just requires a little more compromise from the two sides. In interviewing the MOE, the FET asked if a letter on official headed paper could be supplied which basically stated that the MOE would endorse the experimental methodology being proposed by the Project at Seda, or at least have no objections to such a plan's implementation there, thereby negating the concerns of the forest company. The MOE indicated that this may be possible. Given that the Project claims to have strong political support in the MOE for its work generally, the FET urges the Project to try this approach. A similar request may have to be made to the leading conservation NGOs. This letter(s)

could be tabled at another meeting with JSC "Latvian State Forests" to move the implementation process forward – or at least to determine whether the company does intend to proceed with implementation of this plan or whether it has indeed withdrawn from negotiations to develop its own LEP.

The FET recommends that the MOE be requested to supply an official letter of endorsement supporting "experimental methodology" in implementing the ecological management plan at Seda or at least having no objections to it. A similar approach to leading conservation NGOs may also prove necessary.

Responsibility	***Task***	***Time frame***	***Deliverable***
PMU	Send written request to MOE.	As soon as possible.	Letter to MOE.
PMU	If request successful, table letter at a meeting with JSC "Latvian State Forests".	As soon as possible.	Clarification of JSC's intentions.

Staicele Dam

116. The Project views its own biggest failure as that of not having been able to remove the dam at Staicele which is seen as a barrier to the migration of salmon. This is a weir-like structure a little over one metre in height built to provide power to a pulp-and-paper factory on the north bank that became defunct in the 1960s. The dam has a concrete bridge on supports over the top of it – see Figure 3. The dam is owned by a company that currently employs about 20 people making an undefined timber-based product on the site of the old factory. They claim that the bridge is the only way to get their raw materials to the site without transporting them through the town – something the municipal council wishes to avoid because it would put historical timbered houses at risk. Although the company has been offered compensation to remove the dam, they are holding out for compensation for the entire site (dam plus factory) on the grounds that without the bridge there is no feasible access to the site to continue manufacturing operations. It is clear to the FET from interviews with both the Project and the Municipality that significant politics are at play here – the Project claims that the bridge is not used by lorries accessing the site with raw materials, and indeed on-site inspection even by a non-engineer reveals that this would be extremely hazardous to attempt once, let alone on a regular basis. The Municipality forwarded all sorts of other spurious reasons to maintain the bridge (or to pay more for its demolition which is actually the key prize here) including cultural heritage, tourism, and the fact that central government had not responded to requests for investment in the town.

Figure 3: Staicele Dam with defunct paper mill in background

117. In light of the impasse with the owners, the Project commissioned a Swedish fish migration expert to examine the possibility of constructing structures to facilitate migration of salmon past the dam. While feasible, the structural integrity of the dam itself was called into question. The Project then commissioned a structural engineering study of the dam which reported it to be of unsafe condition and that any attempt to construct fish migration structures may result in its collapse. To avoid any possibility of liability, the Project decided to abandon this approach and moved forwards with its attempts to get the dam demolished. The matter was referred to the Ministry of Regional Development and Local Government to take up with Staicle Municipality on the grounds that the latter has a legal requirement to ensure all buildings within the Municipality comply with basic safety

standards. The Ministry has not yet apparently done this, and the Municipality disputes they have any responsibility; the safety of the bridge is solely the responsibility of its owners. The Project has also passed all its papers to the MOE, who politically (if not bureaucratically) seem to be in favour of the dam's demolition, so that the Minister can raise the issue in the Cabinet of Ministers and make a compulsory purchase order in the national interest. Unfortunately, this latter course of action has been current for about 12 months, although the MOE was still requesting final confirmation that the Project had sent all of the papers at the time of the FET mission. The Project confirmed that it had recently done so.

118. So where next for the Project? Amidst all of the activities and conflict, the FET discovered that no scientific study has ever been undertaken to determine a) if the dam is actually a barrier to migrating salmon, nor b) if it is, how big an impediment it is. It appears that the Project's activities towards removal of the dam are based on an assumption in the Project Document, itself garnered from some sources or opinions lost in the mists of time, that the dam is a barrier. The fish migration expert commissioned above did indicate that the dam was the single most significant barrier to salmon on the Salaca River – but then again it is the only one. It does not appear that he passed the opinion that the dam is *a* significant barrier. The Municipality, not surprisingly, maintain that it is not a barrier to fish migration and that salmon can be seen passing over it during Spring, especially in time of flood. Certainly the FET have some sympathy with this point of view – the dam does not appear to present an insurmountable obstacle to migrating salmon, there are certainly larger waterfalls in Scotland that salmon negotiate successfully each year, and salmon are reported to still be seen upstream of the dam, so how did they get there without jumping the dam? Much of the evidence is based around the fact that lots of salmon are seen immediately downstream of the dam in springtime – but then they would be so seen at any barrier, even ones that are surmountable.

119. The FET believe that the Project should take two courses of action. On the one hand, while continuing to make the assumption that the dam is a significant barrier, it should ramp up the pressure on Staicele Municipality to acknowledge it has a responsibility to the public with regard to the safety of the bridge. Given that in the recent local government reorganisation Staicele Municipality has become part of Aloja County with which the Project has good relations, this may pay dividends. Much of the current owner's resistance to agreeing to demolish the dam (and indeed their flat refusal to even talk about the issue) stems from tacit or even demonstrable support from Staicele Municipality, both parties attempting a unified approach to extracting larger levels of compensation from the Government in economically hard times. A move by the Project to divide these two parties by demonstrating to the new County that it is indeed liable for the safety issues around the bridge may force the issue and concentrate the owner's mind on making a decision either to pay the costs necessary to make the dam and bridge safe (thereby enabling fish migration structures to be constructed) or to accept the probably more attractive option of compensation for its demolition. Such a move should involve the Project in a) lobbying the new County administration over the issue and taking a more assertive stance as some members of the Project team believe should have been taken from the beginning; b) lobbying the Ministry of Regional Development and Local Government much harder to take action against the County; and in lieu of still getting no acceptable action c) funding the initial steps to enable the NVBRA[25] to issue a civil action against the Staicele Municipality for failure to uphold national (and EU?) legislation pertaining to public safety standards – local people use the bridge for fishing as can be seen in Figure 3. Issuance of the intention to undertake civil proceedings may well be enough to bring about a change in attitudes without having to actually go through with a court action. Although as indicated above, the MOE is considering making an application through the Cabinet of Ministers for compulsory purchase, it appears that this has been intended for some time without action actually having been made. The present recommendation is made as something of an insurance policy in case this situation continues. On the other hand, should the above actions still not resolve the issue, belatedly it should commission a scientific study to ascertain whether the dam is actually a barrier or not, and if so whether it is significant enough a barrier to warrant demolition.

[25] If the NVBRA is not legally permitted to issue such an action, or if the NPA prevents it from doing so for some reason, the Project could find an NGO willing to act as a surrogate.

Although this cannot be undertaken until Spring 2010, the TOR could be prepared prior to closing the Project and the tender could be let by UNDP early in 2010 – the aim being to determine whether the NVBRA should continue to spend its reducing budget on actions over the dam or not.

The FET recommends that the Project pressurise the new Aloja County Administration to take action over the public safety issues related to the Staicele Dam with a view to getting the owners to repair it, thereby enabling fish migration structures to be included, or agree to accept compensation for its demolition.

Responsibility	***Task***	***Time frame***	***Deliverable***
PMU	Meet with Mayor and officials of Aloja County to explain the issues and future steps in lieu of compliance with the Dam's repair or demolition	As soon as possible	Minutes of meeting detailing decisions or County's intentions.
PMU/UNDP	Lobby Ministry of Regional Development and Local Government to take action with Aloja County to meet legal requirements for public safety with regard to Staicele Dam	After meeting with Aloja County	Undertaking form Mi Rural Devpt. to act on the matter
PMU/UNDP	Assist NVBRA (or surrogate NGO) to initiate civil legal action against Aloja County Administration over failure to act within law on public safety of structures within its territory.	Only if first two actions produce no tangible results by mid-Nov.	Initial documents delivered to Aloja County of intention to take civil action.
PMU/UNDP	Develop TOR for scientific study of fish migration at Staicele Dam	By mid-Nov.	TOR.
UNDP/NVBRA	Place tender for contract of fish migration study.	If no action taken on dam by end Feb 2010.	Expert contracted for fish migration study.

Information Management System

120. The Information Management System maintains data in four main categories – i) on management (e.g. nature protection plans and management plans); ii) GIS-based data (e.g. base maps, single colour maps for field studies or school projects); iii) libraries (e.g. seminars, lists of publications); and iv) environmental state resources (e.g. monitoring data). The data are stored on servers, not actually on the website, but connections to the system can be made through the internet. The system includes an on-line manual and a search facility by theme. The Information System can be used on three levels of user, i) internally (i.e. NVBRA and Project staff) with full access to all data; ii) registered public which entails no cost but allows multiple use of data over any given period; and iii) unregistered public which enables only *ad hoc* use and is designed for only low-level usage. Both categories of public are prohibited from accessing sensitive data, e.g. the breeding locations of rare species. Full internet access was decided upon over an intranet option because it provides information to a wider audience and will increase the number of users, e.g. planners and students. This is deemed to have been successful. Apparently all staff know how to use the system and it is used widely in deciding licence applications and by inspectors, but some staff still rarely use it, a problem that it is recognised needs addressing internally.

