

Legally protected natural areas in the Mazowieckie Voivodeship in the years 1999–2022

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses the changes in the scope of natural legally protected areas, that occurred after the administrative reform in 1999. It indicates the tasks carried out by the Self-Government of the Mazowieckie Voivodeship in the field of regional policy and spatial management in accordance with the principle of sustainable development. The Mazowieckie Voivodeship – created under the territorial division reform – covered a system of protected areas that included the Kampinos National Park, 164 nature reserves, 9 landscape parks and 29 protected landscape areas. In nearly 25 years, 26 nature reserves and one protected landscape area were created. The boundaries of the existing forms of nature protection have also been modified. With Poland's accession to the European Union, the most significant changes concerning legally protected areas have taken place. The implementation of EU law into Polish law resulted, *inter alia*, in the introduction of a new form of nature protection – Natura 2000 sites, complementing the existing system of legally protected areas. By March 2023, 80 areas of the Natura 2000 network had been designated and approved in the Mazowieckie Voivodeship. The article discusses how the position and competences of the regional self-government in the field of nature protection have evolved as a result of changes in the law. The voivodeship self-government took over competences in the field of landscape parks and protected landscape areas. As a result of the acquired rights, the Mazovian Voivodeship Sejmik, *inter alia*, established the Mazovian Landscape Parks complex and protection plans for landscape parks. The boundaries of the protected landscape areas have been specified. Spatial databases are also maintained in the field of protected areas.

Key words: Mazowieckie Voivodeship, nature conservation, legally protected areas, landscape parks, protected landscape areas, green belt

Introduction

Efforts directed towards nature conservation in Poland have a long tradition dating back to the Middle Ages. Initially, these efforts involved excluding beavers from the group of game animals, protecting yew trees and private forests from logging, imposing bans on hunting larger animals, and establishing protective periods for certain game animals. The increased interest in the native landscape, nature, and culture, was a manifestation of patriotism and the need for preservation of national identity during the period of partitions. Thus, providing the basis for the development of ideas and actions concerning nature conservation [Żarska 2020]. The establishment of the Temporary State Nature

Conservation Committee in 1919, later transformed into the State Nature Conservation Council in 1926, marked a shift towards actions based on scientific foundations. In 1934, the efforts of this body led to the passing of the first Nature Protection Act of a modern nature in Poland, surpassing other European countries in this field as well [Żarska 2020; Janik 2021]. This comprehensive legal act included explicitly formulated goals for nature protection and methods to achieve them, bans, and limitations on the use of protected natural creations¹, a wide range of restrictions to human activities in the natural environment, and served as the basis for establishing national parks (with a minimum area of 300 hectares) and implementing species protection for animals and plants.

Since 1949, when the parliament passed a new nature protection law, a national park can be established on an area no smaller than 500 hectares. The protection of natural creations also extended to nature reserves and natural monuments, along with the introduction of protection for specific, endangered, or low population, plant, and animal species. The State Nature Conservation Council was retained as the main advisory body to the government on nature conservation matters [Nowicki 2020]. As a result of this law, the Kampinoski National Park and 127 nature reserves were established in Mazovia², accounting for nearly 70% of the existing 190 areas protected under this form. The oldest protected area is the Dębina nature reserve, covering an area of 51.21 hectares, established by the Minister of Forestry's Decree on August 12, 1952. In the same year, two more areas were designated as nature reserves: Jedlina, covering 45.64 hectares, and King Jan Sobieski's nature reserve, covering 113.56 hectares. These areas provided protection for the most valuable forests in terms of habitat and natural values, which have largely retained the characteristics of natural communities. Due to their primary conservation focus, forest reserves continue to dominate among established nature reserves. A decree of the Council of Ministers on January 16, 1959, established the Kampinoski National Park, covering an area of about 40,700 hectares. It encompasses extensive sections of the Kampinos Forest, characterised by alternating strips of a few kilometres wide dunes and wetlands running parallel for tens of kilometres. During this period, social organisations played a significant role in creating protected objects and areas in Poland and Mazovia, including organising fundraising campaigns to purchase areas of natural value.

In 1971, the State Nature Conservation Council initiated efforts to protect landscapes. A project was developed for the creation of landscape parks and areas of protected landscape, which, along with national parks and nature reserves, were intended to constitute a national nature protection system [*History of Nature Conservation in Poland* n.d.].

