

## CITIZENS' PREFERENCES FOR EXTENDING PROTECTION OF TRANSBOUNDARY NATURE PROTECTED AREAS

In Europe, transboundary nature protected areas (NPA) cover 188.153 km<sup>2</sup> of altogether 1.12 million km<sup>2</sup> of protected land. The reminiscence of intact ecosystems on border areas between countries can be explained by their historically economic remoteness with low human population density, combined with relatively limited physical accessibility. Border areas between countries, thus, host valuable NPA, although often with no formal transnational management. The statement that “nature does not recognise state borders” is a popular argument among experts and activists to promote international conservation efforts aimed at protecting transboundary intact ecosystems. However, economists’ assessments of what are the best decisions regarding provision of public goods (such as NPAs) are driven by ordinary people’s preferences rather than experts’ visions. Moreover, traditional cost-benefit analysis of environmental goods often fail to capture the transnational perspective.

The TRANPAREA project has, therefore, investigated citizens’ preferences and willingness to pay (WTP) for extending NPAs, as well as whether transboundary NPAs are International Public Goods (i.e., if people equally care for their domestic and foreign part). For this purpose, TRANPAREA has focused on two transboundary nature areas located on the EU’s outer border (Figure 1).

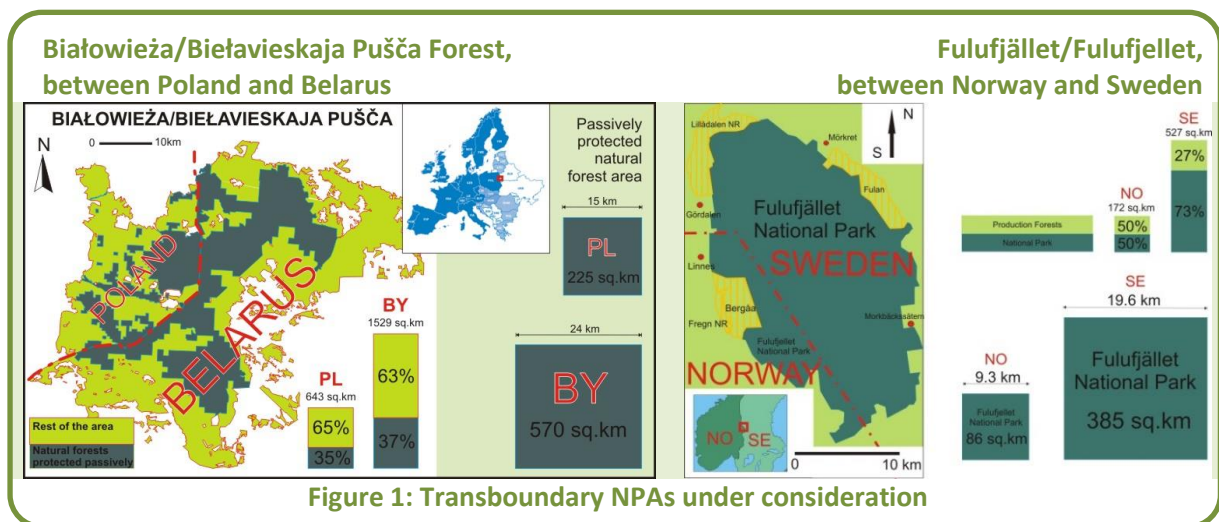


Figure 1: Transboundary NPAs under consideration

Two binational stated preferences valuation studies were run (one in Poland/Belarus and one in Norway/Sweden) during which 4,500 people were surveyed. In the survey, respondents were introduced to the topic of the study and to a hypothetical scenario, in which selected transboundary NPAs could be extended. Each respondent faced sixteen choice-cards, and in each choice-card respondents were asked to select one option. Each choice-card included:

- A status quo option (no extension of the NPAs and, thus, no cost);
- 1 to 3 alternative options to extend the NPAs, which randomly varied according to the surface to be extended (in km<sup>2</sup>) at each side of the border, and the cost that this would imply for the respondents.

Fig.2: Example of a choice-card

Variants comparison 1	Status quo	Variant 1	Variant 2	Variant 3
Additional area in the Polish part of the Białowieża Forest covered by passive protection regime  (Total proportion of passive protection zone in the Polish part of the Białowieża Forest)	<b>+ 0 km<sup>2</sup></b>  (35%)	<b>+ 105 km<sup>2</sup></b>  (51%)	<b>+ 70 km<sup>2</sup></b>  (46%)	<b>+ 0 km<sup>2</sup></b>  (35%)
Additional area in the Belarusian part of the Białowieża Forest covered by passive protection regime  (Total proportion of passive protection zone in the Belarusian part of the Białowieża Forest)	<b>+ 0 km<sup>2</sup></b>  (37%)	<b>+ 105 km<sup>2</sup></b>  (44%)	<b>+ 0 km<sup>2</sup></b>  (37%)	<b>+ 35 km<sup>2</sup></b>  (40%)
Additional sum of taxes, imposed on your income annually during the five next years	<b>None</b>	<b>100 PLN</b>	<b>50 PLN</b>	<b>75 PLN</b>
Please, pick your best variant	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Respondents were told that the cost would adopt the form of a compulsory income tax dedicated to a bilateral Fund (in the Polish / Belarusian case, governed by UNESCO) for the five next years.

### Main results & Recommendations

The majority in the samples of Swedish and Norwegians supported the extension of protected forest areas in Fulufjället; and also Polish respondents were (in average) willing to pay for extending the strictly protected part of Białowieża at their side of the border, while Belarusians respondents prefer to retain the status quo.

Thus, **spatial extension of passive protection of forests should be considered for Fulufjället as well as for the Polish part of the Białowieża Forest.**

Scandinavian respondents were also willing to pay for extending NPAs at the foreign side of the border, though (generally) not as much as for the domestic part. Polish and Belarusians respondents were either neutral or negative towards bilateral conservation programmes. Thus, **none of the sites appears to qualify as a “perfect” international public good.**

- Bilateral co-operation in Fulufjället seems socially desirable, although accounting for that both countries’ citizens stated greater preferences towards their domestic part of the site.
- Current protection of the Białowieża Forest’s Belarusian part matches the people’s preferences well, so the results do not provide economic arguments for NPA extension.

**If cross-border co-operation in the transboundary NPA management and governance remains desirable, as voiced by conservationists, a greater effort should be made in terms of information and promotion of this idea.**

Respondents’ attitudes (patriotism, prospects of visiting the site) and existing border regulations underpin the preference variation. Seemingly, more similar regulations / institutional systems between the neighbours (viz. between the Scandinavian countries, as compared to those between Poland and Belarus) yield much more co-operative preferences.