BELARUS' ENVIRONMENT MINISTRY SUGGESTS INCREASING PRIBUZHSKOE POLESIE AREA

Belarus' Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment plans to submit the draft resolution on the transformation of the Pribuzhskoye Polesie Reserve, presented by the government in February, BelTA learned from the website of the ministry.

The draft resolution provides for an increase of the area of the reserve from 8,000 hectares to 17,200 hectares, including the addition of sections of the Ramsar site Polesie Bug Valley. A significant part of this area is also a nature protection zone.

Belarus, Latvia to develop cooperation in environmental activities

The international technical assistance project "Strengthening human resources, legal frameworks and institutional capacities to implement the Nagoya Protocol" will be implemented in Belarus, Alexander Korbut, the Deputy Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Belarus during the introductory seminar on the project, BelTA has learned.

"Belarus participates actively in the Convention on Biological Diversity and seeks to achieve its three objectives, namely the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources. Belarus has been working on the first two objectives for a long time. With regards to the third one, the most complex one, Belarus needs an additional legal mechanism. The Nagoya Protocol contributes to the third objective of the Convention on Biological Diversity as it creates greater legal certainty and transparency for both providers and users of genetic resources. We will execute the project in order to implement the provisions of the Nagoya Protocol in Belarus, and I hope that today's seminar will help us in achieving our goals," Alexander Korbut noted.

The project calls for the analysis of the current legislation in the field of genetic resources conservation. It also provides for the development of mechanisms to ensure access to genetic resources, and also legal distribution of benefits derived from their use on the principles of justice and equality. "Belarus and this project as an opportunity to give impetus to the development of the country's market of genetic resources and to intensify the exchange of experience in this field," the deputy minister noted.

Belarus joined the Convention on Biological Diversity in 1993. In 2014 the country made part of the Nagoya Protocol. "The Nagoya Protocol reaffirms the sovereign rights of states to their natural resources, and recognizes the importance of genetic resources for food security, health, biodiversity conservation and mitigation of climate change consequences. Belarusian scientists make a significant contribution to the study of biodiversity, pay great attention to the study and conservation of genetic resources. The National Bank of Plant Genetic Resources has been established in Belarus. It includes more than 54,000 collection samples. These are representatives of 1,680 species. Belarusian scientists attach great importance to the issues of DNA-certification of agricultural plants, preservation of the forest gene pool," said Valentina Lemesh, the Institute of Genetics and Cytology of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus.

The Institute of Genetics and Cytology has developed the national DNA bank of human, animals, plants and microorganisms. "The bank includes 12,000 samples. These are valuable genetic resources. Collections are updated every year," added Valentina Lemesh.

The project "Strengthening human resources, legal frameworks and institutional capacities to implement the Nagoya Protocol in Belarus" is part of the global project for 24 countries and funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The executive agency of the project is the UNDP. The implementing organization is the NAS Institute of Genetics.

The Nagoya Protocol to the Convention on Biological Diversity was adopted on 29 October 2010 and entered into force on 12 October 2014. It is a complementary protocol to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.
MINSK TO PLAY HOST TO SEMINAR ON NAGOYA PROTOCOL ON 7 FEBRUARY SOCIETY

Belarus, Latvia to Develop Cooperation in Environmental Activities Society

Belarus and Latvia will develop cooperation in environmental activities. This was agreed at a meeting between Belarus’ Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Andrei Khudyk and Minister of Environment Protection and Regional Development of Latvia Kaspars Gerhards, BelTA learned from the website of the Belarusian Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment.

The ministers discussed promising areas for the development of bilateral cooperation in environmental activities, including a set of measures to implement the cooperation program between the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of Belarus and the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of Latvia for 2018-2022. The program was signed on 7 February. It provides for the conservation and sustainable use of biological and landscape diversity, water resources, hydro-meteorological activities, environmental monitoring, and also research, personnel training and many more.