¹ The subject of protection included creations of nature: land, its topography and formations, caves, standing and flowing waters, waterfalls, water banks, animals, plants, minerals, fossils, species, communities, and individual specimens, the preservation of which is in the public interest due to scientific, aesthetic, historical, memorial, or specific landscape characteristics, and which have been deemed subject to protection by the state authorities.

² In this article, the term 'Mazovia' is used in reference to the Mazovian Voivodeship within its current administrative limits.

However, the legal grounds for the protection of landscape parks and areas of protected landscape were only officially implemented in the Nature Protection Act of October 16, 1991. This law also defined the minimum size of a national park (1000 hectares) and introduced the possibility of individual protection through recognition, not only as natural monuments as was previously the case, but also as documentation sites, ecological use areas, and nature-landscape complexes.

In Poland's current legal system, nature conservation is regulated by appropriate legislative acts, with the most important being the Nature Protection Act of April 16, 2004, along with its secondary legislation. The preparation and adoption of this law were driven by objectives such as harmonising Polish law with European Union law, administrative reorganisation (including the transfer of many competencies from voivodes to regional assemblies, discussed later in the article), strengthening landscape protection, and reshaping the environmental impact assessment institution [Habuda, Radecki 2017; Richling, Malinowska (eds.) 2018]. The core of the law consists of ten forms of nature protection that remain in force today, specified in the second chapter. The legally recognized forms of nature protection include national parks, nature reserves, landscape parks, areas of protected landscape, Natura 2000 sites, natural monuments, documentation sites, ecological use areas, nature-landscape complexes, and the protection of plants, animals, and fungi. These listed forms primarily concern surface objects, but they also include natural monuments as point objects and the protection of plants, animals, and fungi aiming at the identification of species requiring strict protection [Burdziej, Kunz 2013].

Nature Protection in the Mazovia Voivodeship

The Act of July 24, 1998, introducing the fundamental three-tier territorial division of the country, fundamentally reconstructed Poland's territorial organisation. The two-tier division of the country into municipalities and Voivodeships was replaced by a three-tier division into municipalities, counties, and Voivodeships, resulting in the creation of 16 new Voivodeships, among other, the Mazovian Voivodeship. The act outlining the competencies of regional self-government, adapted to the new state organisation and structure, included tasks related to the region's development policy, covering rational use of natural resources and shaping the natural environment following the principle of sustainable development.

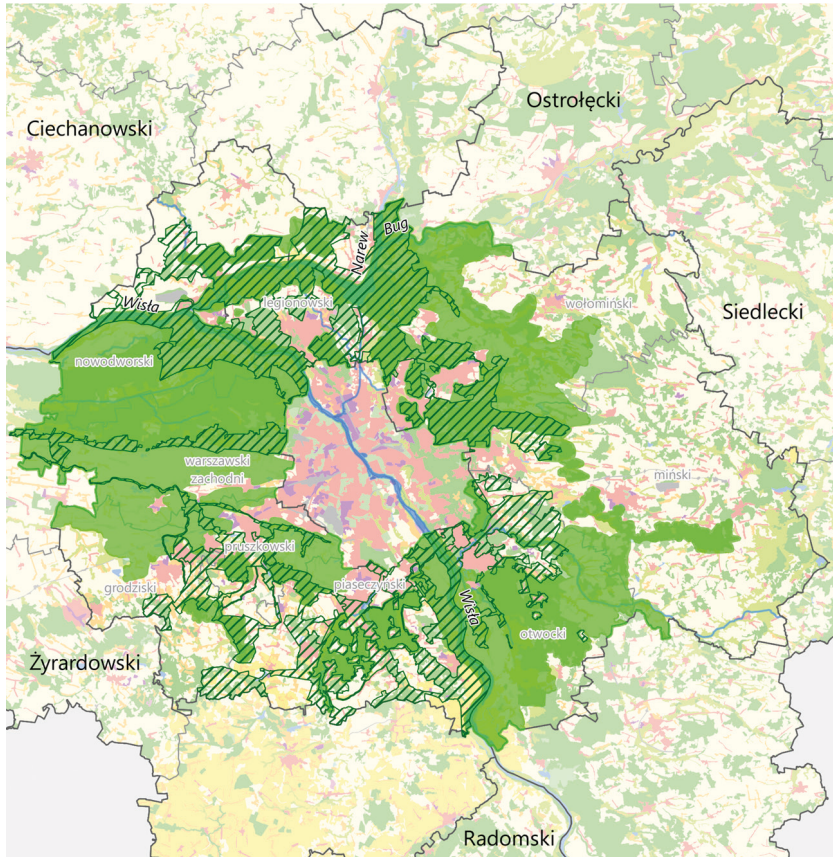
One of the results of the administrative reform was the creation of the Mazovian Office of Regional Planning (MBPR) in Warsaw³, which, while carrying out tasks for the Mazovian regional self-government in the fields of regional policy and spatial planning, also engages in publishing activities. "MAZOWSZE. Analizy i Studia" (MAZOVIA.

