1. Country and Sector Background

*Agriculture and rural development*

Serbia has significant comparative advantages in agriculture, thanks to an abundance of high quality agricultural land, a strategic trading location, and an educated workforce. Primary agricultural production and agro-processing was estimated to be 15 percent of GDP and 20 percent of exports in 2005. About 0.8 million ha, or 15 percent of the arable land consists of about 1,050 large corporate farms and agro-kombinats. Privately owned commercial farms, averaging about 10 ha, account for another 46 percent of agricultural land. The remaining 39 percent comprises over 600,000 small private farms, most under five ha and often consisting of several fragmented parcels of land, which produce agricultural products primarily for their own use and depend heavily on non-farm income. There is significant regional variation in production systems and products.

The agriculture sector is supported by a publicly funded extension service delivered primarily by 34 contracted, socially owned Agricultural Stations but also some private and NGO providers. In 2006, MAFWM extension contracts valued at about US$ 3 million financed extension agent and farmer capacity building, a market price information service and statistical reporting. Extension contracts are milestone based and, increasingly, contestable, however there is no formal stakeholder participation in extension planning or management. Agriculture research is primarily funded by the Ministry of Science and Environment Protection (MSEP) through 4 year contracts for basic research and technology improvement projects and 6-12 month contracts for technology innovation. Total public research funding, however, is very low, with salaries absorbing up to 90% of funding and most research stations relying on income from product sales and service contracts for their survival.
In late 2000, the Government of Serbia (GoS) launched an ambitious reform program to improve the business environment, increase transparency and create a vibrant private sector, with the objective of achieving EU accession by 2013. The GoS Agricultural Strategy (August 2005) sets out a road-map for growth and competitiveness based on: (i) completing the move to a competitive market economy, including abolishing remaining production subsidies and adopting World Trade Organization (WTO) principles; (ii) increasing Serbia’s share of EU markets by harmonizing with EU sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) and quality and agro-environmental requirements; (iii) improving competitiveness through adoption of modern, cost effective production technologies; and (iv) promoting rural development, especially in poor regions, through transparent, EU-type rural development grant mechanisms. The GoS’s EU Integration Strategy for Serbian Agriculture lays out an ambitious three-phase plan for moving away from market and production support towards rural development support, EU standards, and integration with the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The Strategy is backed up by key legal and institutional reforms, improved planning, reorientation of expenditures, improved transparency and an increase in the agricultural budget.

Access to EU markets will require harmonization with EU policies such as the Common Agricultural Policy, the Habitats Directive and the *acquis communautaire*. Experience in accession countries highlights the importance of a proactive approach to achieving these outcomes. The European Agency for Reconstruction (EAR) currently implements 6 EU financed projects in the agricultural sector. These include: support for agricultural policy development; strengthening payment agency procedures and rural development planning; capacity building within the MAFWM Phytosanitary and Veterinary Directorates; alignment of the Serbian wine sector with the EU *acquis communautaire*; and support for the reform and restructuring of the management of agriculture and food laboratories. These EAR projects mostly focus on capacity building and institutional and regulatory reform, providing a base for improved effectiveness and transparency in agriculture and rural development, but will require additional capital investments to fully impact on Serbian agriculture. A number of other donors (USAID, FAO and the Governments of Germany, Austria, Italy and the Netherlands) have programs to address different aspects to help Serbia successfully access EU pre-accession instruments. Within this context, the MAFWM has requested World Bank support in improving the design, administration, and transparency of its structural support program and the development and dissemination of knowledge capital. This provides an opportunity to provide medium term support for a progressive reform agenda.

**Biodiversity and nature protection**

Conservation of biodiversity, including biodiversity important for agriculture, was identified as one of Serbia’s priorities for environmental protection in the GoS adopted report titled "State of the Environment in 2000 and priorities in 2001+ for Serbia". A national Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan is under preparation, but the GoS already has a number of programs and mechanisms to support biodiversity conservation, both in natural areas and within agro-ecosystems.