Andrei Khudyk and Kaspars Gerhards expressed their intention to continue working together to provide for the signing of an agreement between the Government of Belarus and the Government of Latvia on cooperation in the protection and rational use of transboundary waters, improving their quality, preserving and, if necessary, restoring ecosystems. They also discussed the prospects for cooperation in the area of waste management. Both the sides expressed confidence that fruitful cooperation between the two ministries will continue developing.

CONVINCING PROFIT CALCULATION

Belarus joins EU initiative on climate and energy, implementing promising projects

A round eight thousand cities, with a combined population of over 240 million people, have voluntarily pledged to reduce harmful emissions into the atmosphere. Belarus has joined one of the largest global initiatives in the field of climate and energy, with Polotsk already seeing carbon dioxide emissions falling by 12 percent. Brest, Mogilev and fifteen other cities are also working towards similar goals and, not so long ago, twenty other towns joined the list: Bobruisk, Bykhov, Verkhnedvinsk, Vitebsk, Volkovysk, Gorodezh, Grodno, Novogrudok, Kalinkin, Mosty, Mitislav, Nesvizh, Novopolotsk, Pruzyhan, Svetlogorsk, Slavgorod, Slutsk and Smorgon.

The Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy is a European Union initiative signed by over 300 countries, each promising to improve the quality of life for their citizens. The idea has received support from the Eastern Partnership region and 225 million Euros have been allocated for related projects.

Ivan Shchedrenok, a national expert of the Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy in Belarus, tells us, “Belarusian cities have been demonstrating interest in this initiative: in 2017 alone, the number of participants almost doubled and, in early 2018, there were forty signatories. You might wonder why the initiative is so popular. Cities primarily gain the opportunity to draw upon global expertise in the field of climate change, learning from international experience. Secondly, donors and credit institutions pay attention to signatories, rendering financial assistance. It’s important for investors that cities develop a specific business plan to reduce CO2 emissions, as this is a bright indicator for co-investors.”

Polotsk was the first Belarusian city to join the EU initiative, cutting carbon dioxide emissions by 12 percent and aiming to double that figure by 2020. The Gorsvet (City Light) project is being successfully implemented, envisaging major modernisation of street lighting, at a cost of 1.3 million Euros. The initiative is much welcomed by city residents with people replacing usual incandescent bulbs with LED bulbs, and taking steps to save water, heat and electricity.

The town of Chaussy is a great example too, with its Saving Water Belarus joins EU initiative on climate and energy, implementing promising projects.

The Nagoya Protocol to the Convention on Biological Diversity was adopted on 29 October 2010 and entered into force on 12 October 2014. It is a complementary protocol to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

“Progressive cities are joining the initiative, wishing to do more than the state programme envisages. For example, they’re aiming to halve energy consumption and generate the remainder from renewable sources by 2050. Many desire full climatic neutrality by 2050, producing no detrimental effect on the climate,” explains Mr. Shchedrenok.

The Braslav District, in the Vitebsk Region, has already voiced this wish, planning major modernisation of street lighting costing 1 300 000 Euros.

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Meanwhile, the regional centre of Brest is promoting green urban planning and has launched a wasterecycling plant: an excellent example of integrating national financing and European monetary assistance. Its water treatment facilities may soon be modernised.

Speaking of achievements, Mr. Shchedrenok notes that the Energy Saving programme (being realised until 2020) is helping achieve greater energy efficiency, allowing Belarus to approach the level of most developed countries. However, some activities are yet to become part of the state programme. Participation in the Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy will help implement these, and find external sources of funding.

Many Belarusian cities are keen on eco-initiative: Gorsvet project is being realised in Polotsk, with major modernisation of street lighting costing 1 300 000 Euros.

