



Executive summary of the public audit report

MANAGEMENT OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTY AND USE OF EQUIPMENT ALLOCATED FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF AREAS IN STATE PARKS AND RESERVES

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Full audit report in Lithuanian is available on the website
of the National Audit Office: www.vkontrole.lt

ABBREVIATIONS

SSPA means the State Service for Protected Areas under the Ministry of Environment.

State parks means national and regional parks.

Administrations means the administrations of state parks and reserves.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There are 31 state parks and 3 reserves in Lithuania, with administrations subordinate to the SSPA which perform the protection of landscape complexes and objects (properties), organise continuous maintenance and management thereof, promote knowledge-oriented tourism and rational use of natural resources, and carry out other functions delegated thereto. The administrations are owned by the state, and the rights and duties of the owner are exercised by the SSPA.

The administrations of state parks and reserves:

- by the right of trust, dispose of 382 buildings (and premises therein) and structures, with the total area of 65,580.2 m² and the residual value of LTL 57,039.5 thousand;
- carry out maintenance of a territory of 1,222.9 thousand ha and manage or use, by the right of ownership and trust and under contracts of use or lease concluded with land owners, an area of 243.6 ha;
- have 139 cars, which are mainly used to carry out administrative functions, and 33 tractors used to manage and supervise the areas.

Pursuant to their regulations, state park and reserve administrations shall use the property entrusted thereto by the state to perform their functions, such as organise research and monitoring of the nature of state parks and reserves, store information about the state of and changes in the components of the natural environment, provide environmental education, create conditions for developing recreational activities, knowledge-oriented and rural tourism and short-term leisure in parks in designated areas.

In order to ensure efficient management of buildings and structures, land and equipment, the administrations should have detailed information about the condition of property managed and used thereby, analyse the need for such property and take decisions related to the property management on the basis of this information; they should also use the buildings, structures and equipment to perform their functions and maintain the areas of state parks and reserves.

The objective of the audit was to assess the efficiency of the use of buildings, structures, land, as well as equipment intended for the maintenance of state parks and reserves by the administrations of state parks and reserves. The audit assessed whether:

- the buildings and structures managed by the administrations of state parks and reserves are used efficiently;
- the land of state parks and reserves is used properly;
- the equipment intended for the maintenance of state parks and reserves is used efficiently.

The audit was conducted at the Ministry of Environment, which forms the system of protected areas and the state policy in the fields of the use of state administrative and other non-residential premises and buildings and organises, coordinates and supervises its implementation.

Audit procedures were carried out in the SSPA which exercises the rights and performs the duties of the owner of the administrations of state parks and reserves, as well as in the administrations of state parks and reserves which shape policies, are responsible for the protection of landscape complexes and objects (property), and organise regular maintenance, management and rehabilitation thereof.

The audit covered the year 2013. Some data from the period 2010–2012 and the year 2014 was also used for the purpose of analysing trends and changes.

The following public audit conclusions and recommendations were drawn upon the assessment of the audit findings.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The management, use and maintenance of a number of buildings and premises of the administrations of state parks and reserves is not sufficiently efficient because:
 - 1.1. the administrations do not use about 24 per cent of all buildings and premises to perform their functions, because a number of the buildings managed thereby are in poor condition, too big and situated in remote locations. The condition of the abandoned buildings and premises is continually deteriorating, their residual value is decreasing, so more funds may be required in future to upgrade this property;
 - 1.2. most of the national parks administrations do not carry out analyses of the need for the buildings managed thereby and thus do not know the need for buildings to perform the assigned functions;
 - 1.3. the administrations are required to plan the demand for funds for the maintenance of the buildings based on the amount of funds allocated and used in the previous year, so the allocations are not sufficient for the maintenance or reconstruction of all buildings;
 - 1.4. over the period 2010-2014, the administrations liquidated, reconstructed or transferred a number of their buildings to other institutions; however, the problem of abandoned buildings in state parks and reserves still persists, because the administrations have failed to take decisions concerning further use, transfer or liquidation of 43 abandoned buildings, have not recognised them as unnecessary or not suitable for use (unusable), and have not prepared documents for transferring the buildings or premises, hence municipalities and other state institutions cannot take over the buildings which are no longer necessary for and are not used by the administrations;
 - 1.5. the contracts on lease or use of buildings or premises made by the administrations of three national parks or previous managers of the buildings did not provide for the term of validity, possibilities of building renovation, or contract amendment conditions. The contracts do not comply with current legislation and thus should be revised; however, they may be amended or terminated only by mutual agreement or by court order. This process takes a long time, so the administrations cannot manage these buildings or premises.
2. In accordance with the Law on Land, land owners or users are required to implement environmental protection measures, meanwhile administrations, pursuant to the Law on Protected Areas, are supposed to carry out maintenance of the areas. The area managed by the administrations of state parks and reserves, using the budget funds for this purpose, is about ten times larger than the area of the land actually owned, which means that the administrations manage the land owned by other entities, without having contracts on land lease or use or other documents.
3. Decisions of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania on granting permanent use of 14,263.3 ha of state land to the administrations were adopted over 1991-1998; however, at the end of 2014, cadastral measurements of all granted state lands were still not carried out by the administration of two national parks and one reserve due to lack of funds, also, this land was not registered with the Real Property Register. This means failure to meet the requirements of Article 16 of the Law on the Management, Use and Disposal of State and Municipal Assets and to ensure proper management of the state-owned land in these parks and reserves.

4. The State Service for Protected Areas has purchased equipment for the maintenance of state parks and reserves for the amount of LTL 7 million and transferred this equipment to the administrations; however, some administrations have been using it inefficiently due to the limited demand for this equipment thus failing to use the full potential of the equipment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Ministry of Environment with the State Service for Protected Areas:

1. In order to avoid the risks related to the preservation of the results of maintenance works carried out in protected areas or obstacles in the use of the developed infrastructure of protected areas, a procedure (or recommendations) should be prepared and approved specifying in what cases the administrations of protected areas should regulate legal relations on the use of private land with the owners or manager of this lands as well as what documents should be required for this purpose.

To the State Service for Protected Areas with the administrations of state parks and reserves:

2. In order to ensure rational use of the buildings of the administrations of state parks and reserves, i.e. that the number and area of all buildings corresponds to the one required for performing the functions of the administrations, and to maintain adequate operating characteristics of the buildings, the following is recommended:
 - 2.1. to assess the need for buildings required for performing the functions of the administrations, taking into account the area of the territories maintained thereby, the number of visitors and the staff, and possibilities of the maintenance, renovation and reconstruction of the buildings;
 - 2.2. after conducting analysis of the need for buildings, to take decisions on transferring all buildings that are not used or needed in the activities of the administrations to the state enterprise Turto bankas and/or other institutions, or on their liquidation.
3. In order to ensure more efficient use of equipment of the administrations of state parks and reserves for the maintenance of areas, measures should be provided for to improve the use of the equipment of the administrations.
4. In order to ensure that the administrations of state parks and reserves could manage and use state-owned land, cadastral measurements and legal registration of the state-owned land of Čepkeliai, Kamanos, Viešvilė state reserves and Žuvintas biosphere reserve should be carried out.

To the administrations of state parks and reserves:

5. In order to prevent the loss of state property or funds, previously concluded contracts on lease and use should be revised and amendment of the contracts on lease and use of the buildings or premises that are no longer needed by the administrations of state parks and reserves should be initiated.

The measures and deadlines for implementing the recommendations are given in Annex 6.