About five percent of Serbia’s territory is designated as protected area (PA), including five National Parks, 120 nature reserves, 20 nature parks, 470 natural monuments and one Biosphere Reserve, and an application is under preparation for UNESCO designation of a second Biosphere Reserve (covering the trans-boundary West Stara Planina area, currently designated as a Nature Park in Serbia). The total area under protection is expected to increase to ten percent by 2010. There are, however, gaps and inefficiencies in PA management, in some cases arising from unclear or overlapping roles of different institutions.
Ninety seven of the PAs\(^1\) (including the Stara Planina Nature Park (SPNP)) are managed by the Public Enterprise for Forests (Srbijasume). The spatial plan for the SPNP reflects a diverse set of objectives for the park, including nature conservation, habitat restoration, small-scale livestock husbandry and agriculture, and sustainable tourism. Srbijasume’s responsibilities relating to non-forest areas within PAs, however, remains undefined and the organization has little experience or capacity in ecosystems management (such as pastures), other land uses (such as tourism), or participatory approaches. In addition, the 1997 law establishing the SPNP only defines its outer boundaries, although a recently prepared spatial plan now defines land use within the park.

In 2002, the Parliament approved a strategy "to preserve locally adapted breeds that are becoming extinct, for social and economical purposes and for future scientific research and education purposes.” The strategy emphasizes in situ conservation and a defined role for autochthonous (indigenous) breeds within the overall livestock sector. Key elements include protecting wild relatives of these breeds and their habitats, monitoring populations of endangered local breeds and providing incentives for maintaining them, raising public awareness, training personnel in modern conservation technologies and the development of supporting, EU-aligned legislation and regulations. The MAFWM Division for Genetic Resources and Genetically Modified Organisms (DGRGMO) is responsible for implementation of this strategy, including data collection and reporting, advising farmers and breeders’ associations, channeling Government subsidies to them, and direct support for in situ conservation activities. Local Non-government Organizations (NGOs) also contribute to the effort, including providing a connection to regional and international agro-biodiversity programs. The efforts to preserve this national heritage, however, remain severely limited by capacity and funding constraints.

Local NGOs, municipalities, the IPN branch in Niš and the recently formed Council for Sustainable Rural Development of Dimitrovgrad, have led strong initiatives to preserve in an integrated way the Stara Planina region's cultural and natural heritage, much of which is characterized by traditional extensive farming systems leading to the identification of investment needs and opportunities to preserve the biodiversity and traditional agricultural landscapes of the SPNP. In January 2004, the GEF Focal Point for Serbia and Montenegro, and the Minister for the Protection of Natural Recourses and Environment, requested World Bank assistance in preparing a project for submission to the GEF.

2. Objectives

The project development objective is to enhance the competitiveness of Serbian agriculture. The global environmental objective is to conserve the globally important eco-system in the Stara Planina mountainous area.

Key outcome indicators would include: (i) improved Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management (MAFWM) ability to target the use of rural development funds, disburse them transparently and evaluate their impact on the agri-food sector; (ii) an increased number of agricultural producers and processors using competitive, market oriented agriculture technologies and practices; and (iii) expanded areas under ecological management and/or restoration within the Stara Planina Nature Park (SPNP) and surrounding area.

3. Rationale for Bank Involvement

The World Bank has experience with supporting agricultural competitiveness, sustainable land use and environmental management within the context of EU accession programs in a number of countries.

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\(^1\) Excluding national parks, which are managed by individual Public Enterprises established for this purpose
(Romania, Croatia, Slovakia, etc.). The objective is always to integrate these objectives within the broader economic development agenda.

In Serbia, the World Bank Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) for 2005-2007 emphasizes building a vibrant and competitive private sector and a responsive and transparent public sector. It is built on two complementary government strategies: the EU Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) process and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). Based on these and the GoS Agricultural Strategy, the Bank has developed a comprehensive program of support for agriculture and rural development. The proposed operation represents an important element of this program, complementing the ongoing land project and irrigation projects, which are helping to create the necessary initial conditions for growth. Consistent with emerging lessons from transition economies and in accordance with the first three elements of the GoS Agricultural Strategy, this third project will focus on agri-food sector competitiveness, the introduction of modern technologies and harmonization with EU requirements and norms. The CAS also includes a Global Environment Facility (GEF)-financed “In-situ Agrobiodiversity” project to promote economic development based on sustainable land use and conservation of ecosystems and agrobiodiversity, with a focus on the SPNP area. This is consistent with GoS and EU policies to promote agri-environmental activities and also supports the GoS rural poverty alleviation objectives by targeting the poorest rural area in the country. In recognition of the many areas of convergence and complimentarity, the GEF and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) operations have been fully blended into a single operation.