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By Vladimir Mikhaliov

Belarus, № 1(1012), 2018
**ENDANGERED SPECIES OF BIRDS IN FOCUS OF UNDP-GEF CONSERVATION PROJECT IN BELARUS**

A big environmental project aimed at restoring the habitats of globally threatened species (Aquatic warbler, greater spotted eagle, great snipe, black-tailed godwits) and the conservation-oriented management of forest and wetland ecosystems is underway in Belarus, BelTA has learned.

The five-year UNDP-GEF project "Conservation-oriented management of forests and wetlands to achieve multiple benefits" (Wetlands) started in November last year. All this time the stakeholders were engaged in preparatory work. On 27 February Minsk played host to the initial workshop that brought together representatives of NGOs, stakeholders and Environmental Protection Agency. The donors are the Global Environment Facility, the United Nations Development Programme. The total budget of the project is $4.3 million.

The main objective is to introduce conservation-centered and financially self-sufficient approaches to management of forests and wetlands that will yield both nature and natural biodiversity, climate and land use, said Nikolai Svidinsky, the head of the project. "Regarding the landscape diversity at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection. Sustainable use of resources is very important for the balance of environmental and economic interests, he noted.

Wetland ecosystems of Belarus are of global importance for unique biodiversity. The conservation of these ecosystems is important for reducing the rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national levels. The five-year Wetlands program includes a number of interesting projects that do not repeat the previous ones but are based on their results and problematic aspects," Nikolai Svidinsky said.

Of course, among unmanned vehicles, we also view passenger cars as a possibility; not long ago, our country became a state of light car industry. Of course, we also view passenger cars as a possibility; not long ago, our country became a state of light car industry.

**VITAL NOT TO loose Time**

We might call July 22nd, 2017 the birthday of domestic electric car building

2017 was a landmark for the Belarusian scientific sphere, headlined by the Year of Science welcoming several significant events. Among them was the launch of a domestically assembled prototype electric vehicle. Although industrial production is some way off, engineers are already planning a version that can drive unmanned, as Oleg Yelovoy, the Deputy Director General for Research and Innovative Activity at the United Institute of Mechanical Engineering of the National Academy of Sciences, tells us.

**From site to quarry**

Mr. Yelovoy, unmanned taxis and lorries are already in use, such as in Japan, the USA and the United Arab Emirates. May we soon see unmanned vehicles in Belarus?

Vital not to lose time We might call July 22nd, 2017 the birthday of domestic electric car building. We’ve begun developing unmanned vehicles with cargo cars. It’s a topical issue and, historically, our country has specialised in production of large-size equipment, with great success. It might sound strange, but cargo transport is simpler to control unmanned: quarry dump trucks, which have strict routes and need to perform specific tasks. These vehicles need drivers least of all. Of course, unmanned vehicles are expensive but costs are well-founded since they preclude human error, and save on wages, insurance etc. Thus, we can say that the first single specialist to supervise the operation of several vehicles, from the office. The leading global companies – like Tesla and others – are moving in this direction. We hope our cooperation with BelAZ will result in a robotic quarry dump truck; we’ve begun along this path already.

Probably, there will be more than dump trucks without drivers...

The Buggies servicing plant territories are another promising avenue for unmanned vehicles, transporting spare parts and equipment; they’ll be like little warehouses that we already use (though these are larger). Of course, we also view passenger cars as a possibility; not long ago, our country became a state of light car industry.

**How much time will it take to develop our own unmanned car? What’s the flavour of the process?**

If we gain a customer, our scientists will need 18 months to two years to develop a prototype. However, there’s a more important issue, as voiced by the President during the 2nd Congress of Scientists: the susceptibility of the industry. Plants need to be ready and adaptable. Innovation requires not only courage but, often, the updating of production equipment, technological processes and in the line. No facility is ready for this. I’m convinced that, if an enterprise produces less than a third of new equipment in its total range, it will sooner or later lose its market position. German automakers, for example, update their range by 40 percent every two years. Japanese do the same. We’re looking into the industry to follow the same example. However, there are some problems. Primarily, we lack highly professional engineers and are seriously technologically backward. Sadly, we often have to replace the important ‘designer-technologist-researcher’ scheme, while adjusting production.