121. The one issue that confuses the FET is why the design of the system opted not to include a fully-functioning GIS facility on which staff could plot there own data on various layers and then manipulate it to answer questions raised in the decision-making process. No one could provide a categorical answer to this but it is assumed that such a GIS function was not believed to be necessary at the design stage, or possibly the capability and scope for a GIS was not fully understood at that time. Certainly the development of the system had a chequered history with key people leaving at key times and the whole running some six months behind schedule. However, the current NPM (Mr. Ģērmanis) maintains that the system does include a fully-functioning GIS using ArcInfo – three licences for which had been purchased by the Project, and training on which had been undertaken by many staff; but database specialist (Mr. Soms), categorically stated that the system was "*not a full GIS system with active layers, but an information management tool for storing fixed GIS data*". Certainly there is no-one in the NVBRA HQ at Salacgrīva who can use the GIS but one person, based in Rujiena, has been trained by the Project to use ArcInfo. This may account for the view in HQ that

there is no GIS. The discrepancy does not bode well since if the information from Mr. Soms is correct it does seem to have been a missed opportunity not to include a full GIS facility, albeit one that does not appear to have a high priority within the NVBRA; while as seems more likely, if Mr. Ģērmanis is correct then the money spent on the GIS facility, licences, and the associated staff training appears to have been largely wasted[26].

Back-ups

122. The one issue with which the FTE takes the Project and the NVBRA to task over is that of backing-up its computer-stored data. As with so many UNDP-GEF projects, this one had no written policy on computer back-up procedures, nor does the NVBRA appear to have a policy on this. In April 2009 the inevitable happened and the server on which all of the Project's data was held crashed. At that time, the NVBRA's backup-system did not have enough space to save all of the Project's files and the new servers (bought by the Project) had not yet been installed. Although some of the missing data could be retrieved from other computer drives and a variety of other stored media, some files, mainly pertaining to reports produced in 2004 and 2005 were lost. The crashed disc is currently in IBM's Latvian technical laboratory in Riga where attempts are being made to recover the lost data, at a cost estimated to be in the region of US$ 500.

123. One would have thought that such an event would be enough to make those responsible learn. Unfortunately not. Although the new back-up server was installed and now provides enough space to store all the Project data, and the NVBRA's IT manager has now instituted automated daily back-up procedures, the back-up system is still stored in the same offices as the main computers making it vulnerable to fire. When the FET raised this issue with the NVBRA management, the answer received was that it was too expensive (about US$ 500) to purchase the fire-proof storage necessary to safeguard the discs. Such short-sightedness is at best foolhardy and at worst negligent. UNDP, as the GEF's implementing agency, need to make strong representations to the NVBRA to rectify this matter as a degree of urgency – spending even US$ 1,000 to safeguard GEF's US$ 2.9 million investment, not to mention the number of man-hours taken to collect it and the probable irreplaceable nature of some of it, would seem like a good deal. If this fails, then the Project should use what funds it has left to make this purchase itself on behalf of the NVBRA. If this too proves to be impossible, then a rigorous system of back-up should be initiated with immediate effect whereby back-up discs should be stored in a building separate to the NVBRA offices.

The FET recommends that the computer back-up system in the NVBRA's offices (including lists of computer passwords) be stored in a fire-proof storage unit, purchased as a matter of urgency.

Responsibility	***Task***	***Time frame***	***Deliverable***
UNDP CO	Make strong representations to the NVBRA to purchase the fire-proof storage unit(s) necessary to store the computer back-up system.	Immediately and urgently	NVBRA purchases fire-proof storage facility.
PMU	In the event of the above not being successful, purchase a fire-proof facility for keeping one set of computer back-ups and other valuable project information in	As soon as possible	Fire proof safe installed in each NVBRA's office.
PMU/NVBRA	Alternative to a fireproof unit would be to ensure two copies of data are kept separate from each other and from the NVBRA office, and that these are backed up alternately – Week A and Week B.	With immediate effect.	Multiple back-ups of computer data.

[26] PMU comment: "*To clarify the issue: Functions of Information Management system containing access to the data stored by the administration should be separated from the administration's capacity to work with GIS. NVBR administration has one person, Dainis Ozols, who has the knowledge and technical possibilities (GIS software) to create GIS data. Information management system is the tool for publishing this data. Together of course it makes a system in itself*."

RECOMMENDATIONS

Approximately in order of importance as perceived by the FET.

- The computer back-up system in the NVBRA's offices (including lists of computer passwords) should be stored in a fire-proof storage unit, purchased as a matter of urgency.
- The Project/UNDP should continue to engage with the NPA to attempt to embed the Project's gains into the new institutional framework resulting from the current reforms.
- The concept or brand of the Nature Concert Halls should be legally registered internationally to defend the freedom of its current use; and the possibility of franchising it should also be examined.
- The MOE should be requested to supply an official letter of endorsement supporting "experimental methodology" in implementing the ecological management plan at Seda or at least having no objections to it. A similar approach to leading conservation NGOs may also prove necessary.
- The Project should pressurise the new Aloja County Administration to take action over the public safety issues related to the Staicele Dam with a view to getting the owners to repair it, thereby enabling fish migration structures to be included, or agree to accept compensation for its demolition.
- The Project/UNDP should support the NVBRA in repeating the Small Grants Programme by seeking funding from the EU (Leader Plus programme?) and other sources, using the success of this Project's SGP as evidence of its effectiveness.
- The efficient and supportive role played by the UNDP CO in Latvia to the Project and the reasons behind it, should be documented and the lessons learned shared with other UNDP COs implementing GEF projects.

LESSONS LEARNED

124. The Project has produced a large number of documents and reports, many of which list lessons learned, and many of these are specific to the NVBR or various technical matters. It has not been our intention to document all of these in this Final Evaluation. Instead, the FET has listed general lessons that may benefit other GEF projects, and a few key technical ones.

- **Innovation involves risk**

  Perhaps the main characteristic of this Project has been its innovative approach, trying new things not only in the context of Latvia, but in some cases completely new. While in this case things have been highly successful, the first NPM admits that there were a number of critical phases where it could have all gone wrong. The FET wonders publicly what it would be writing now if that had happened. The lesson would seem to be that GEF should find ways of encouraging innovation without being overly censorious where such attempts fail – as long as the associated risks are managed carefully the benefits would seem to outweigh the costs.

- **Communication is important, harness its power from the beginning**

  The FET has been particularly complimentary about the Communication Strategy of this Project – in part because the FET Leader has seen some major failings of this in other projects. This one was carried out professionally and effectively and the benefits are plain to see. Key lessons are to engage a professional at the earliest opportunity; define the resources available according to reality; develop a strategy early; understand the challenges and risks the project faces; identify the target groups; and use as many means possible of getting messages across. In

addition, it is hard to change attitudes purely from a "green" point of view because people don't listen; it is important not to use scientific language such as "sustainable development" but to use simple concepts instead; and it is important to show people concrete examples – demonstrations and case studies are particularly effective in getting people to understand. Finally, use all of a project's activities to raise awareness, e.g. the public monitoring system has proved to be a very effective means of communication and has had a snowball effect.

- **Providing a visual identity or creating a brand for a project or protected area results in increased social capital**

  The creation of a visual identity has been particularly noteworthy. The importance of getting local people to recognise and identify with an idea, a project, or an area of land cannot be over-stated since this is often at the centre of gaining the respect of local communities and local stakeholders and landowners on whose goodwill much of a project's success may lie.

- **Increased visual identity brings increased demand for management resources**

  As people come to identify more and more with an area, the most prominent managers or administrators of that area come under increased pressure to provide all sorts of support. For example, the NVBRA is constantly being asked to become a partner or take part in actions to develop new projects, assist in the promotion of activities, or just provide basic information. It is important that those in such a role do not underestimate the amount of resources such an increased identity will bring since such a role should not be rejected. Involvement in the local community brings increased influence and awareness-raising opportunities.

- **Awareness-raising has to be specific as well as general**

  A number of specific issues have arisen during the Project where a lack of understanding in, and opposition of society to, could be observed, even including stakeholders as important as the MOE. Chief amongst these was the LEP, whose innovation and scope caused considerable concern. It is important that where specific issues are causing, or are likely to cause, a project problems that public awareness raising is done to alleviate the problem and overcome opposition.

- **Care taken during the inception phase pays dividends.**

  The inception period for this project was long and carefully considered. Much time was taken in defining the activities from what was considered to be a fairly general description in the Project Document. Later, a lot of care was taken with the process of changing the indicators to make them more quantitative, each being selected carefully to ensure they could be measured accurately. The whole implementation was based on a sound scientific approach with good feedback provided by a precise monitoring programme. The result is a highly successful project. This compares favourably with a other projects where time has been taken to study lessons from other projects, calmly study the existing situation and revisiting the legal, policy and institutional conditions to identify changes from the Project Document prior to initiating implementation. It also contrasts starkly with those projects that have rushed into implementation as soon as possible, without reassessment of the enabling environment or ensuring the validity of the logframe's risks and assumptions, and whose results have suffered accordingly.

- **Small grants programmes can offer small amounts of money and still be successful**

  There is often a difficult choice to be made in designing and/or implementing projects between implementing a micro-credit facility and a small grants programme since the former is often deemed to be able to reach more people by providing smaller sums thereby maximising the effect of finite resources, while the latter is often favoured by having a bigger impact on small businesses. The present Project showed that a SGP can have significant success even when only small sums are involved and the leverage ratio is high. The key appears to be to make the application process a) easy for the applicant; b) well supported to deal with questions; and c) to have clear and concise aims and criteria.