³ Mazovian Office of Regional Planning in Warsaw was established by the Resolution of the Mazovian Regional Assembly No. X/37/99 of May 17, 1999, under the name Mazovian Office for Spatial Planning and Regional Development. In 2006, by the Resolution of the Mazovian Regional Assembly No. 199/06 of October 9, 2006, the name of the Office was changed to the current one.

Analyses and Studies), a publication series initiated in 2006 with the aim of disseminating research, expertise, and analyses prepared for the needs of the regional self-government, contains analyses in the field of nature conservation as well. It is part of a broader range of activities related to environmental protection.

A publication *Zagospodarowanie przestrzenne dolin rzecznych a zagrożenie powodziowe województwa mazowieckiego* [*Spatial Development of River Valleys and Flood Hazard in the Mazovian Voivodeship*] was issued in 2008, and another one in 2015, *Korytarze ekologiczne w województwie mazowieckim ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem korytarza ekologicznego Wkry* [*Ecological Corridors in the Mazovian Voivodeship with Special Emphasis on the Wkra River Ecological Corridor*]. These publications focus on the characterisation of natural resources and values, including those under legal protection. It is estimated that around 80% of the ecological corridor's surface is protected within the boundaries of forest complexes and areas under legal nature protection, which encompass the effective ways of animals' movement and the dispersion of plants.

In 2011, a publication *Opracowanie ekofizjograficzne do Planu zagospodarowania przestrzennego województwa mazowieckiego* [*Eco-physiographic Study for the Spatial Development Plan of the Mazovian Voivodeship*] was published, being the first comprehensive study of this kind for the entire voivodeship. Detailed characterisation and diagnosis of the state and functioning of the environment were conducted in designated nature-landscape units for analytical purposes. A crucial part of the study is the assessment of the state of natural resource protection, considering the proportion of areas under legal protection within the surface area of nature-landscape units with relatively minimal anthropogenic transformation (dominated by forest, hydrogenic, meadow, and agroforestry areas). The assessment demonstrated that units comprising areas protected under the Kampinoski National Park, landscape parks (Kozienice, Nadbużański, Mazovian), and those protected within the European Natura 2000 network (mainly large surface areas) exhibit a high degree of natural resource protection. Ecosystems linked with the major river valleys and large forest complexes have preserved characteristics close to natural conditions. Significant restrictions on spatial management apply to specific nature-landscape units, with some of them being of an obligatory nature. The results of numerous assessments carried out in the study can be utilised in various spatial planning efforts. The document aimed to provide information about the natural environment, its resources, values, and threats, while defining conditions for the development of various functions and forms of spatial development, considering the continuity of connections within natural structures (at local, regional, and national scales) (Fig. 1).



- areas with potential for shaping the green belt of Warsaw
- ▨ areas with potential for enhancing the coherence of the green belt of Warsaw

* the indicated areas include selected natural-landscape units and protected areas, at least 50% of whose surface area is within a 20km buffer zone around Warsaw

Fig. 1. Areas with potential for shaping the green belt of Warsaw

Source: Plan zagospodarowania przestrzennego województwa mazowieckiego, MBPR, Warszawa 2018, p. 132

In 2018, in order to update the spatial development plan of the voivodeship, another eco-physiographic study was prepared. *Opracowanie ekofizjograficzne dla miejskiego obszaru funkcjonalnego ośrodka wojewódzkiego Warszawy* [*Eco-physiographic Study for the Functional Urban Area of the Voivodeship Centre, Warsaw*] is an integral part of this study. It attempts to delimit the green belt of Warsaw. Using the limits of nature-landscape units, areas with the potential for forming and enhancing the coherence of the green belt were specified. Legally protected areas account for nearly 65% of this area. Protected landscape areas have the largest share (around 40%) among the areas with the potential for shaping the green belt. Designing a structure for protecting open areas surrounding Warsaw is aimed at securing their recreational and ecological functions, and at managing the processes of urban spread and dispersion, which cause increasing landscape fragmentation and hinder the migration of plants, animals, and fungi [Degórska 2017]. The topic of green belts of large cities is discussed extensively and in depth in Cieszewska's work from 2019.