Of course, among unmanned vehicles, we also view passenger cars as a possibility; not long ago, our country became a state of light car industry.

**Show me your face**

We might call July 22nd, 2017 the birthday of domestic electric car building. We already have a prototype at one of the academic organisations of the Scientific-Practical Materials Research Centre. Although the first series of our electric cars will probably use traditional lithium drives and super-condensers, in time, we’ll be testing and graphine materials.

Is there a second proposal to make e-cars at BelGee Plant – as mentioned earlier?

The enterprise is our partner and is meeting us halfway. We’ll receive a crossover prototype or, even, a model from the Geely electric car range. Jointly with the Industry Ministry, we’re preparing a road map for the project, based on suggestions by the company’s management, Belarusian State University of Information Technologies, and the support of the scientific community.

**Tell us more about the batteries for electric cars. How heavy are they and how quickly do they charge?**

We’re developing electric accumulators (the most expensive component of an electric car) so there’s no need for lithium-ion technologies, which are very dirty and quite expensive, as they require cobalt. There aren’t many deposits globally and those countries which possess cobalt are already planning to raise prices. We’ve chosen another path. A sample of graphene-like material will soon be ready and we’re making a cell to rival lithium-ion in its characteristics. Its production is simpler, cleaner and cheaper, being lighter, and it’s more reliable, in all weather and temperatures. It’s not explosive either. We can produce batteries of the required capacity and power, easily distributing grading shells in cells in the body of an electric car. We’re now making a prototype at one of the academic organisations of the Scientific-Practical Materials Research Centre. Although the first series of our electric cars will probably use traditional lithium drives and super-condensers, in time, we’ll be testing and graphine materials.

Time is of the essence for all our projects, and rely on the support of industry. We need to ensure high added value in high-tech products.

By Vera Arteaga

Reference:
Viktar Bagusak, Chairman of the President of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus: The Year of Science was rich in innovations. Among the most significant, as mentioned at the 2nd Congress of Scientists, was the development of a portable supercomputer, that performs up to 20 trillion operations per second. In addition, we now have a national system for identification of individuals using fingerprints and other personal identifiers. There are many deposits globally and those countries which possess cobalt are already planning to raise prices. We’ve chosen another path. A sample of graphene-like material will soon be ready and we’re making a cell to rival lithium-ion in its characteristics. Its production is simpler, cleaner and cheaper, being lighter, and it’s more reliable, in all weather and temperatures. It’s not explosive either. We can produce batteries of the required capacity and power, easily distributing grading shells in cells in the body of an electric car. We’re now making a prototype at one of the academic organisations of the Scientific-Practical Materials Research Centre. Although the first series of our electric cars will probably use traditional lithium drives and super-condensers, in time, we’ll be testing and graphine materials.

Time is of the essence for all our projects, and rely on the support of industry. We need to ensure high added value in high-tech products.

By Vera Arteaga

Belarus, № 1(1012), 2018
Belarus, UNDP to consider project on early detection of pine forest dieback and decline

Belarus invites the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to implement a joint project on the early detection of pine forest dieback and decline, Belarus’ Deputy Forestry Minister Alexander Kulik said during a meeting with FAO Assistant Director General, Regional Representative for Europe and Central Asia Vladimir Rakhamin, BelTA learned from the press service of the Forestry Ministry.

“We propose to implement joint projects with FAO in a number of areas. We suggest developing integrated measures to rehabilitate the damaged pine plantations in the southern regions of the country, implementing a pilot project on early detection, monitoring and restoration of damaged plantations, evaluating the national methods to take stock of the forests under the technical assistance program,” Alexander Kulik said.