- **Capacity building should include a review of an organisation's legal mandate**

  Despite the significant strengthening of the capacity of the NVBRA to manage the Biosphere Reserve, insufficient human resources and the substantive legal mandate still means that it is focused primarily on reaching its immediate priorities – the management and enforcement of compliance with legal requirements in the NVBR – which are largely reactive. These, primarily external, pressures then inhibit the NVBRA from establishing a more proactive, adaptive, strategic management approach to the Reserve's management. The supervising institutions' requirements for reporting, such as to the MOE, unfortunately still demonstrates a limited understanding of the functions of a biosphere reserve (i.e. mostly concentrating on the conservation and compliance functions rather than wider sustainable socio-economic development functions), which creates institutional capacity constraints for the NVBRA to address all of its strategic priorities equally.

- **Involvement of landowners directly in management or restoration leads to sustainability**

  The approach used – to involve landowners and local stakeholders in restoration activities – although more complicated than contracting external assistance, is likely to be more sustainable in terms of ensuring the future management of restored areas since their interest and understanding means that they are more inclined to continue with the management. The activities have stimulated local farmers to get more involved in networking and exchange of experiences and triggered a much wider application for EU agri-environment funding for sustainable management. Since they now realise that protected areas may also bring income and not only restrictions they will get used to that income stream and management requirements associated with it, which in turn will make them more likely to re-apply for funding.

- **Implementation of a landscape ecological plan really requires a legislative base**

  The unwillingness of the Ministry of Regional Development and Local Government or the MOE to enact the requisite legislation or regulations to convey the LEP into law has undermined its implementation significantly. While local governments have seemed ready and willing to incorporate much of it into their development and spatial plans, to a large degree this has arisen because their capacities are low and it is welcomed as saving time and money. However, the State forest managers have integrated it into their plans only on areas with high biodiversity value and then with great difficulty and some reluctance. Private landowners view it with suspicion because of the restrictions it brings and will be unlikely to take account of it except through its integration in the legally binding local government plans.

- **Landscape ecological plans require a higher degree of flexibility when elaborated at a small scale**

  Elaboration of the LEP was caught over the problem of scale – 1:10,000 was preferred from a working point of view (e.g. forest compartment maps) and precedents; 1:50,000 was the only practical scale for an area as large as the NVBR. In selecting the practical option, the management guidelines for the various zones were still elaborated with the same level of detail and stringency as if the larger scale had been selected. This has caused significant (and perhaps intractable) problems for the implementation of the LEP, and a higher level of flexibility in the elaboration of a plan at a smaller scale would have been beneficial.

- **Sustainable development profile changes the mindset of protected area managers**

  Production of a sustainable development profile had unexpected benefits in that it changed managers thinking from solely about nature protection to paying more attention to socio-economic aspects of reserve.

ANNEX I : MID-TERM EVALUATION TERMS OF REFERENCE

UNDP/GEF Project
"Biodiversity Protection in the North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve"

INTRODUCTION

The Monitoring and Evaluation Policy at the project level in UNDP/GEF has two overarching objectives:
a) promote accountability for the achievement of GEF objectives through the assessment of results, effectiveness, processes and performance of the partners involved in GEF activities. GEF results will be monitored and evaluated for their contribution to global environmental benefits; and
b) promote learning, feedback and knowledge sharing on results and lessons learned among the GEF and its partners, as basis for decision-making on policies, strategies, program management, and projects and to improve knowledge and performance.

A mix of tools is used to ensure effective Project monitoring and evaluation. These might be applied continuously throughout the lifetime of the project e.g. periodic monitoring of indicators – or as specific time-bound exercise such as mid-term reviews, audit reports and final evaluations.

The evaluation is to be undertaken in accordance with the "GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy"(see http://thegef.org/MonitoringandEvaluation/MEPoliciesProcedures/mepoliciesprocedures.html).

Evaluations in the GEF explore five major criteria:

(i) Relevance – the extent to which the activity is suited to local and national development priorities and organizational policies, including changes over time.
(ii) Effectiveness – the extent to which an objective has been achieved or how likely it is to be achieved.
(iii) Efficiency – the extent to which results have been delivered with the least costly resources possible.
(iv) Results – the positive and negative, and foreseen and unforeseen, changes to and effects produced by a development intervention. In GEF terms, results include direct project outputs, short-to medium term outcomes, and longer-term impact including global environmental benefits, replication effects and other, local effects.
(v) Sustainability – the likely ability of an intervention to continue to deliver benefits for an extended period of time after completion. Projects need to be environmentally as well as financially and socially sustainable.

The implementation of the UNDP/GEF Project "Biodiversity Protection in the North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve (NVBR)" began in July 2004 with an objective to optimize biodiversity conservation practice in Latvia's protected areas and associated landscapes. Its immediate objective is to ensure conservation of globally significant biodiversity in the NVBR by implementing a set of initiatives required to integrate biodiversity conservation principles and practices into the planning, management and sustainable use of the NVBR.

The project has eight primary outcomes: a) improved information on the NVBR and its biodiversity, as well as the information's management and use in decision-making; b) strengthened institutional capacity and multi-sectoral and participatory mechanisms for governance and management of the NVBR; c) identification of desirable reforms to existing policies, legislation and incentive/regulatory frameworks for resource use, with the aim of stimulating or supporting biodiversity-friendly behavior; d) integrated landscape ecological planning for the NVBR; e) demonstration of alternative biodiversity-supporting economic development activities for local communities in forestry, agriculture and tourism; f) increased awareness of and support for biodiversity conservation and sustainable

development among all stakeholders; g) habitat restoration at selected sites to maintain and enhance globally significant biodiversity; and h) systematic identification and dissemination of lessons learned and best practices through ministerial and NGO channels throughout Latvia.

The project document was signed in July 2004 and implementation started immediately. The total project budget is US$ 2, 780,500. The Executing Agency for the project is the Administration of the North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve.

Expected main results: (1) development of NVBR information system; (2) establishment of public monitoring system (EcoWatch programme); (3) preparation of NVBR management plan on basis of an landscape ecological plan; (4) establishment of micro-grants facility; (5) increased public awareness on biodiversity through campaigns, seminars, study tours; (6) restored habitats for globally threatened species; (7) successful transfer of knowledge and experience to other protected territories in Latvia and worldwide.

The mid-term evaluation for the project was conducted in March 2007. The mid-term evaluation made the following ratings and conclusions in its report:

- Project relevance rated satisfactory, responding well to those of the UNCBD, the UNESCO-MAB and the EU policy for nature conservation. However, the internal design of the project is rated as marginally satisfactory since the focus on the delivery of 8 outcomes prevents the project to focus more on a long term strategic approach to develop an overall capacity to manage the biosphere reserve in the long run.
- The project is effective in achieving its (8) expected outcomes; it is rated as highly satisfactory. Interviews with the key Stakeholders indicated that the project achievements are so far greater than expected and are highly valued such as the EcoWatch programme, the landscape ecological plan, the restoration of meadows and the small grant programme.
- The efficiency of the project is rated overall as highly satisfactory. It is well managed by the project management team. The design of the project was retrofitted during the inception phase to reflect the new UNDP RBM approach. The 8 initial outputs were transformed into 8 outcomes and the development and immediate objectives became respectively the project goal and the project objective. The performance indicators were also changed to be more quantitative and simpler to monitor. All these changes were well documented and approved by the relevant bodies starting with the PSC and UNDP.
- There is a strong ownership of the project design by the NVBR Administration and all project activities are supported by the Administration.
- The project is well monitored using the set of revised indicators of the projects and also the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) developed by the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA). This current (2006) result of this tool indicates some weaknesses in the management of the NVBR compounded by the fact that there are not enough people assigned to the management of the area. Another area is the potential for sustainable economic benefits that is not fully exploited and controlled.
- The project should achieve its objective in the long run and has the potential to make a positive impact on the management of the NVBR and secure the globally significant biodiversity values of the NVBR; it is rated as satisfactory.
- The sustainability of results achieved by the projects is rated as marginally satisfactory. Despite good progress for the project to deliver the expected outcomes, the challenge remains for the project management team to ensure that these outcomes be integrated within the functions of the NVBR Administration and be replicated by other agencies, ministries and other organizations such as NGOs.
- The main issue for the long term sustainability of project results resides in the limited resources of the NVBR Administration.

The Mid-term evaluation also made some concrete suggestions: on producing a socio-economic profile for the NVBR; reviewing the management models of similar biosphere reserves worldwide and identify new management model options which could be applied to the NVBR; support a

comprehensive capacity assessment for the management of the BR and to identify and develop a sustainability strategy for the project.

This UNDP/GEF project will be one of the last project's to be implemented in Latvia with international funds, as the UNDP Latvia Projects Office is scheduled to close 2010. Thus the final evaluation's focus should be a lessons-learned section for wide distribution to other countries planning similar activities in the area of biodiversity, nature protection in Biosphere Reserve, etc.

EVALUATION AUDIENCE

This Final Evaluation of the UNDP/GEF Project "Biodiversity Protection in the North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve (NVBR)" is initiated by UNDP as the GEF Implementing Agency. It aims to provide managers (at the NVBR Administration, Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection Administration, UNDP-Latvia Project Office and UNDP-GEF levels) with strategy and policy options for more effectively and efficiently replicating successful project initiatives or for filling gaps note covered in the policy area in the project. It also provides the basis for learning and accountability for managers and stakeholders.

OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

The overall purpose of the evaluation is to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of project activities in relation to the stated objective. The evaluation is expected to produce possible recommendations on:

- The key elements of success of the project and further steps to be taken to secure successful initiatives in the Administration and its territory;
- Any gaps remaining after the project implementation to be addressed in further initiatives by the Administration and Government;
- Identifying risks to the sustainability of the project initiatives to be considering by the Administration and Government in future development of the NVBR.

The Final Evaluation is to consider the currently evolving policy and economic climate in consideration of the risks and the further development of the initiatives as the external pressures on results and Administration have changed considerably during the last 6 months of the project.

The Final Evaluation serves as an agent of change and plays a critical role in supporting accountability. The emphasis of the evaluation should be the following:

<u>Project indicators</u>
The evaluators will assess the achievement of indicators and review the work plan, planned duration and budget of the project.

<u>Implementation</u>
The evaluation will assess the implementation of the project in terms of quality and timeliness of inputs and efficiency and effectiveness of activities carried out. Also, the effectiveness of management as well as the quality and timeliness of monitoring and backstopping by all parties to the project should be evaluated. In particular the evaluation is to assess the Project team's use of adaptive management in project implementation and the Project team's fulfillment of management responses to evaluation recommendations made during the mid-term evaluation in March 2007.

<u>Project outputs, outcomes and impact</u>
The evaluation will assess the outputs, outcomes and impact achieved by the project as well as the likely sustainability of project results. This should encompass an assessment of the achievement of the immediate objectives and the contribution to attaining the overall objective of the project. The evaluation should also assess the extent to which the implementation of the project has been inclusive of relevant stakeholders and to which it has been able to create collaboration between different partners. The evaluation will also examine if the project has had significant unexpected effects, whether of beneficial or detrimental character.

The Final Evaluation will also cover the following aspects:

1. PROGRESS TOWARDS RESULTS

Changes in development conditions. Address the following questions, with a focus on the perception of change among stakeholders:

- Have critically endangered species been properly and adequately protected within the NVBR?
- Have there been changes in local stakeholder behaviour (i.e. threats ….) that have contributed to improved conservation? If not, why not?
- Is there distinct improvement in biodiversity information turnover and use in decision making among NVBR stakeholders?
- Has awareness on biodiversity conservation and subsequent public participation in biodiversity monitoring and management increased as a result of the project?
- Is there adequate territorial planning in place, or in progress, ensuring long-term conservation of biodiversity and cultural values?

Measurement of change*:* Progress towards results should be based on a comparison of indicators before and after (so far) the project intervention. Progress can also be assessed by comparing conditions in the project site to conditions in similar unmanaged sites.

Project strategy: how and why outcomes (listed as outputs in the project document) and strategies contribute to the achievement of the expected results:

- Examine their relevance and whether they provide the most effective route towards results.

Sustainability: Extent to which the benefits of the project will continue, within or outside the project domain, after it has come to an end. Relevant factors include for example: development of a sustainability strategy, establishment of financial and economic instruments and mechanisms, mainstreaming project objectives into the economy.

Gender perspective: Extent to which the project accounts for gender differences when developing and applying project interventions. How are gender considerations mainstreamed into project interventions?

2. Project's Adaptive Management Framework

(a) Monitoring Systems

- Assess the monitoring tools currently being used:
    - Do they provide the necessary information?
    - Do they involve key partners?
    - Are they efficient?
- Ensure the monitoring system, including performance indicators, at least meets GEF minimum requirements[27]. Apply SMART indicators as necessary.
- Apply the GEF Tracking Tool and provide a description of comparison with initial application of the tool.

(b) Risk Management

- Validate whether the risks identified in the project document and PIRs are the most important and whether the risk ratings applied are appropriate. If not, explain why. Describe any additional risks identified and suggest risk ratings and possible risk management strategies to be adopted
- Assess the project's risk identification and management systems:
    - Is the UNDP-GEF Risk Management System[28] appropriately applied (with particular emphasis on the financial risks related to micro-grants)?

[27] See section 3.2 of the GEF's "Monitoring and Evaluation Policies and Procedures", available at http://www.undp.org/gef/05/monitoring/policies.html

- How can the UNDP-GEF Risk Management System be used to strengthen project management?

(c) Work Planning
- Assess the use of the logical framework as a management tool during implementation and any changes made to it
    - Ensure the logical framework meets UNDP-GEF requirements in terms of format and content
    - What impact did the retro-fitting of impact indicators have on project management?
- Assess the use of routinely updated workplans.
- Assess the use of electronic information technologies to support implementation, participation and monitoring, as well as other project activities
- Are work planning processes result-based[29]?
- Consider the financial management of the project, with specific reference to the cost-effectiveness of interventions. Any irregularities must be noted.

(d) Reporting
- Assess how adaptive management changes have been reported by the project management
- Assess how lessons derived from the adaptive management process have been documented, shared with key partners and internalized by partners.

3. Underlying Factors

- Assess the underlying factors beyond the project's immediate control that influence outcomes and results. Consider the appropriateness and effectiveness of the project's management strategies for these factors.
- Re-test the assumptions made by the project management and identify new assumptions that should be made
- Assess the effect of any incorrect assumptions made by the project

4. UNDP Contribution

- Assess the role of UNDP against the requirements set out in the UNDP Handbook on Monitoring and Evaluating for Results. Consider:
    - Field visits
    - Steering Committee/TOR follow-up and analysis
    - PIR preparation and follow-up
    - GEF guidance
- Consider the new UNDP requirements outlined in the UNDP User Guide[30], especially the Project Assurance role, and ensure they are incorporated into the project's adaptive management framework
- Assess the contribution to the project from UNDP "soft" assistance (i.e. policy advice & dialogue, advocacy, and coordination).

5. Partnership Strategy

[28] UNDP-GEF's system is based on the Atlas Risk Module. See the UNDP-GEF Risk Management Strategy resource kit, available as Annex XI at http://www.undp.org/gef/05/monitoring/policies.html

[29] RBM Support documents are available at http://www.undp.org/eo/methodologies.htm

[30] The UNDP User Guide is currently only available on UNDP's intranet. However UNDP can provide the necessary section on roles and responsibility from http://content.undp.org/go/userguide/results/rmoverview/progprojorg/?src=print

- Assess how partners are involved in the project's adaptive management framework:
    - Involving partners and stakeholders in the selection of indicators and other measures of performance
    - Using already existing data and statistics
    - Analysing progress towards results and determining project strategies.
- Identify opportunities for stronger substantive partnerships;
- Assess how local stakeholders participate in project management and decision-making. Include an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the approach adopted by the project and suggestions for improvement if necessary.
- Consider the dissemination of project information to partners and stakeholders and if necessary suggest more appropriate mechanisms.

Scope of the evaluation

The Final evaluation is to consider that a mid-term evaluation has been completed and that the management of the project has prepared management response to this evaluation and to a certain degree, tailored further activities in the project taking into consideration the recommendations from the mid-term evaluation.

A separate evaluation on the small grants programme implemented in the project has been conducted in May 2009. Thus, it is anticipated that the final evaluation does not concentrate on the evaluation of the small grants per se, but to use the evaluation conducted as a resource for its conclusions on this particular output.

Due to the broad scale of the project objectives and the large territory the North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve covers, it is important for the evaluators to be careful in selecting stakeholders to be included in the evaluation to form as objective a picture of the project results, accomplishments and remaining challenges as possible.

Ownership of the project processes and outcomes by the key stakeholders will be one of the key factors in project success to achieve project sustainability and thus the evaluators are asked to make an objective assessment of the ownership of the project outcomes/results by the key stakeholders.

PRODUCTS EXPECTED FROM THE EVALUATION

The key product expected from this final evaluation is a comprehensive analytical report in English that should, at least, include the following contents:

Please note that some of the categories in the findings and conclusions need to be rated in conformity with the GEF guidelines for final evaluations.

1. Executive summary
- Brief description of project
- Context and purpose of the evaluation
- Main conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned

2. Introduction
- Purpose of the evaluation
- Key issues addressed
- Methodology of the evaluation
- Structure of the evaluation

3. The project(s) and its development context
- Project start and its duration

- Problems that the project seek to address
- Immediate and development objectives of the project
- Main stakeholders
- Results expected

4. Findings and Conclusions

In addition to a descriptive assessment, all criteria marked with (R) should be rated using the following divisions: Highly Satisfactory, Satisfactory, Marginally Satisfactory, Unsatisfactory

4.1. Project Formulation

Conceptualization/Design (R). This should assess the approach used in design and an appreciation of the appropriateness of problem conceptualization and whether the selected intervention strategy addressed the root causes and principal threats in the project area. It should also include an assessment of the logical framework and whether the different project components and activities proposed to achieve the objective were appropriate, viable and responded to contextual institutional, legal and regulatory settings of the project. It should also assess the indicators defined for guiding implementation and measurement of achievement and whether lessons from other relevant projects (e.g., same focal area) were incorporated into project design.

Country-ownership/Driveness. Assess the extent to which the project idea/conceptualization had its origin within national, sectoral and development plans and focuses on national environment and development interests.