The green belt of Warsaw, a crucial component in shaping a spatial environment of considerable significance to the quality of life, has been integrated into the *Plan zagospodarowania przestrzennego województwa mazowieckiego* [*Spatial Development Plan of the Mazovian Voivodeship*]. Subsequently, its principles have been incorporated into updated planning documents of municipalities, among other, studies of land use conditions and directions of spatial development of Izabelin and Podkowa Leśna.

Analysis of changes in the natural areas of legally protected regions

The Mazovian Voivodeship, established on January 1, 1999, as part of a territorial division reform, encompassed the existing system of legally protected areas. This system included, alongside the Kampinos National Park, the following large-scale nature protection areas: 164 nature reserves, 9 landscape parks (including 4 partially located within other voivodeships), and 29 protected landscape areas. Collectively, the protected areas occupied a total area of 1,052,170.5 hectares, constituting 29.6% of the region's surface. By the year 2022, 26 new nature reserves and one protected landscape area have been created, increasing the legally protected area to 1,057,050.21 hectares (29.7% of the voivodeship's territory). The vast majority of the protected area consists of areas with the lowest protective regime, namely protected landscape areas (81.8% in 1999, 79.1% in 2021). This statistic does not include the latest form of protection, which is the Natura 2000 sites.

During the analysed period, there were also alterations to the boundaries of existing systems. Two landscape parks were expanded, and the boundaries of protected landscape areas were adjusted. Complementing the large-scale forms of protection were local forms of nature conservation, including ecological utility areas, natural landscape complexes, documentation sites, and natural monuments. Presently, these fall exclusively under the jurisdiction of municipal self-government. As of August 1, 2009, according to the *amendment to certain acts related to changes in the organisation and division of tasks of public administration in the voivodeship*, the authority to establish or remove such

forms of nature conservation was transferred to the municipal council (in place of the voivode). According to data from the Central Statistical Office (GUS) at the end of 2021, the Mazovian Voivodeship contained: 4150 natural monuments (4478 in 1999), 1.9 thousand hectares of ecological utility areas (1.2 thousand hectares in 1999), 5.6 thousand hectares of natural-landscape complexes (6.0 thousand hectares in 1999), and 537.3 hectares of documentation sites (521.3 hectares in 1999).

The establishment and functioning of forms of nature conservation are crucial components of achieving nature protection goals at both the national and voivodeship levels. Each form of nature protection serves a distinct purpose and entails different objectives, thus being characterised by varying protective regimes and limitations for use. Over the course of nearly 25 years of the Mazovian Voivodeship's existence, the system of legally protected areas has undergone various modifications. In addition to establishing new protected areas, alterations were made to the boundaries of existing areas, motivated by the need to enhance structural and functional integrity and increase protection effectiveness.

The first recorded changes included the expansion of the two landscape parks and the establishment of new nature reserves. In 2001, after a nearly 6-year endeavour, the enlargement of the Kozienice Landscape Park's southern part encompassing the Kozienice Forest, was completed. Furthermore, in 2002, territories from the municipalities of Platerów (Łosice County), Korczew, Paprotnia, Przesmyki (Siedlce County), Repki, Sabnie, and Sterdyń (Sokołów County) were incorporated into the boundaries of the Nadbużański Landscape Park. By that year, a total of 10 nature reserves had been established, accounting for over one-third of the objects analysed during the 25 years. As of the end of 2022, the list of Mazovian nature reserves comprised 190 entities. The most recent addition, the Toczna Nature Reserve spanning approximately 6.1 hectares, was established in November 2022. Currently, around 0.5% of the voivodeship's area is protected as nature reserves. In addition to national parks, nature reserves represent the most effective form of conservation and enduring preservation of nature. The existence of such a rational network of reserves, safeguarding a representative portion of natural ecosystems and habitats of endangered species, is an essential prerequisite for effective nature protection [Jermaczek 2017]. A significant management instrument for these areas is conservation planning, executed through protection plans or, in their absence, protective measures stipulated in directives issued by the Regional Directors for Environmental Protection. As of the end of 2022, 69 Mazovian nature reserves had valid protection plans, while 76 were governed by protective measures.

