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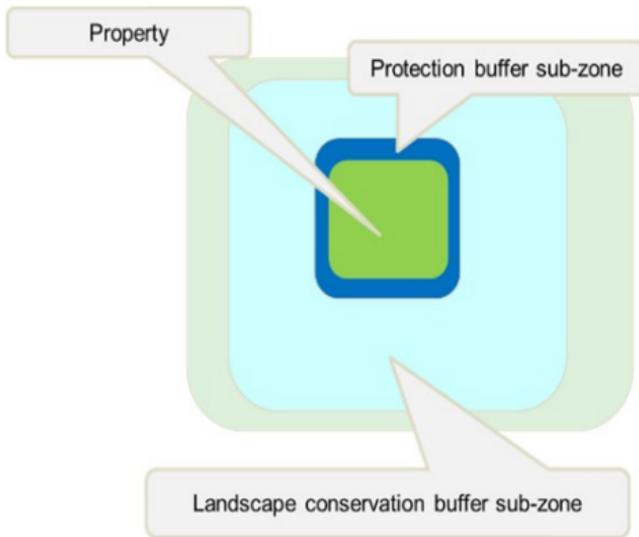
BEECH POWER

Buffer zones as areas for ecosystem-based forest management, World Heritage knowledge transfer and education



What are buffer zones?

The UNESCO World Heritage Site “Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe” includes 94 old-growth beech forests of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). To conserve them for the future, they are protected, meaning people should not damage them. However, they are also deeply influenced by what happens around them.



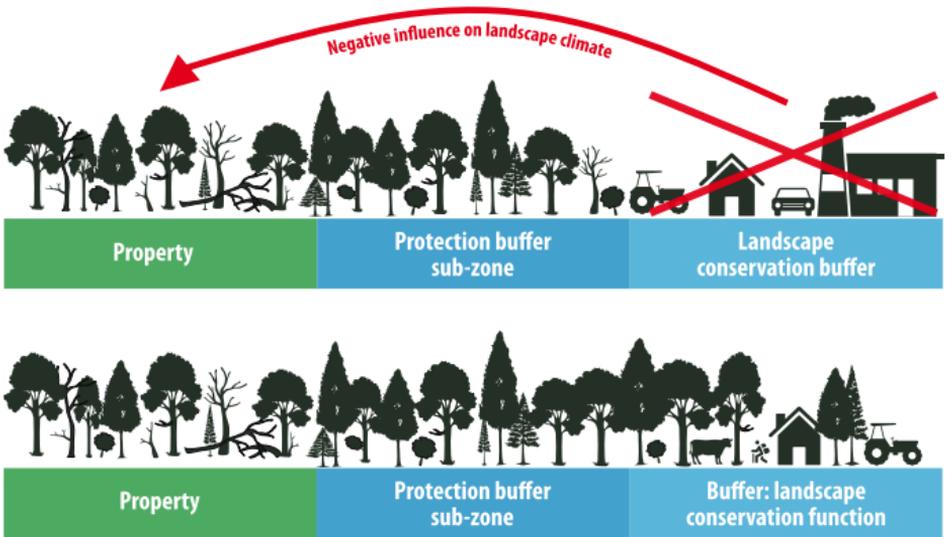
Example of a buffer zone (Source: Guidance document on buffer zone management and buffer zone zonation Version April 13, 2021)

To make sure that harmful human activities are not happening right next to them, the beech forests are surrounded by so-called buffer zones, which should prevent negative impacts on them. Here, local residents and visitors can co-exist with nature as long as they follow the rules of behaviour and engagement, which apply to this specific area. BEECH POWER has developed several outputs that support managers of buffer zones. They enable them to balance their manifold functions with the main aim to maintain the protection of the values of the protected area, maximize the connectivity to adjacent forests and to integrate the World Heritage site on a landscape conservation level by involving community initiatives for sustainable use practices. Activities in buffer zones can comprise forestry, agriculture, recreation, hunting and tourism, which is why BEECH POWER has developed guidelines for it. The key aspect for successful management in buffer zones is the involvement of stakeholders and the prevention or management of conflicts. Strategies on these aspects give buffer zones managers the knowledge they need.

Forest management in buffer zones

In World Heritage beech forest component parts, forestry activities are forbidden to preserve their integrity and OUV. Buffer zones act as transition zones from this strict protection to commercial forestry in the surroundings. Hence, BEECH POWER developed the **Guideline for ecosystem-based forest management in landscape conservation buffer subzones of World Heritage beech forests**.

Buffer zones are in some cases separated into two different sub-zones. The protection buffer sub-zone should use non-intervention regimes to promote natural processes including regeneration of native tree species, deadwood and habitat connectivity. In the landscape conservation zone, close-to-nature forestry to maintain ecological functionality and ecosystem services can take place.



The Landscape conservation buffer subzone should protect the wider landscape from negative developments (adapted after JMC, 2021)

The Guideline supports forest managers by showcasing best practice examples. The foundation is an ecosystem-approach that aims to protect land, water and living resources while promoting conservation, sustainability and multi-functionality. This culminates in a list of criteria and indicators that provide guidance for forest managers and make it possible to assess the current situation and management plans.

How to involve local communities?

Old-growth forests have to be protected from human exploitation to be preserved. On the other hand, this can in many cases mean taking economic opportunities away from local residents, which can bring benefits for both nature and people, but only if all involved stakeholders understand the need to protect some areas for future generations. Buffer zones are crucial for this purpose, as they are the buffer between local residents, their activities and the World Heritage site.

BEECH POWER has developed a **Strategy for actively involving stakeholders**. This is especially challenging for the Beech Forest World Heritage with component parts all over Europe. The situation is different everywhere and the strategy to involve stakeholders must be tailored to each case. Factors to be considered are land ownership, management structure and decision-making processes. The strategy provides an analysis of examples across Europe leading to general objectives and actions that can be adapted to individual cases.

Conflict management

Where many people and interests come together, conflicts are likely. This is the case in buffer zones of the World Heritage as they incorporate many different functions and stakeholders. BEECH POWER has developed a **Strategy for conflict management** to help managers of buffer zones. They must balance many aspects like the integrity of the protected area, raising public awareness and benefiting local residents. This is a challenging task for the managers of each component. On one hand, the beech forests have an OUV because they have been mostly untouched by human activity because of the ecological processes in untouched forests and the expansion of beech across Europe after the Ice Age. On the other hand, they should increase publicity and tourism (that can bring some extra income to better protect the area), which threaten to change the pristine character in a negative way.

First of all, the goal must always be to prevent conflicts before they arise. Key for this is close stakeholder involvement on all levels in all aspects. In case they fail, de-escalation strategies must be applied.

Visitor management

Tourism is the most important economic activity in many World Heritage sites. It can bring prosperity to the local economy without harming nature if done in the correct way. It becomes even more important, as the number of visitors to World Heritage beech forest is rising. People come in order to experience pristine nature and escape from crowds and big cities. Managers have to cope with the growing number of visitors. This means that they have to create attractive offers for visitors while making sure that these visitors do not harm the integrity of the component part and nature while getting educated.

BEECH POWER's **Strategy for visitor management and knowledge transfer** defines the objectives of sustainable tourism and visitor management to make optimal use of environmental resources, respect socio-cultural values and provide socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders. By analyzing the visitor management in seven World Heritage component parts, the strategy bundles principles, knowledge, important stakeholders and visions. From this analysis, it derives eight objectives for visitor management based on monitoring visitor streams and development, creating a concept for visitor guidance and focusing on communication and education.



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World Heritage BEECH Forests:
emPOWERing and catalyzing an
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