Stakeholder participation (R) Assess information dissemination, consultation, and "stakeholder" participation in design stages.

Replication approach. Determine the ways in which lessons and experiences coming out of the project were/are to be replicated or scaled up in the design and implementation of other projects (this also related to actual practices undertaken during implementation).

Other aspects to assess in the review of Project formulation approaches would be UNDP comparative advantage as IA for this project; the consideration of linkages between projects and other interventions within the sector and the definition of clear and appropriate management arrangements at the design stage.

4.2. Project Implementation

Implementation Approach (R). This should include assessments of the following aspects:

(i) The use of the logical framework as a management tool during implementation and any changes made to this as a response to changing conditions and/or feedback from M and E activities if required.

(ii) Other elements that indicate adaptive management such as comprehensive and realistic work plans routinely developed that reflect adaptive management and/or; changes in management arrangements to enhance implementation.

(iii) The project's use/establishment of electronic information technologies to support implementation, participation and monitoring, as well as other project activities.

(iv) The general operational relationships between the institutions involved and others and how these relationships have contributed to effective implementation and achievement of project objectives.

(v) Technical capacities associated with the project and their role in project development, management and achievements.

Monitoring and evaluation (R). Including an assessment as to whether there has been adequate periodic oversight of activities during implementation to establish the extent to which inputs, work schedules, other required actions and outputs are proceeding according to plan; whether formal evaluations have been held and whether action has been taken on the results of this monitoring oversight and evaluation reports.

Stakeholder participation (R). This should include assessments of the mechanisms for information dissemination in project implementation and the extent of stakeholder participation in management, emphasizing the following:

(i) The production and dissemination of information generated by the project.

(ii)Local resource users and NGOs participation in project implementation and decision making and an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the approach adopted by the project in this arena.

(iii) The establishment of partnerships and collaborative relationships developed by the project with local, national and international entities and the effects they have had on project implementation.

(iv) Involvement of governmental institutions in project implementation, the extent of governmental support of the project.

Financial Planning: Including an assessment of:

(i) The actual project cost by objectives, outputs, activities

(ii) The cost-effectiveness of achievements

(iii) Financial management (including disbursement issues)

(iv) Co-financing [31]

- Sustainability. Extent to which the benefits of the project will continue, within or outside the project domain, after it has come to an end. Relevant factors include for example: development of a sustainability strategy, establishment of financial and economic instruments and mechanisms, mainstreaming project objectives into the economy or community production activities.

Execution and implementation modalities. This should consider the effectiveness of the UNDP counterpart and Project Co-ordination Unit participation in selection, recruitment, assignment of experts, consultants and national counterpart staff members and in the definition of tasks and responsibilities; quantity, quality and timeliness of inputs for the project with respect to execution responsibilities, enactment of necessary legislation and budgetary provisions and extent to which these may have affected implementation and sustainability of the Project;

[31] Please see guidelines at the end of Annex 1 of these TORs for reporting of co-financing

quality and timeliness of inputs by UNDP and GoC and other parties responsible for providing inputs to the project, and the extent to which this may have affected the smooth implementation of the project.

4.3. Results

Attainment of Outcomes/ Achievement of objectives (R)*:* Including a description *and rating* of the extent to which the project's objectives (environmental and developmental) were achieved using Highly Satisfactory, Satisfactory, Marginally Satisfactory, and Unsatisfactory ratings. If the project did not establish a baseline (initial conditions), the evaluators should seek to determine it through the use of special methodologies so that achievements, results and impacts can be properly established.

This section should also include reviews of the following:

Sustainability*:* Including an appreciation of the extent to which benefits continue, within or outside the project domain after GEF assistance/external assistance in this phase has come to an end.

- Contribution to upgrading skills of the national staff

5. Recommendations

- *Corrective actions for the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the project*
- *Actions to follow up or reinforce initial benefits from the project*
- *Proposals for future directions underlining main objectives*

6. Lessons learned

This should highlight the best and worst practices in addressing issues relating to relevance, performance and success.

7. Evaluation report Annexes

Evaluation TORs

The length of the final evaluation report shall not exceed 50 pages in total (not including annexes).

Evaluation team

A team of independent experts will conduct the evaluation. The evaluators selected should not have participated in the project preparation and/or implementation and should not have conflict of interest with project related activities.

The evaluation team will be composed of one International Consultant or team leader and one National Consultant. The consultants shall have prior experience in evaluating similar projects. Former cooperation with GEF is an advantage.

Team Qualities:

(i) Recent experience with result-based management evaluation methodologies;
(ii) Experience applying participatory monitoring approaches;
(iii) Experience applying SMART indicators and reconstructing or validating baseline scenarios;
(iv) Recent knowledge of the GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy;
(v) Recent knowledge of UNDP's results-based evaluation policies and procedures

(vi) Competence in Adaptive Management, as applied to conservation or natural resource management projects;
(vii) Recognized expertise in the management and sustainable use of wetlands in temperate ecosystems;
(viii) Familiarity with protected area policies and management structures in Latvia;
(ix) Demonstrable analytical skills;
(x) Work experience in relevant areas for at least 10 years;
(xi) Experience with multilateral or bilateral supported conservation projects;
(xii) Project evaluation experiences within United Nations system will be considered an asset;
(xiii) Excellent English communication skills.

Specifically, the international expert (team leader) will perform the following tasks:

- Lead and manage the evaluation mission;
- Design the detailed evaluation scope and methodology (including the methods for data collection and analysis);
- Assist in drafting terms of reference of the national consultant(s)
- Decide the division of labor within the evaluation team;
- Conduct an analysis of the outcome, outputs and partnership strategy (as per the scope of the evaluation described above);
- Draft related parts of the evaluation report; and
- Finalize the whole evaluation report.

The National Consultant will provide input in reviewing all project documentation and will provide the International Consultant with a compilation of information prior to the evaluation mission. Specifically, the national expert will perform tasks with a focus on:

- Review documents;
- Prepare a list of the outputs achieved under project;
- Organize the mission programme and provide translation/interpretation when necessary;
- Participate in the design of the evaluation methodology;
- Conduct an analysis of the outcome, outputs and partnership strategy (as per the scope of the evaluation described above);
- Draft related parts of the evaluation report;
- Assist Team leader in finalizing document through incorporating suggestions received on draft related to his/her assigned sections.

Individual consultants are invited to submit applications together with their CV for a position. Applications are welcome from anyone who feels they can contribute to the team because they possess three or more of the listed qualities. Obviously the more qualities that can be demonstrated, the better the chance of selection.

Joint proposals from two independent evaluators are welcome. Or alternatively, proposals will be accepted from recognized consulting firms to field a complete team with the required expertise within the evaluation budget.

The evaluation will be undertaken in-line with GEF principles[32]:

- Independence
- Impartiality
- Transparency
- Disclosure
- Ethical

[32] See p.16 of the GEF's Monitoring and Evaluation Policy

- Partnership
- Competencies and Capacities
- Credibility
- Utility

The evaluators must be independent from both the policy-making process and the delivery and management of assistance. Therefore applications will not be considered from evaluators who have had any direct involvement with the design or implementation of the project. This may apply equally to evaluators who are associated with organizations, universities or entities that are, or have been, involved in the NVBR policy-making process and/or delivery of the project. Any previous association with the project, the NVBR Administration, the Ministry of Environment, UNDP-Latvia or other partners/stakeholders must be disclosed in the application. This applies equally to firms submitting proposals as it does to individual evaluators.

If selected, failure to make the above disclosures will be considered just grounds for immediate contract termination, without recompense. In such circumstances, all notes, reports and other documentation produced by the evaluator will be retained by UNDP.

If individual evaluators are selected, UNDP will appoint one Team Leader. The Team Leader will have overall responsibility for the delivery and quality of the evaluation products. Team roles and responsibilities will be reflected in the individual contracts. If a proposal is accepted from a consulting firm, the firm will be held responsible for the delivery and quality of the evaluation products and therefore has responsibility for team management arrangements.

METHODOLOGY OR EVALUATION APPROACH

An outline of an evaluation approach is provided below, however the evaluation team is responsible for revising the approach as necessary. Any changes should be in-line with international criteria and professional norms and standards (as adopted by the UN Evaluation Group[33]). They must be also cleared by UNDP before being applied by the evaluation team.

The evaluation must provide evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful. It must be easily understood by project partners and applicable to the remaining period of project duration.

The evaluation should provide as much gender disaggregated data as possible.

The methodology to be used by the evaluation team should be presented in the report in detail. It shall include information on:

- Documentation review (desk study) - the list of documentation to be reviewed is included in the Annex A to the Terms of Reference);
- Interviews will be held with the following organizations and individuals at minimum: UNDP – Latvia, UNDP/GEF RTA, NVBR Administration, project team, Steering Committee, Latvian Fund for Nature, representatives of key municipalities;
- Field visits;
- Questionnaires;
- Participatory techniques and other approaches for the gathering and analysis of data.

Implementation Arrangements

The principal responsibility for managing this evaluation lies with UNDP-Latvia. The UNDP Latvia Project Office is the main operational point for the evaluation responsible for liaising with the project team to set up the stakeholder interviews, arrange the field visits and co-ordinate with the Executing

[33] See http://www.uneval.org/

Agency and other counterparts. UNDP-Latvia will contract the evaluators and ensure the timely provision of per diems and travel arrangements within the country for the evaluation team. The Project implementation unit will be responsible for liaising with the evaulation team to set up stakeholder interviews, arrange field visits, coordinate with the Government and ensure the timely provision of per diems and travel arrangements.