The most significant changes in the field of legally protected natural areas occurred on May 1, 2004 (the day Poland joined the European Union), coinciding with the implementation of the current Nature Protection Act of April 16, 2004. It laid down principles and methods for safeguarding natural assets, which, akin to historical monuments bearing witness to history, constitute elements of the country's natural heritage [Szulczewska 2008]. Alongside regulations concerning protected areas, the act also included principles forcing the protection and sustainable utilisation of nature outside of these areas.

Protection should be an integral component of spatial policy, other sectoral policies, and development strategies formulated by authorities at various levels. Consequently, the requirements of nature protection were incorporated into laws regulating other fields, including the Environmental Protection law, Forest Act, Spatial Planning and Development Act, Water law, and Protection of Agricultural and Forest Land law.

The new law, which replaced the previous one from 1991, stemmed from the implementation of EU regulations into Polish law. A new form of nature protection was introduced – the Natura 2000 sites. It aimed at preserving specific types of natural habitats and species considered valuable and endangered on a European scale. They do not replace the existing forms of nature protection but complement them. Natura 2000 sites can cover the entirety or parts of areas protected under other forms of nature protection. This has a significant impact on reducing the isolation of rare plant and animal species populations and constitutes important ecological connectivity links (Fig. 2).

The legal framework for the Natura 2000 program consists of two EU directives: the so-called Birds and the Habitats Directives. The binding guideline governing the functioning of areas significant for preserving the natural assets of Europe is the necessity to preserve the species and ecosystems listed in the annexes to the directives, in the so-called proper conservation status.

Initially, a proposal for 23 Natura 2000 sites located either entirely or partially in the Mazovian Voivodeship was submitted to the European Commission (14 “habitats” and 9 “birds” areas). By March 2023, 80 network areas were designated and approved in Mazovia: 16 “birds” areas, 63 “habitats” areas, and 1 area protected under both directives (PLC140001 Kampinos Forest). This demonstrates the high significance of the region’s natural assets and resources. The most recent expansion of the Mazovian Natura 2000 network, involving 4 new “habitats” areas, occurred in February 2022. Among the designated areas, the largest one located entirely in Mazovia is the Biała Forest with an area of 83,779.74 hectares, protected under the Birds Directive. The smallest is the Pachnicowa Alley with an area of 1.1 hectares, protected under the Habitats Directive. By the end of 2022, the approved Natura 2000 sites (excluding the areas’ projected size) covered approximately 13.1% of the Mazovian Voivodeship’s area.

To ensure the protection of biodiversity and effective spatial management within Natura 2000 sites, protective action plans (a fundamental protection instrument) or protection plans are prepared when necessary. These documents specify all actions (regardless of their location) necessary for maintaining and restoring the proper state of protection of protected objects located within the boundaries of Natura 2000 sites.

Due to the substantial overlap of Natura 2000 sites with other forms of spatial forms of nature conservation, the interactions between individual protection plans needed to be established [Fogel 2008]. The Act of October 3, 2008, amending the Nature Protection Act and some other acts, altered, among other things, the competence of authorities to establish and prepare protection plans (competence was transferred to Regional Directors for Environmental Protection), and introduced several changes concerning protection plans for Natura 2000 sites.