He also noted that for the third year the forests in Belarus have been suffering the consequences of the climate change. In 2015 the country had to deal with very dry weather. In 2016 it was the drought of birch beetles. All this has caused significant damage to forests. The Forestry Ministry called on the partner countries to join efforts and on the international organizations to provide support. The ministry places great emphasis on cooperation with FAO.

Alexander Kulik recalled that there are plans to hold an international seminar on protection of pine plantations against insects and diseases with the participation of FAO experts at the Gomel-based forestry in April this year.

Vladimir Rakhamin, for his part, said that FAO will help the Forestry Ministry to fight off the drying out of pine plantations. According to him, the problem primarily affects Belarus and Ukraine, but forests know no borders and it is therefore important to fight off the spread of insects.

UN member states adopted Sustainable Development Goals until 2030: a list of seventeen goals aimed at eliminating global poverty, combating inequality and injustice, and solving problems relating to climate change. The project unites 193 states, including Belarus. In late 2017, an open parliamentary session was organised, entitled Partnership of Branches of Power as a Prerequisite for Successful Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals: The Deputy Chair of the National Assembly’s Council of the Republic, the National Coordinator for Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, Marianna Shchetkina, comments upon the project.

What do we need to focus on, to realise the SDGs?

Approaches to achieving the SDGs are reflected in two major strategic documents: the National Strategy for Sustainable Social and Economic Development until 2030 (a key programme document outlining major avenues in the field of development and echoing the Agenda-2030) and the Programme of Social and Economic Development for 2016-2020. Several other documents for industries and regions are also relevant but our analysis demonstrates that they aren’t covering all indicators. Our task is to develop national parameters and implement them into Republican, branch and regional programmes, at various levels.

All seventeen goals are interrelated, aiming to enhance the quality of life of our people. Ensuring public welfare economically and socially should be the basis for long-term development. No social progress is possible without economic development, and vice versa: no economic progress can be achieved without human potential development.

Obvious, the SDGs cover more than a single state or a handful. What contribution can we make to the prosperity of peace, and partnership on the planet?

Globalisation seriously affects social policy. Previously, social issues were the sphere of responsibility of national governments but, these days, it’s hardly possible to avoid international influence. Worldwide, we’re seeing the most advanced practices of joint projects and approaches. It’s time for our national system to apply approaches which meet public interest.

It development is an undoubted priority but we must understand that new technologies require new skills in the labour market — such as the ability to work with large arrays of information. Accordingly, appropriate qualifications are needed. With this in mind, people of the older generation should have the opportunity to train and retrain — in order not to lose out on the labour market. Informatisation of processes and activities entails the need to move to a new type of employment and this should be taken into account when regulating labour relations. Introduction of new technologies is determined by optimisation of figures of those involved; this is a matter of employment. Therefore, it’s important to create new industries and promote development of entrepreneurship.

Achieving SDGs is an ambitious task; realisation requires more than mobilising internal resources. We support the idea of an ‘integration of integrations’, as proposed by the President at the UN summit in 2015, to promote multilateral initiatives to find optimal joint paths for sustainable growth, and to coordinate the battle against global challenges and threats.

Some of the tasks which UN member states plan to jointly solve by 2030 are losing their relevance for us — such as reducing child mortality, and improving maternal health. Will our priorities change?

It’s true that our starting position for achieving these goals is quite high. The country has managed to achieve the major Millennium Development Goal relating to eradicating poverty and hunger ahead of schedule, and we fully meet our food needs.

The Millennium Development Goal aimed at reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis has been achieved. Our country is also demonstrating success in achieving gender equality and education. However, much work lies ahead. Belarus is obligated to meet all seventeen Sustainable Development Goals. This is a difficult yet necessary path; nobody should be left aside.

In February, the country will host the first regional forum gathering national co-ordinators involved in achieving the SDGs in Europe and the CIS. What do you expect from this meeting?