Timeframe for submission of first draft of the report: 6 weeks upon signing the contract.
The report shall be submitted to the UNDP Latvia Projects office (Ms. Silvija Kalnins, address: Pils 21, LV 1167 Rīga, tel. 7503688, fax 750 3601)

Prior to approval of the final report, a draft version shall be circulated for comments to government counterparts and project management: The Project Director and Director of the NVBR Administration, Mr. Valerijs Seilis and members of the project steering group members representing the following institutions:

- The Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Latvia
- The Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Latvia
- Latvian Environment, Geology and Meteorology Agency
- State Stock Company "Latvia's State Forests"
- State Forest service
- Vidzeme University College
- Staicele town council
- Valmiera district council
- Valka district council
- Limbažu district council
- State regional Development Agency
- Latvian Ornithological Society
- Vidzeme development Agency
- European stork city organization
- Forest holder Society
- Club "Uzņēmēji"(Entrepreneurs) in Valkas district
- United Nations Development Programme;

If any discrepancies have emerged between impressions and findings of the evaluation team and the aforementioned parties, these should be explained in an annex attached to the final report.

The activity and timeframe are broken down as follows:

Activity	Timeframe and responsible party
desk review	5 days by the international expert, 8 days by the national consultant
briefings for evaluators	1 day by the team
visits to the field, interviews, questionnaires, de-briefings	9 days by the international consultant, 11 days by the national consultant
Preparation of draft report, validation of preliminary findings with stakeholders through circulation of initial reports for comments, meetings and other types of feedback mechanisms	4 days by the evaluation team
Finalization of the evaluation report (incorporating comments received on first draft)	3 days by the international evaluator, 1 day by the national

ANNEX II : ITINERARY OF ACTIVITIES OF THE FINAL EVALUATION MISSION

Key: PE (Phillip Edwards); MK (Maija Kurte).
* = Member of Prespa Project Steering Committee.

Date		Activities
Sun	2nd August	Evaluation team leader PE arrives in Riga
Mon	3rd August	am: 1. Final Evaluation Team meeting (PE and MK). 2. Meeting with National Project Manager (Mr Jānis Ģērmanis). pm: 1. Meeting with Ministry of Environment, (Ms Vija Buša*). 2. Meeting with Institutional Capacity and Management Team leader (Ms. Iveta Teibe). 3. Meeting with UNDP Project Office Programme Assistant (Mr Arvis Vilciņš).
Tue	4th August	am: 1. Travel to Salacgrīva. 2. Meeting with NPD and Director of NVBR Administration, (Mr Valērijs Seilis*). 3. Meeting with Chairman of Nature Protection Agency (Mr. Jānis Strautnieks) pm: 1. Meeting with NVBR Administration PR Manager (Mr Andris Soms). 2. Meeting with Community Involvement and Education Expert (Ms Inta Soma). 3. Meeting with Institutional Capacity and Management Team Leader (Ms. Marina Gurbo). 4. Meeting with Head of the UNDP Projects Office in Latvia (Mrs Silvija Nora Kalniņš). 5. Signal Crayfish catching event.
Wed	5th August	am: 1. Meeting with Salacgrīva County Mayor (Mr Dagnis Straubergs). 2. Travel to Limbazi. 3. Meeting with Representative of Limbazi District Council, (Ms Spīdola Lielmane*). pm: 1. Meeting with Limbazi County Mayor (Mr. Didzis Zemmers), County Vice Mayor (Mr Ziedonis Rubenis) and Executive Director (Mr Agris Blumers, Limbazi). 2. Travel to Salacgrīva . 3. Meeting with NPD, Director of NVBR Administration, (Mr Valērijs Seilis*).
Thu	6th August	am: 1. Visit to Randu coastal meadows, Salacgrīva (PE). 2. Meeting with NVBR Research and Development Manager, Administration Vice-Director (Mr Andris Urtāns). 3. Travel to Staicele. 4. Meeting with Staicele Municipality ex-Mayor, Aloja County Vice Mayor, (Mr Jānis Bakmanis*) and visit to Staicele Dam pm: 1. Travel to Mazsalaca. 2. Meeting with Mazsalaca County Mayor (Mr Gunārs Zunda) and Director of Nature Park "Skaņaiskalns", Deputy of Mazsalaca County Council (Mr Valdis Kampuss). 3. Travel to Valmiera. 4. Meeting with Representatives of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (Ms Iveta Druva-Druvaskalne*) and (Prof. Agita Līviņa).
Fri	7th August	am: 1. Travel to Rūjiena. 2. Meeting with Landscape ecological Planning Implementation expert (Ms Nadežda Graudiņa). 3. Travel to Naukšēni. 4. Meeting with NVBR Senior Expert in Geology (Mr Dainis Ozols), and visit to small-grant recipient site. pm: 1. Travel to Burtnieki. 2. Visit to Lake Burtnieki Project site. 3. Travel to Valmiera
Sat	8th August	All day: Sight-seeing around NVBR (PE).
Sun	9th August	am: 1. Visit to Seda Wetland site (PE). pm: Free.
Mon	10th August	am: 1. Travel to Strenči. 2. Meeting with NVBR Nature Protection Department Manager (Mr Aldis Liepiņš) and NVBR Senior Expert, North Gauja Project Manager (Ms Rūta Zepa). 3. Travel to Jērcēni. 4. Meeting with Representative of NGO "Valka District Enterepreneurs Club", (Mr Dainis Zuika*). pm: 1. Travel to Valmiera. 2. Meeting with Managing Director of JSC "Latvian State Forests"Western Vidzeme Region (Mr Vilmārs Katkovskis*). 3. Travel to Riga.
Tue	11th August	am: 1. Meeting with representatives of Latvian Nature Foundation (Ms Inga Račinska and Mr Ainārs Auniņš). 2. Meeting with Alternative Economic Development Team Leader (Ms Laura Zvingule). 3. Meeting with PR Manager, Communication Strategy Development Team Leader (Ms Aija Jakubovska) (MK).

Date		Activities
		pm: 1. Meeting with UNDP Project Office Programme Assistant (Mr Arvis Vilciņš). 2. Report writing.
Wed	12th August	am: 1. FET meeting. 2. Document review. pm: 1. Meeting with Project Manager (Mr Jānis Ģērmanis). 2. Skype meeting with Regional Technical Advisor for Biodiversity for Europe and CIS (Ms. Adriana Dinu).
Thu	13th August	am: 1. Meeting with NPM (Mr Jānis Ģērmanis) and travel together to Project sites. 2. Visit to Limbazi County "Smēdes", river bank restoration site. 3. Visit to Niedrāju-Pilku Bog Nature Trail. 4. Visit to Salacgrīva coastal forest demonstration project site. pm: 1. Meeting with Project and NVBR Information System Maintenance Specialist (Mr Edgars Kukuts) (MK). 2. Travel to Naukšēni with Alternative Economic Development Team Leader (Ms Laura Zvingule) and Project Manager (Jānis Ģērmanis). 3. Visit to small-grant recipient site in Naukšēni (Mr Ilmārs Baunis, Ms Inese Baune) 4. Travel to Valmiera. 5. Meeting with Managing Director of JSC "Latvian State Forests"Eastern Vidzeme Region (Mr Aigars Dudelis). 6. Travel to Riga.
Fri	14th August	am: 1. FET meeting. 2. Meeting with former National Project Manager (Dr Otars Opermanis). pm: 1. Meeting with Director of Nature Protection Department, Ministry of Environment (Ms Daiga Vilkaste). 2. Meeting with NPM (Mr. Jānis Ģērmanis).
Sat	15th August	am: Report writing pm: Report writing
Sun	16th August	am: Report writing pm: free
Mon	17th August	am: 1. FET meeting. 2. Meeting with Project Manager Estonian Latvian Lithuanian Environment Ltd (Ms Lūcija Konošonoka). pm: De-briefing meeting with NPM (Mr. Jānis Ģērmanis).
Tue	18th August	am: FET Leader PE departs Riga

ANNEX III : PERSONS INTERVIEWED

* = PSC Member.
(T) = telephone/skype interview. Alphabetic order.

UNDP / GEF

Adriana Dinu	Regional Technical Advisor for Biodiversity for Europe and CIS (T)
Arvis Vilciņš	Program Assistant, UNDP Latvia Project Office
Silvija Nora Kalniņš*	Head of the UNDP Projects Office in Latvia

Project Staff

Aija Jakubovska	PR Manager, Communication Strategy Development Team Leader
Inta Soma	Community Involvement and Education Expert
Iveta Teibe	Institutional Capacity and Management Team leader, Jan. 2005 to Dec. 2006.
Jānis Ģērmanis	National Project Manager Sept. 2008 to present.
Laura Zvingule	Alternative Economic Development Team Leader
Marina Gurbo	Institutional Capacity and Management Team Leader, Mar. 2007 to Aug. 2009.
Nadežda Graudiņa	Landscape ecological Planning Implementation Expert
Otars Opermanis*	National Project Manager, July 2004 to Sept. 2008.