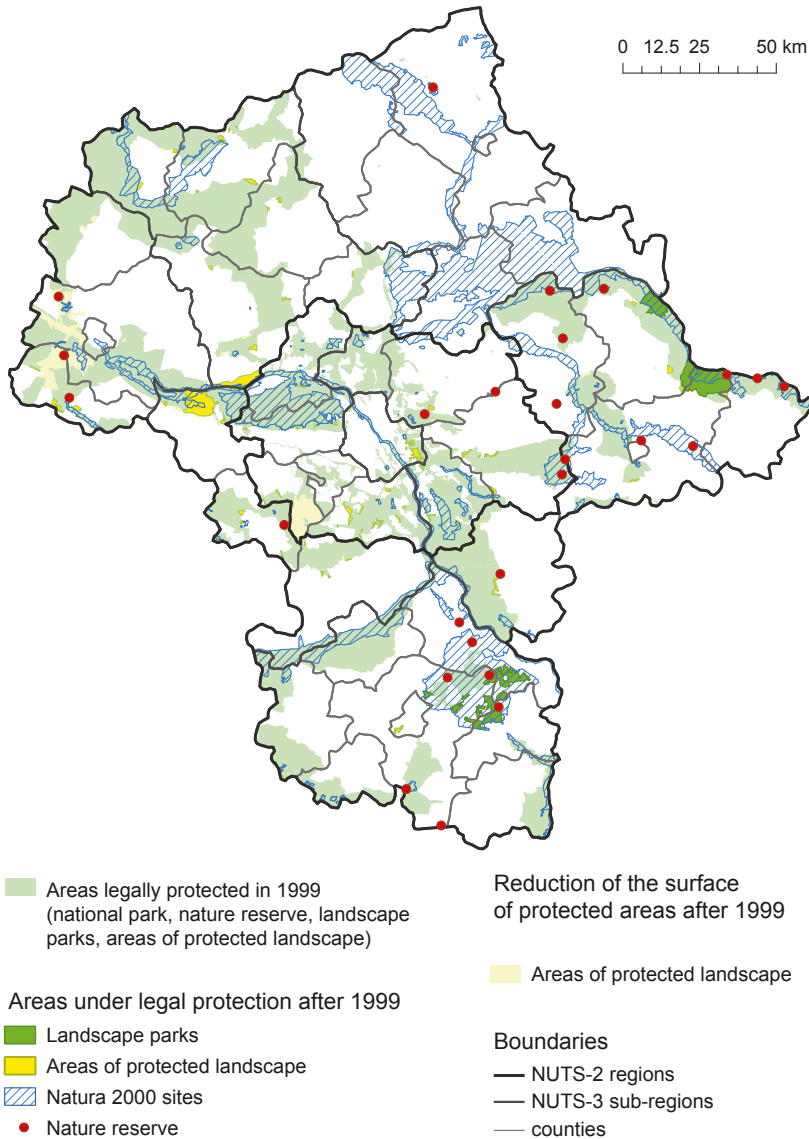


Fig. 2. Changes in legally protected areas from 1999 to 2022

Source: Compilation by MBPR based on GDEP (General Directorate for Environmental Protection) data and analysis of legal acts concerning landscape parks

As of the end of 2021, in Mazovia, a total of 68 Natura 2000 sites (14 “birds” areas and 54 “habitats” areas) were covered by current protective action plans established by Regional Directors for Environmental Protection’s decrees. In January 2023, a protective action plan was established for another “habitats” area.

A significant change introduced by the Nature Protection Act of April 16, 2004, was the enabling of local self-governments (regional and local) to co-decide in the process of creating and expanding national parks – the highest national form of nature protection. The only national park in the Mazovian Voivodeship – Kampinoski National Park – was established in 1959 to protect the nature, as well as the historical and cultural heritage of the Kampinos Forest. The park's protection plan, prepared for the period from January 1, 1997, to December 31, 2016, lost its validity on February 2, 2001. It was due to an amendment to the Nature Protection Act on December 7, 2000. Despite attempts, a new document has not yet been created, and since 2002, the park's protective tasks have been carried out in line with the scope and location specified in decrees issued by the Minister of the Environment.

Currently, within the framework of a project co-financed by EU funds, a protection plan for Kampinoski National Park (along with a protective action plan for the Natura 2000 site of Kampinos Forest) is being prepared to be submitted to the Minister of the Environment for approval by way of legislation. According to Article 19 para. 1a and 2 of Nature Protection Act, the draft of this document will be subject to public consultations conducted in accordance with the Act of October 3, 2008, *on providing information about the environment and its protection, participation of society in environmental protection, and environmental impact assessments*. Additionally, it will require opinions from relevant local municipal councils.

The current position of the voivodeship in terms of nature protection was primarily shaped after the implementation of the Act of January 23, 2009, *on the voivode and government administration in the voivodeship*, and the accompanying Act of January 23, 2009, *amending certain acts in connection with changes in the organisation and division of public administration tasks in the voivodeship* [Habuda 2017]. Competencies in the field of environmental and nature protection, previously held by voivodes, were largely transferred to the Voivodeship self-government and regional directors for environmental protection. The establishment, elimination, and alteration of the boundaries of landscape parks and protected landscape areas, which protect natural and landscape assets alike, were transferred to the Mazovian Voivodeship Regional Assembly. It also gained the right to establish protection plans for landscape parks.

