



CREDIT: S. J. J. van den Berg

Sustainable management of wild plant resources through the application of FairWild Standard principles in Bosnia and Herzegovina

BACKGROUND Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is located in South-east Europe and is exceptionally rich in plant diversity. At least 170 species of medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs) are native to BiH and most of these are under collection. Currently, 231 species are in national and international trade in the country. In total, 64 species are at risk from unsustainable harvesting. Examples of such species include Great Yellow Gentian *Gentiana lutea*, Wolf's Bane *Arnica montana* and Bearberry *Arctostaphylos uva ursi*.

In the majority of cases, traditional wild collection is still a predominant activity, with over 100,000 harvesters collecting in rural areas. There are over 300 companies involved in the collection, processing and trade of MAPs. Uncontrolled exploitation of resources driven by the poverty of local people and loss of habitats are the main threats to the sustainable use of MAP resources and business development in the MAP sector.

The following case study describes the experience of implementing the FairWild principles of sustainable wild plant collection and use in the Vlasenica area of the Republic of Srpska (one of the governing entities of BiH), and review of the legislation of the Republic of Srpska, based on the FairWild Standard principles.

IMPLEMENTATION OF FAIRWILD Implementation of the FairWild Standard (FWS) in the Vlasenica area of the Republic of Srpska was carried out under the 'Saving Plants that Save Lives and Livelihoods' project led by TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network, and its partners WWF and IUCN from November 2007 to March 2010. The ecological module of the FairWild Standard was tested in co-operation with 'Elmar d.o.o', a private company specialised in harvesting and trading of MAPs, and which already had organic and social responsibility certification (FairWild Standard version 1.0). Wild Garlic *Allium ursinum* was selected as a target species, being of great economic importance for stakeholders from the project region.

RESOURCE ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT PLAN Initially, a situation analysis was conducted of MAP collection practices in BiH and the Vlasenica project region, followed by a number of training workshops at the local and state level in order to introduce core stakeholders from the BiH MAP sector to the FWS through participatory processes.

During project implementation, a resource assessment for Wild Garlic was conducted for the first time in this area, providing baseline information for sustainable collection practices. Since its completion, the resource assessment has formed the basis for issuing collection permits. The Vlasenica *Allium ursinum* Management Plan (VAMP) was later developed through the interaction with forestry authorities and other stakeholders.

The main goal of the VAMP was to ensure the long-term survival and sustainable use of *Allium ursinum* for commercial purposes, whilst taking into account the needs and rights of all stakeholders, including the local community, that depend on this resource. Responsibility for implementation of the VAMP lies with the local forestry authority, as the resource management organization, and with *Elmar d.o.o* (one of three main users of *Allium* species in the region) for implementation of the FWS.



Great Yellow Gentian *Gentiana lutea*, CREDIT: Creative Commons/©Teun Spaans



Bearberry *Arctostaphylos uva ursi*, CREDIT: Creative Commons/©Sten Porse



Wolf's Bane *Arnica montana*, CREDIT: WWF/ G. Ammermann

REGULATION Good co-operation with forestry authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina was among the most important prerequisites for successful FWS implementation in the country. From 2008 to 2010, TRAFFIC was invited to contribute to the development of the ‘*Rule Book of Conditions for Utilization and the Methods of Collection of Other Forest Products*’ – the regulation detailing the provisions of the utilization of forest products in the Republic of Srpska.

Based on TRAFFIC’s recommendations, FairWild Standard principles and criteria served as a basis for defining articles in the Rule Book that defined the practical steps to implementation of sustainable systems for wild collection.

The Rule Book entered into force in 2010 in the Republic of Srpska. It defines groups of products included under the definition of non-wood forest products (NWFPs), identifies responsible entities for the management of wild NWFPs, and defines procedures and rules for establishing harvest quotas, the selection of harvesting techniques and for devising management plans for species utilization and population monitoring. Important new measures concern the establishment of new licensing procedures and controls over commercial collection, the introduction of a list of plants approved and forbidden for commercial collectors (the first list of its kind), and introduction of obligatory annual plans for NWFPs use, based on ecological sustainability. Species of particular conservation concern, which are put on the list of species forbidden for commercial collection, include medicinal plants such as *Arnica montana*, *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* and *Gentiana lutea*.

The introduction of FairWild principles of sustainable wild plant collection and use in the Rule Book is a positive example of a policy mechanism introduced to support the establishment of a sustainable system for the wild collection and use of NWFPs.

CONCLUSION The following conclusions were made to support the development of sustainable approaches to wild resource use in Europe:

- To ensure the conservation of wild MAPs a number of measures should be introduced, including: greater engagement of private sector and civil society organizations with resource management authorities; the use of internal standards, voluntary codes of practice and certification schemes; and the establishment of effective international trade and conservation regimes through existing policy frameworks.

- Experience of FWS implementation in BiH suggests that there are potentially numerous opportunities to promote and introduce sustainable wild plant management schemes across Europe.

- Ensuring multiple stakeholders’ interest and active involvement are essential for successful implementation of sustainable resource management practices. Such involvement and active participation should be encouraged at every level.

- Scientific data on distribution and population size of wild plants need to be established, and where necessary gathered through collaborative efforts of research institutions, resource management authorities and government institutions.

- Management plans should first be established for species for which information is available. This may potentially increase the number of management plans developed for wild collected species, because much of the necessary baseline scientific information is already available within research institutions and forestry authorities.



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The views expressed are those of the individuals and organizations that contributed to the case studies and do not necessarily reflect those of TRAFFIC.

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KEY LESSONS

Implementation of the FWS in the Vlasenica area of the Republic of Srpska serves as a good model approach that could be widely replicated across South-east Europe and has potential for other regions. In this example, the FWS was used as the framework to guide the development of a species-area management plan (VAMP) which serves as the basis for issuing collection permits. The private sector companies are responsible for developing their own operational plans to ensure compliance. The VAMP enabled the successful implementation of sustainable collection practices for *Allium ursinum* in accordance with the FWS in the Vlasenica region.



Collection of *Allium ursinum* in BiH, CREDIT: Sladjana Bundalo

Key companies in the MAP sector and State authorities welcomed the approach of this project and have shown interest in scaling the approach up to species that are of concern (endangered and threatened) in the region, for example *Gentiana lutea* and *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*.

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