North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve Administration

Aldis Liepiņš	Manager of Nature Protection Department, NVBR
Andris Soms	PR Manager of NVBR
Andris Urtāns.	Vice-Director of NVBRA and Manager of Research and Development, NVBR.
Dainis Ozols	Senior Expert in Geology NVBR
Rūta Zepa	Senior Expert, NVBR, North Gauja Project
Valērijs Seilis*	Director of NVBRA and National Project Director

Project Consultants

Agita Līviņa	Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences, Consultant on NVBR Sustainable Development Profile and Scientific Conference organiser
Ainārs Auniņš	Latvian Nature Foundation, Consultant on Restoration activities
Edgars Kukuts	Project and NVBR Information system Maintenance Service.
Inga Račinska	Latvian Nature Foundation, Consultant on Restoration activities
Iveta Druva-Druvaskalne*	Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences, Consultant on NVBR Sustainable Development Profile and Scientific Conference organiser.
Lūcija Konošonoka	Estonian Latvian Lithuanian Environment Ltd., Consultant on the Development of Landscape Ecological Plan.

Government Departments

Daiga Vilkaste	Director Nature Protection Department, Ministry of Environment.
Jānis Strautnieks	Chairman of Nature Protection Agency.
Vija Buša*	Protected Area Unit manager, Nature Protection Department, Ministry of Environment.

Local Government Administration

Dagnis Straubergs	Mayor of Salacgrīva County.
Spīdola Lielmane*	Representative of Limbazi District Council
Didzis Zemmers	Mayor of Limbazi County.
Agris Blumers	Executive Director of Limbazi County.
Ziedonis Rubenis.	Vice Mayor of Limbazi County.
Jānis Bakmanis*	Ex-mayor of Staicele Municipality, and Vice Mayor of Aloja County
Gunārs Zunda	Mayor of Mazsalaca County
Valdis Kampuss	Director of Nature Park "Skaņaiskalns", Deputy of Mazsalaca County Council.

NGOs

Ainārs Auniņš	Latvian Nature Foundation.
Dainis Zuika*	Chairman of "Valka District Enterepreneurs Club".
Inga Račinska	Board of Latvian Nature Foundation.

Commercial Organisations

Aigars Dudelis	Managing Director Eastern Vidzeme Region, JSC [Latvian State Forests].
Ilmārs Baunis	Farmer, small grant recipient
Vilmārs Katkovskis*	Managing Director Western Vidzeme Region, JSC [Latvian State Forests].

ANNEX IV : SUMMARY EVALUATION OF PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS BY OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

The initial Project logframe was revised several times during the Project with the final version being approved by the PSC on 5th July 2007. The present evaluation matrix uses this revised logframe.

KEY:

GREEN = Indicators show achievement successful at the end of the Project.

YELLOW = Indicators show achievement nearly successful at the end of the Project.

RED = Indicators not achieved at the end of Project

Project Goal: To optimise biodiversity conservation practice in Latvia's protected areas and associated landscapes.

#	Aim	Performance Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Delivery Status at Terminal Evaluation	Comments	HS	S	MS	MU	U	HU
1	**Objective**: Secure the globally significant biodiversity values of North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve by implementing a set of initiatives required for integrating biodiversity conservation into the planning, management and sustainable use of the Reserve.	Increase of core areas to represent 5% of the NVBR area	4%	5%	7.7%	Increase arises from newly declared strictly protected areas within NVBR, however no re-zoning has occurred.						
2		Populations of key indicator species maintained at [or above] the baseline level: Wolf *Canis lupus* (number of animals, SFS count)	29 (2004)	30	45 (2008)							
		Lynx *Lynx lynx* (number of animals, SFS count)	102 (2004)	100	210 (2008)							
		Salmon *Salmo salar* (smolt production in Salaca river; thousands)	10 (2004)	15	25 (2008)							
		Great snipe *Gallinago media* (leks with >1 male)	6 (2004)	6	7 (2008)							
3		Areas (ha) of threatened habitats under conservation management:				Floodplain grasslands and river rapids have come under 5-year management agreements from						

#	Aim	Performance Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Delivery Status at Terminal Evaluation	Comments	HS	S	MS	MU	U	HU
		Floodplain grasslands	0 (2004)	600	622 (2008)	the Project's habitat restoration scheme		■				
		River rapids	0 (2004)	18	32 (2006)							
		Woodland key habitats	409 (2004)	1,000	2,276 (2007)	Official statistics of State Forest Information System. Woodland key habitats automatically come under conservation management by the State Forest Service	■					
4		Improved management effectiveness of NVBR administration; METT score	42 (2005)	70	67 (2009)	Target achieved except for minor discrepancies relating to time staff spend on various functions			■			
5	**Outcome 1**: Improved information on the NVBR and its biodiversity, as well as the information's management and use in decision-making.	Percentage of application responses by NVBR administration not exceeding time as set in the legislation:				Some applications connected to requirements new to NVBRA (e.g. Landscape Ecological Plan) required checking in the field and therefore greater time requirements..		■				
		To Valmiera Regional Environmental board	40 (2004)	100	75							
		To other applicants (local people, stakeholders, etc.)	40 (2004)	90	94	Response target to local stakeholders achieved	■					
6		Number of cases[34] when key stakeholders declared having used the information and monitoring system in their decision-making process:				These two indicators are being assessed by independent consultants during the Final Evaluation Teams' mission and will report by the end of August 2009.						
		Municipalities	0	10								
		Private landowners	0	20								
7	**Outcome 2**: Strengthened institutional capacity and multi-sectoral and participatory mechanisms for	Proportion of time that NVBR staff devotes to following issues (percentages by categories):	(2005)		(2009)	Failure to reach targets are in part from too few staff, and in part from a prioritization in their mandate for internal administration over research, education, and partnerships			■			
		Projects	26	25	19							
		NVBR internal administration and communication	34	25	34							

[34] In PIR 2006 we used 'percentage of key stakeholders'; this was changed to 'number of cases' as a special enquiry must be organized to get the percentages. Also, number of cases could illustrate better project success as one important stakeholder might use the IS many times.

#	Aim	Performance Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Delivery Status at Terminal Evaluation	Comments	HS	S	MS	MU	U	HU
	governance and management of the Reserve.	Regulatory functions	22	15	19							
		Habitat management	1	5	3							
		Research	5	10	4							
		Education	5	10	7							
		Maintaining/establishing partnerships	7	10	8							
8		Patrolling activity and law abidance by NVBR inhabitants and guests: Number of patrol campaigns committed by NVBR inspectors at the seacoast	216	180	(2009) 65	Aim was to decrease policing function and increase awareness/education. Fall in violations at coast almost certainly connected with decreased number of patrols rather than increased environmental awareness.						
		Number of violations recorded/ penalties at the seacoast	156	50	10							
		Number of patrol campaigns committed by NVBR inspectors in Salaca river	46	50	48							
		Number of violations recorded/ penalties in Salaca river	28	5	106	Increase largely due to illegal fishing (without licence) and is directly attributable to poor economic condition in Latvia.						
9		Percentage of NVBR advisory board members representing interests of local stakeholders	60	75	80 (2009)							
10		NVBR resources to meet minimum management requirements: State budget, US$	(2004) 111,920.86	400,000.00	273,610.23 (2008)	Progress towards the target was being made, e.g. in 2007 the total was US$ 331,290.00. The subsequent decrease is directly attributable to the economic crisis, but still represents a significant increase over baseline levels.						

#	Aim	Performance Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Delivery Status at Terminal Evaluation	Comments	HS	S	MS	MU	U	HU
		Projects (excluding UNDP/GEF project), US$	25,461.94	200,000.00	273,443.51 (2008)	NB was US$ 855,793.00 in 2007 but two EU LIFE projects ended in 2008. One NVBRA staff member now almost full-time working on attracting project funding. High probability that this figure will rise sharply in 2010.						
		Staff size	8	11	11 (June 2009)	NB was 13 in 2007 but 2 book-keepers fired in June 2009 when reorganisation of accounting functions undertaken.						
11	**Outcome 3**: Identification of potential reforms to existing policies, legislation and incentive/regulatory frameworks for resource use, with the aim of stimulating or supporting biodiversity-friendly behaviour.	Amount (LVL[35]) paid to farmers as economic incentives to modify agricultural practices to be biodiversity friendly (Valmieras, Valkas, Limbažu, Cēsu regions):	(2004)									
		Development of biological agriculture	711,007.06	1,000,000	3,459,042.70 (2008)							
		Conservation of biological diversity in grasslands (late mowing, extensive grazing)	128,939.81	250,000	673,877.15 (2008)							
		Preservation of genetic resources of agricultural animals	32,753.62	30,000	Programme terminated							
12		Compliance with International obligations in Biosphere Reserve management in NVBR law.	100%	100%	100%							
13	**Outcome 4**: Integrated ecological landscape planning for the NVBR.	Percentage of NVBR area managed in accordance with ecological landscape planning principles.	0	10%	17.7%	Area includes legally defined nature protection (core) zone of NVBR, plus Natura 2000 sites that are outside this core zone,						