Utilising the acquired competencies, the assembly established the Mazovian Landscape Parks Complex (MZPK) in 2010. This self-governmental organizational unit was formed at the voivodeship level by merging the budgetary units of 5 landscape parks, all located entirely within the Mazovian Voivodeship. MZPK was created to consolidate administration and finances, reduce operational costs, contribute to public education, and protect the environment, nature, and landscape. The complex includes the Czesław Łaszek Mazovian Landscape Park, Nadbużański Landscape Park, Professor Ryszard Zaręba Kozienicki Landscape Park, Chojnów Landscape Park, and Brudzeński Landscape Park. In 2019, protective action plans were prepared for three of the parks (Brudzeński, Chojnowski, Kozienicki), which had not previously had such

plans. Protective action plans enable the implementation of protective activities, and their provisions are taken into account when preparing planning documents. They include characteristics and assessments of the state of nature in given areas, analyses of conditions and the state of spatial development, as well as the identification and assessment of existing and potential risks. Due to the growing threats to natural assets, including uncontrolled urban sprawl, the role of these protective action plans cannot be overstated.

In 2020, efforts began to expand the Nadbużański Landscape Park by incorporating a part of the Podlaski Przełom Bugu Landscape Park located in the Mazovian Voivodeship. The Mazovian Landscape Parks Group in Otwock will assume control and nature protection responsibilities for the added part of the park from the Lublin Voivodeship.

Landscape parks, due to their size (approximately 5% of the Mazovian Voivodeship's territory) and functions, are a crucial element of the nature protection system, where comprehensive protection of natural, historical, and cultural values, and landscape characteristics is realised. They are the only organisationally distinct entities performing tasks related to nature and landscape protection. They play a role in education and contribute to preserving the region's identity and distinctiveness. One of their purposes is to conserve and popularise protected assets in the conditions of sustainable development. In this aspect, their role in providing accessible recreational spaces is important, and this can largely be achieved through responsible spatial policies by self-governments.

The largest share of protected areas in the Mazovian region (and in the country as a whole) is occupied by areas of protected landscape, which encompass territories protected due to their distinctive landscapes characterised by diverse ecosystems. These areas are valuable due to their touristic and recreational functions, or their serving as ecological corridors. As of 2021, their total area reached 835,722.15 hectares, constituting approximately 24% of the voivodeship's territory. Protected landscape areas represent one of the least restrictive forms of nature preservation, allowing for economic activities within their boundaries with minor limitations present. Within the Mazovian voivodeship, there are 30 protected landscape areas, comprising 7 designated by resolutions of the Mazovian Regional Assembly, 22 designated through ordinances of the Mazovian Voivode, and 1 designated by a resolution of the municipal council.

Since 2009, when the regional self-government assumed full jurisdiction over landscape parks and protected landscape areas, the management of natural resources within protected areas has been consistently updated. This involves the periodic adjustment of restrictions and exceptions within specific protected areas, as well as the incorporation of detailed boundaries into the spatial information system of the voivodeship. The effectiveness of safeguarding legally protected areas and the proper management thereof are contingent upon the enhancement of operational efficiency, including the development of conservation plans and the establishment of spatial databases. The creation of these databases enables a comprehensive assessment of natural and landscape assets,

as well as cultural values, essential for planning protection strategies for areas under the voivodeship's self-government authority.

From 2018 to 2022:

- Rules of governance were adapted to local conditions across 15 protected landscape areas.
- Spatial databases were compiled to specify boundaries for 22 protected landscape areas and for the Nadbużański Landscape Park with its buffer zone. This park will be expanded to include a section of the Podlaski Przełom Bugu Landscape Park located within the Mazovian Voivodeship.
- Detailed boundaries were added to the voivodeship's spatial information systems for 7 protected landscape areas and the Górznieńsko-Lidzbarski Landscape Park.

Mazovian Nature Council plays a pivotal role in strategic nature conservation efforts within the Mazovian Voivodeship. Established in 2011, this consultative and advisory body of the Mazovian Voivodeship Administration consists of representatives from the regional self-government, governmental administration, academic circles, and non-governmental organizations. The Council's responsibilities cover providing recommendations and opinions to the Mazovian Voivodeship Administration concerning projects and activities related to the creation of documents pertaining to nature conservation forms. Moreover, it advises the voivodeship executive board on both strategic and ongoing initiatives related to the completion of tasks outlined in the Nature Protection Act.

Summary

During the entire analysed period, the area of legally protected natural areas in the Mazovian Voivodeship increased by approximately 4880 hectares. Their share in the region's total area grew by only 0.1 percentage points. Excluding the newest form of protection, Natura 2000 sites, the system of area protection now includes Kampinos National Park, 190 nature reserves, 9 landscape parks, and 30 protected landscape areas, which cover 29.7% of the total area of the voivodeship. All the mentioned forms of spatial nature protection create a distinctly diverse yet coherent system of protected areas. Efforts should be made to ensure that this system, with its significant biological potential, safeguards the remaining natural environmental assets and spatial connections between the functioning protected areas.