We have plans to host such a regional forum for leaders of regional sustainable development initia- tives in Minsk, in February 2018. We plan to gather heads responsible for co-ordinating work aimed at achieving the SDGs in Europe and Central Asia, in addition to UN officials and international experts. Participants will be able to exchange experience on sustainable development, establish sustainable development between national co-ordinators and solve other issues relating to social, economic and environmental sustainability.

Meanwhile, we must understand that nobody but us will act in the interests of our country. Our work towards the SDGs requires our joint effort. We need mutual support, understanding and interaction for the sake of present and future generations.
WHAT DO GENES HIDE?

Minsk’s Akademicheskaya Street is a science hub, with almost every building housing a research institution or laboratory. Wherever you go, you come across a scientist. There’s even a DNA bank: the only one in the post-Soviet space.

As valuable as gold

"The national ‘gene pool store’ is right under you," says Ph.D. in biology Valentina Lemesh, who has been the Director of the Institute of Genetics and Cytology at Belarus’ National Academy of Sciences. Meeting on the first floor, she tells me that all genetic research relies on this database, which is being used by the ‘DNA Identification’ Union State programme, currently in its second year.

The programme’s title is ‘Development of Innovative Geno-geographic and Genomic Technologies for Personality Identification and Individual Characteristics of a Person on the Basis of Studying Regional Gene Pools’. Each word represents painstaking work by geneticists, which begins with collection of biological material for wide-ranging analysis, determining the function and development of the human genome.

Belarusian scientists have collected an impressive number of DNA samples and biological materials in pursuit of the state programme, with each sample used repeatedly from the bank; it’s efficiently and saves up to $130 from each unit.

Over eight thousand DNA samples are stored in large freezers in a special room, at a temperature of minus 80 degrees: from people, plants, animals and micro-organisms. Among them are samples from patients with malignant and benign tumours of the lungs and bladder, and from people suffering from bronchial asthma, cardiovascular pathology and osteoporosis. In the process of research, these are compared with samples from healthy people, allowing analysis and the drawing of conclusions. In addition, the bank keeps 780 DNA samples from Belarus’ indigenous people, from eighteen settlements, across six regions of the country. The biomaterial of national team athletes is also stored at the bank, which resembles a systematised library, providing scientists with great opportunities for research. Doctors from large Republican medical centres help replenish it.

"It’s difficult to collect enough samples of a certain pathology in medical genetics," Ms. Lemesh stresses. "The process is strictly regulated and conducted in accordance with the principles of voluntariness and informed consent, with mandatory questionnaires. Each sample is as valuable as gold."

Margarita Smal, a research officer at the laboratory of molecular genome stability, at the Institute of Genetics and Cytology, of the NAS of Belarus explains the Director of the Institute of Genetics and Cytology at Belarus’ National Academy of Sciences. "Criminals with particular genetic diseases will have distinctive DNA, enabling their identification more easily."

This should help seriously in criminologists’ gathering of evidence, with studies conducted only by laboratories with international certification. Belarus’ lab is the only one in the CIS accredited to these standards.

Expensive equipment is necessary to ensure accuracy and quality of research. Belarus owns one of twenty fragmented analysers worldwide: a compact box with touch buttons which helps greatly in investigating crime. Geno-geographic research can help identify individuals who have died in disasters and in wartime. Results can be safely submitted into the bank gene pool, remaining valid for dozens of years.

Testing suitability for stressful employment

This year will see some innovations implemented, including genetic testing for stress resistance and emotional characteristics. Results will then be used in employing members of emergency services, such as for the Emergency Ministry, and for aviation.

"A complex of genes is responsible for stress resistance," explains Irma Mosse, who heads the human genetics laboratory. "A person can be healthy and physically fit to work in these areas but, in a stressful situation, will cease functioning. We can determine at the initial stage whether someone is suitable for certain work."

Tests will soon be available for all residents of Belarus, to create a genetic passport, showing their innate predispositions and features. Forewarned is forearmed.

By Alena Prokina

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