[35] 1.00USD=0.51LVL

#	Aim	Performance Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Delivery Status at Terminal Evaluation	Comments	HS	S	MS	MU	U	HU
						together totalling 7.7% of the NVBR. The additional 10% comes from land under 4 Municipalities which have included the Landscape Ecological Plan principles within their legally adopted Municipal Spatial Plans.						
14		Number of municipal development plans adapted to incorporate ecological landscape planning requirements	0	5	4	The planning cycle for municipal plans coincided with the possibility of including the Landscape Ecological plan in only 4 Municipalities during the Project's lifetime – a 100% take-up.						
15		Percentage of targeted private lands (by area) that follow biodiversity conservation actions as required in the NVBR management plan	0	25		Will be reported in final PIR. Depends on interpretation. In NATURA 2000 sites it is close to 100%, while outside less than 10%. Separate evaluation will be concluded by end of project.						
16	**Outcome 5**: Demonstration of alternative biodiversity-supporting economic activities for local communities in forestry, agriculture and tourism.	Number of targeted households that have replaced activities detrimental to biodiversity with biodiversity-friendly activities.	0	20	41	Number = small grants allocated to people who agreed to change activities. Even if take a longer term view by looking at number who were successful (66% - see below), the total is still 27 and above target value.						
17		Percentage of alternative income-generating activities supported by the project rated as successful.	n/a	75	66 (2009)	66% arises from an independent evaluation – see paragraph 76. Discrepancy almost certainly attributable to economic crisis.						
18	**Outcome 6**: Increased awareness of and support for biodiversity conservation and	Proportion (%) of negative responses by the Regional Environmental Board on NVBR inhabitants' applications on use	14 (Jul 2006- Jul 2007)	10	9 (Jul 2008- Jul 2009)							

#	Aim	Performance Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Delivery Status at Terminal Evaluation	Comments	HS	S	MS	MU	U	HU
	sustainable development among all stakeholders.	of natural resources.										
19		Number of people participating in voluntary monitoring programme	0	400	409							
20		Support by the general public and authorities on NVBR activities for biodiversity conservation. % of positive answers vs all respondents.	64.5 (2003)	70	86 (2008)							
21	**Outcome 7**: Habitat restoration at selected sites to maintain and enhance globally significant biodiversity.	Salmon is spawning in upper reaches of Salaca river (upstream from Staicele town)	No	Yes	No.	Dam at Staicele not removed because of conflict over compensation. Project has made significant advances towards achieving this aim which could still bear fruit after end of Project.						
22		Percentage of giant hogweed covered agricultural lands (estimated 40 ha in 2006) under management, i.e., continuous cleaning of infected areas. Information from the Agricultural Support Service.	0	50	51 (2008)	Data from Rural Support Service. Project has helped by collecting distribution information of hogweed through EcoWatch scheme.						
23		Numbers of target species in floodplain meadows restored by the project: Corncrakes *Crex crex* (calling males)	(2005) 40-58	 60-100	(2009) 39-69							
		Great Snipe *Gallinago media* (lekking males)	32-41	50-60	55-71							
24		Water quality in rivers (Seda, Rūja, Briede, Dūre, Ēķinupe, Ramata, Salaca, Iģe, Korģe); percentages by categories: Very good	(2001-02) 60	 70	(2008) 15	Data not comparable. Initially data from limited survey points (3-4) by Environmental Geological and Meteorological Agency via national monitoring						

#	Aim	Performance Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Delivery Status at Terminal Evaluation	Comments	HS	S	MS	MU	U	HU
		Good	40	30	85	programme. New data includes additional points from EcoWatch scheme, and year on year does not necessarily include measurements taken from same points on river. Thus, evaluation of this indicator is not possible.						
		Medium	0	0	0							
		Low	0	0	0							
25	**Outcome 8**: Systematic identification and dissemination of lessons learned and best practices through ministerial and NGO channels throughout Latvia.	An independent panel with representatives of NGOs, local authorities and the MoE evaluate the codification of lessons and dissemination as successful.	n/a	Successful	Successful							
26		Number of cases when other protected territories have applied approaches and methodology developed in this project, particularly ecological landscape planning, voluntary monitoring and demonstration projects.				Public monitoring has been replicated in Kemeri National Park, Gauja National Park, Nature Society Kruzes (Vidzeme region), Zemgale Nature Management Authority, and Ecological Landscape plan: Razna Nature Park.						
		In Latvia	0	5	5							
		Abroad	0	1	2	Nature Concert Halls by Maramures NP, Romania; and EcoWatch programme by Sept Vallees College, the Artois Picardie Agency, and the Canche Water Agency, France. Also elements of EcoWatch included in Rhodope Mountains GEF project, Bulgaria.						

ANNEX V : LIST OF PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

	Representative	**Institution**
1.	Vilmārs Katkovskis	State Company "Latvian State Forests" (elected Chair of PSC)
2.	Valērijs Seilis	North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve Administration (Project Director)
3.	Silvija Nora Kalniņš	UNDP Office
4.	Vija Buša	Nature Protection Department, Ministry of Environment
5.	Vilnis Bernards	Nature Protection Department, Ministry of Environment
6.	Aiva Zvirbule	Ministry of Agriculture
7.	Kristīne Puriņa	Ministry of Agriculture
8.	Aigars Kalvāns	State Forest Service
9.	Anta Vērdiņa	State Regional Development Agency
10.	Nora Kabuce	Latvian Environment, Geology, and Meteorology Agency
11.	Iveta Druva-Druvaskalne	Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences
12.	Ginta Zariņa	Valmieras District Council
13.	Gunta Smane	Valka District Council
14.	Spīdola Lielmane	Limbaži District Council
15.	Jānis Bakmanis	Staicele Town Council
16.	Jolanta Jakste	Vidzeme Development Agency
17.	Edmunds Račinskis	Latvian Ornithological Society
18.	Arnis Muižnieks	NGO "Association of Forest Owners"
19.	Dainis Zuika	NGO Valka Distric club "Enterpreneuers"

ANNEX VI : LIST OF INDICATORS MEASURED BY THE ECOWATCH PUBLIC MONITORING PROGRAMME

1. Agricultural dates (time of hay-making, time of ploughing).
2. The biological quality of water.
3. Lichens as air quality indicators.
4. Distribution of giant hogweed.
5. Distribution of orchids.
6. Distribution of secular trees;
7. Presence of hermit beetle (*Osmoderma eremite*).
8. Diversity of dragonflies.
9. Distribution of white stork (*Ciconia ciconia*).
10. Dates of sightings of migratory birds.
11. Presence and numbers of sand martin colonies.
12. Hunted waterbirds (reports from the hunting sites);
13. Inventory of night birds and corncrakes.
14. Distribution and number of European beaver (*Castor fiber)*.
15. Population of bats in deserted buildings.
16. Diversity of molluscs.
17. Presence of alleys and tree-rows (usually along roads).
18. Birds nesting in farmsteads.
19. Presence of birds at bird tables.

ANNEX VII : LIST OF PROJECTS APPROVED UNDER SMALL GRANT PROGRAMME

No	Title of the Project	UNDP/GEF input in US$ *
1.	Building of slaughterhouse for rabbits	2,385.30
2.	Management of nature trail	1,393.46
3.	Shiitake growing training centre with trend in tourism	1,329.87
4.	Development of craft work in Vīksnas	1,288.43
5.	Increasing competitiveness of tourism farm "Korķi"	3,220.21
6.	Biodiversity protection along the river Korģe	5,088.80
7.	Meadow – water – cattle	3,314.24
8.	Management of riverbanks along the rivers Rūja and Ķire	5,350.19
9.	Improving environment	4,278.03
10.	Improving the quality of honey	1,136.13
11.	Paradise apple orchards	3,795.09
12.	Improving environment around the guest house	5,289.15
13.	Mowing meadows for chinchillas	2,499.94
14.	Improvement of recreational place "Bruņķīši"	2,106.30
15.	Cattle breeding	3,150.17
16.	Bird and animal watching in the territory of farm "Jasmīni"	3,669.24
17.	Sheep-farming	5,320.04
18.	Renovation of old barn for storing hempseeds	3,044.62
19.	Establishing of new service – production delivery from farm to customers' door	4,743.83
20.	Sea-buckthorn – resource of healthy juice	3,507.52
21.	Handicraft studio "Vēveri"	5,303.27
22.	Renewal of bee-garden equipment	1,363.91
23.	Environmentally friendly farming in the farm "Bajāri"	5,328.25
24.	Building of slaughterhouse for pigs	4,690.42
25.	Maintenance of biologically valuable meadows	2,023.16
26.	Development of handicraft studio	4,504.83
27.	Development of farm's Celmiņi infrastructure	2,471.69
28.	Management of Rūja flood plain meadows with cattle	5,296.61
29.	Diversification of services provided by farm "Stūri"	4,358.89
30.	Establish the honey production in farm "Tūži"	2,621.70
31.	Raising the cattle and grazing the meadows	5,656.11
32.	Maintaining the natural landscape in farm "Ieivņās"	5,459.71
33.	Restoration of Ķemeri park and manor house	5,426.82
34.	Peaceful and happy cows in farm "Mierkalnos"	2,814.26
35.	Raise the competitiveness of tourism place "Kraukļi"	5,284.88
36.	Raise the competitiveness of tourism place "Korķi"	1,890.34
37.	Development of boat rental service in farm "Jaunbomji"	1,211.41
38.	Improvement of biodiversity friendly farming practice in farm "Bajāri"	4,686.72
39.	Natural grazing for landscape and tourism	5,207.80
40.	Enlarge the carpenter's shop	1,701.08
41.	Planting of apple orchard and creating storage for apples	5,407.29

*NB: Projects were paid in Latvian Lats. Although some of the above amounts show over the US$ 5,000 maximum, this has arisen from differences in the exchange rates used. Amounts calculated here use August 2009 rates of US$1 = 0.48 Lat.