The highest forms of protection (national parks, nature reserves) cover only 1.6% of the Voivodeship's area, while the majority of the protected area consists of areas with the lowest protection regime (protected landscape areas), which do not provide effective protection against threats and biodiversity loss. Apart from designating Natura 2000 sites, resulting from Poland's accession commitments, the process of creating new protected areas has slowed down in recent years. The requirement introduced in the Nature Protection Act of 2000 for obtaining local self-government approval for establishing a protected area has undoubtedly contributed to these difficulties. The creation of new

national parks, landscape parks, and protected landscape areas requires the consent of the relevant municipal council [Gwiazdowicz 2008].

The general lack of acceptance for land use restrictions, which is necessary for nature conservation, is also significant. Proposals for legal protection are still in the conceptual stage for areas such as the Omulwia and Płodownica valleys with fragments of the Kurpie Forest, and the Vistula River valley from Warsaw to Płock (including the lower Narwia River section), from Góra Kalwaria to Dęblin, or along the border with the Lublin Voivodeship (Małopolski Przełom Wisły). To preserve the valuable natural areas of Mazovia, both those already under legal protection and those outside protected areas, the increasing of ecological awareness in society and the involvement of numerous social organizations working for nature conservation are essential. It should be noted that in order to measure the civilization's development rate, taking into account only the advanced technical infrastructure is not enough. The richness of nature and the quality of the natural environment, which determine people's quality of life should also be considered [Jermaczek 2017].

The implementation of projects (especially the construction and modernisation of road, rail, and air infrastructure) necessary to improve internal cohesion and the region's attractiveness, as well as rapid urbanisation, may threaten the coherence of protected areas and the continuity of ecological corridors. Rational spatial planning is one way to counter these threats, as it is an important tool for nature protection, enabling not only the effective protection of natural and landscape values but also the minimisation of social conflicts.

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Przyrodnicze obszary prawnie chronione w województwie mazowieckim w latach 1999–2022

STRESZCZENIE

W artykule omówiono zmiany w zakresie przyrodniczych obszarów prawnie chronionych, które zaszły po reformie administracyjnej w 1999 r. Wskazano realizowane przez Samorząd Województwa Mazowieckiego zadania w zakresie polityki regionalnej i zagospodarowania przestrzennego, zgodnie z zasadą zrównoważonego rozwoju. Województwo mazowieckie, powstałe w ramach reformy podziału terytorialnego, objęło swym zasięgiem system obszarów chronionych, w skład którego wchodził Kampinoski Park Narodowy, 164 rezerwaty przyrody, 9 parków krajobrazowych i 29 obszarów chronionego krajobrazu. W ciągu blisko 25 lat utworzono 26 rezerwatów przyrody oraz jeden obszar chronionego krajobrazu. Modyfikacji uległy również granice istniejących form ochrony przyrody. Wraz z wejściem Polski do Unii Europejskiej dokonały się największe zmiany dotyczące obszarów prawnie chronionych. Wdrożenie przepisów prawa unijnego do prawa polskiego skutkowało m.in. wprowadzeniem nowej formy ochrony przyrody – obszarów Natura 2000, uzupełniającej istniejący system obszarów prawnie chronionych. Do marca 2023 r. na terenie województwa mazowieckiego wyznaczonych i zatwierdzonych zostało 80 obszarów sieci Natura 2000. W artykule omówiono, jak kształtowała się pozycja i kompetencje samorządu województwa w zakresie ochrony przyrody na skutek wprowadzanych zmian w prawie. Samorząd województwa przejął kompetencje dotyczące parków krajobrazowych i obszarów chronionego krajobrazu. Na skutek nabytych uprawnień Sejmik Województwa Mazowieckiego m.in. powołał do życia Mazowiecki Zespół Parków Krajobrazowych oraz ustanowił plany ochrony dla parków krajobrazowych. Uszczegółowione zostały granice obszarów chronionego krajobrazu, prowadzone są także bazy danych przestrzennych w zakresie obszarów chronionych.

Słowa kluczowe: województwo mazowieckie, ochrona przyrody, obszary prawnie chronione, parki krajobrazowe, obszary chronionego krajobrazu, zielony pierścień

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