

Wetlands and peatlands in spatial planning - threats and opportunities amidst warfare and post-war revival

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"Indirect" consequences of russian aggression for nature

- "Compensation" for the losses of agriculture, energy, and industry through the use of previously unused natural and semi-natural territories
- Relocation of business from East and South regions to “safe” regions in Western, Central, and North-Western Ukraine

Example - relocation of a large potato farm to Zhytomyr region

- Restoring of reclamation channels that have not been used for more than 20 years = re-drainage
 - Construction of new dams
 - Increasing water intake from canals and rivers
 - Implemented with the financial and information support of USAID
- “Success story” for business = harmful story for nature



Important facts of Ukraine for understanding conservation approaches

- A significant part of peatland lands is state or community-owned
- A lot of land is still unused in economic activities, mostly on former agricultural lands
- A lot of well-preserved areas have no official protected status
- Environmental legislation is strict, but it is regularly violated by businesses, farmers, foresters, mining companies, and local people
- Most of the Ukrainian “soft legislation” (strategies, declarations, etc) leaves only “on paper”







інформація лоту

🏠 Оренда землі 📄 Трираундовий англійський аукціон

Продаж права оренди (річної орендної плати) земельної ділянки сільськогосподарського призначення, площею 10,3279 га, кадастровий номер: 4621282100:04:000:0405, що розташована за адресою: Львівська область, Дрогобицький район, за межами населеного пункту с. Нижні Гаї, категорія земель – землі сільськогосподарського призначення,...

Розгорнути назву ▾

Поділитися:



📄 Прийняття заяв на участь

Стартова орендна плата: ⓘ

3 422.41 грн

*без ПДВ

До завершення прийому заявок
залишилось

28 : 09 : 06 : 05

днів годин хвилин секунд

Example – article 80 of Water Code

In order to protect the water content of small rivers, it is prohibited to:

- 1) change the relief of the river basin;
- 2) destroy the beds of drying rivers, streams, and watercourses;
- 3) straighten river beds and deepen their bottom below the natural level or block them without the construction of drains, culverts, or aqueducts;
- 4) reduce the natural vegetation cover and forest cover of the river basin;
- 5) plow floodplain lands and use chemical agents on them;
- 6) carry out drainage and reclamation works on swampy areas and tracts in the upper reaches of rivers;
- 7) grant land plots in river floodplains for any construction (except for hydraulic, hydrometric, and linear structures), as well as for gardening and horticulture;

Very strict? Yes! But only “on paper”!



**Destruction of the
source of the Vilkhova
Hovtva River**

Local community authorities are mostly not interested in preserving and restoring nature!

The simplest way to fill the local community budget is to increase of use of natural resources - providing new areas for agriculture, mining, and logging

Yes, in some ideal future, many, many years from now, thanks to environmental education, budget compensation, and EU subsidies, communities may start to think differently.

But until that happens, we will lose our nature!

Consequences?

- Nature restoration is good, but **nature conservation should be a priority** in Ukraine, even for degraded and drained peatlands or other natural and semi-natural areas
- Unused peatlands that are owned by the state can be restored more easily in the future compared to peatlands that are used in agriculture or peatlands in private ownership
- Nature conservation and restoration should be based not only on financial compensation for owners, but also on law enforcement from the state, especially on state and community-owned lands

2023 "Yelne" Case



Black Color - area of the amber mining project

Green Color - area of the wetland restoration project inside Rivne Natural Reserve

One part of the Syra Pohonia swamp is being destroyed while the other is being restored?

Where is the logic?

How does UNCG protect wetlands?



UNCG's work at the legislative level

- Analyzing law and decree projects related to wetlands and opposing harmful initiatives
- Introduction of new legislative initiatives to protect and restore wetlands
- The Framework Climate Law, adopted in 2024, prioritizes nature-based solutions.
- The new “State mineral exploration program” adopted in 2024 has restrictions on the exploration of new peat deposits

Bringing violators of environmental law to justice

- We systematically detect violations of the law, such as peat extraction without proper permits, plowing of riparian areas, etc., reclamation without permits, and violation of the protected areas regime
- We write official complaints to law enforcement agencies (State environmental inspection, police, prosecutors)
- We "accompany" our complaints – media support, juridical support, etc.

Prevention of implementation environmentally harmful projects at the earliest possible stage

- Analysis of mining plans
- Analysis of forest management plans
- Analysis of plans for the allocation of budget funds in water and irrigation management areas
- Participation in SEA and EIA procedures

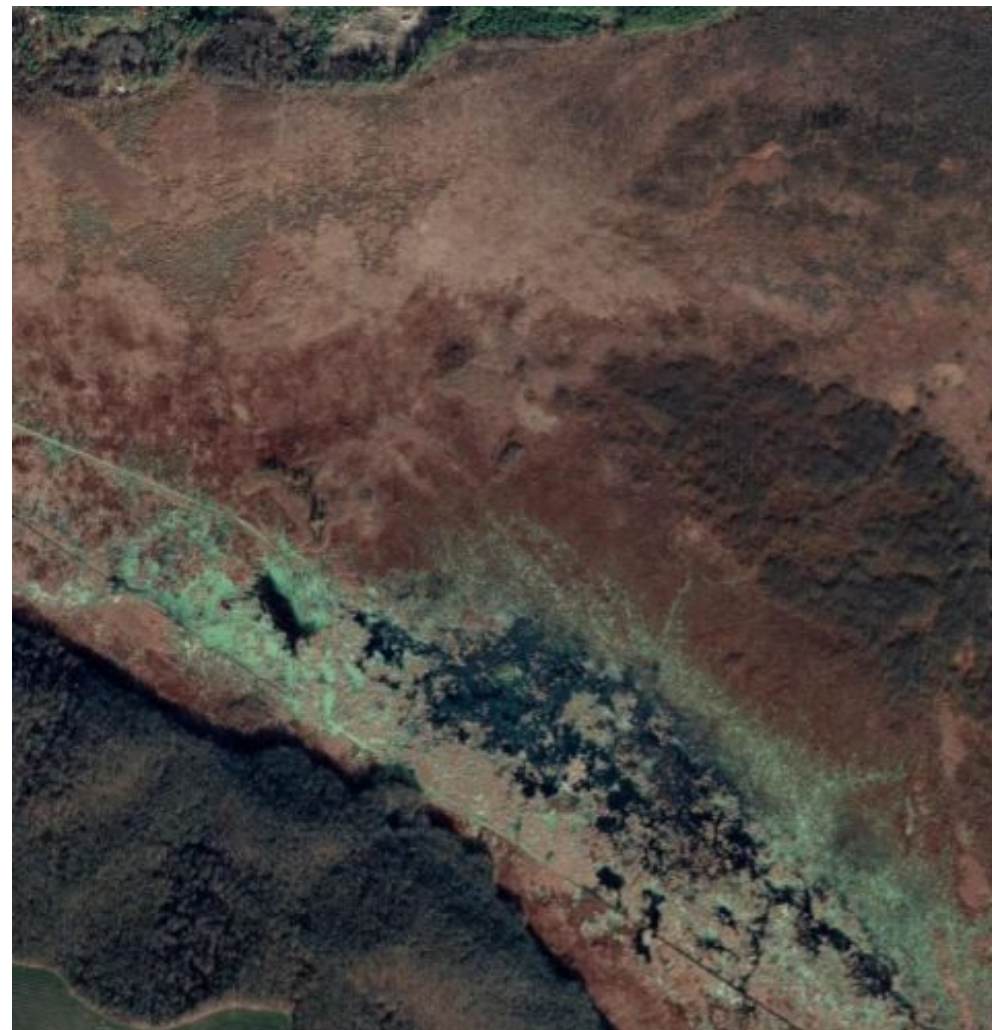
If we find that the project can be harmful, we write complaints, raise issues in the media, etc.

Example - Success story

- Starting from October 2023, every week, UNCG writes a request to the Ministry of Environment to provide a list of sites that are planned to be auctioned for peat and amber extraction
- This is the earliest stage where public participation is possible, before the EIA procedure and auctions.
- If we see environmental risks, we write official comments.
- By this, we prevented more than 80 peat or amber extraction projects

Creation of protected areas

- We conduct scientific expeditions to find valuable areas for nature that have not yet been protected
- In 2023, two landscape regional parks were created in Kyiv region to preserve the Irpin River floodplain and wetlands
- Now we work on creating a new Irdyn Swamp National Park, which will preserve one of the largest and southernmost swamps in Ukraine



Creation of protective zones for rare species

- The legislation for this was adopted during 2021-2023 with the participation of the UNCG
- Zones established to protect rare species and their habitat
- To create these zones, only confirmation of the presence of the rare species from the Red Book of Ukraine is required
- Established by the regional administration
- No need to obtain the landowner's agreement for creation



June 9, 2025,
Zhytomyr region

Spatial planning

- Comprehensive spatial development plans - each local community must develop this document
- The deadline was supposed to be 01.01.2025, but it was changed to the end of the war
- Until 2025, the development of such plans was funded by USAID projects
- Now its development is funded by the local community's budget money
- Most communities are financially dependent on leasing communal land for plowing and other harmful to nature.

Why are these plans important?

- The plan defines how each land plot will be used
- If the peatland is granted the status of arable land, it will be almost impossible to restore it
- If, on the contrary, the territory receives the status of nature restoration, it will be impossible to use it economically
- UNCG trying to participate in this plan development process for some areas – but we don't have successful stories for now (

Ukrainian environmentalists still do not understand the importance 😞

How can the EU help Ukrainian NGOs?

- Supporting activities aimed primarily at nature conservation - creating new protected areas, preventing peat extraction or wetland reclamation projects, etc.
- Supporting legislative and advocacy activities of NGOs
- Support for local small “grassroot” NGOs