The 2006 Bank ESW study “Supporting Serbia’s Agricultural Strategy” identifies improved producer access to high quality inputs and technologies, greater commercialization of farms, land consolidation, improved output quality and strengthened farmer association as important constraints in the sector. Key actions recommended by the study include the: (i) increased financing of research and extension systems more closely aligned with farmers’ needs; (ii) development of the institutions and capacity to benefit from EU pre-accession funds; (iii) compliance with international food safety and standards requirements; (iv) continued shifting of public resources from market support into structural support programs; and (v) increased public expenditures facilitating land consolidation and farmer retirement programs. The STAR project would directly support recommendations (i)-(iv), and indirectly support recommendation (v) through improved capacity for public expenditure management, monitoring and evaluation. The Bank Real Estate Cadastre and Registration Project also indirectly supports land consolidation.

The project complements other World Bank support to Serbia for regional integration. This includes the Danube River Pollution Project (GEF, FY05) which seeks to reduce nutrient pollution from livestock production and slaughterhouses, in keeping with the EU environmental acquis (nitrates directive). The Bank also participates, together with the European Commission, in the Infrastructure Steering Group for South East Europe, which promotes a regional strategic approach to infrastructure development. The proposed project will help to strengthen cooperation between the World Bank and other donors, including the EC, which is a key partner in promoting reforms linked with the SAA. The focus of this project is on supporting rural development, both structurally and substantively, in ways that echo Pillar 2 of the CAP.

4. Description

The project objectives will be achieved through a series of strategic public investments that aim to: (i) improve and strengthen the GoS system for transparently delivering rural development investment grants and evaluating their impact; (ii) improve the knowledge and capacity of agricultural producers and processors to make the best use of these funds; and (iii) improve management of the SPNP, including its flora and autochthonous livestock breeds, in partnership with local communities and other stakeholders. It will build on and enhance existing Government systems and programs to help the agri-food sector fully benefit from the new opportunities arising from the GoS market-oriented reform agenda, and accelerate
the harmonization of these systems with EU requirements. This includes support for the implementation of an efficient, transparent and EU-compatible farm payment system and for the implementation of a rural development program consistent with Pillar 2 of the EU Common Agricultural Policy. The project would also develop a system for the competitive contracting and delivery of extension and applied research outcomes consistent with beneficiary needs and empower stakeholders to oversee this process. GEF co-financing will increase capacity and incentives for agricultural producers and processors to engage in activities that support agro-biodiversity conservation and sustainable land use, and to support ecosystem restoration and management in the SPNP.

Component 1: Strengthening the Agriculture and Rural Development Support System
The Government of Serbia provides several types of support for the agriculture and rural development sector, totaling about EUR 200 million in 2006. Of this amount, over EUR 120 million was for structural support, including EUR 28 million in the form of matching grants for which individuals can apply, based on certain eligibility criteria. As part of its overall economic reform and in line with the process of moving towards EU accession, the GoS is progressively de-emphasizing price subsidies and shifting resources towards investment grants and income support.

This component will support the shift towards structural support. It will involve building capacity for processing and administering the national rural investment grant program. The project would fund development and implementation of data processing software across the Payment Directorate (PD) system. Technical assistance would be used to design the national PD integrated administration and control system (IACS), a pilot land parcel information system (LPIS) and a risk management program. In PY3, the project will support the updating of the national rural development plan and support measures. This component complements the work of European Agency for Reconstruction (EAR) SRDPPS project, which is supporting the development of an EU-compatible fiduciary system within the MAFWM and the preparation of a national rural development plan and supporting measures.

Component 2: Building Knowledge and Capacity of Agricultural Producers and Processors
This component will help develop and disseminate the knowledge and technology needed for agricultural producers and processors to raise agricultural production and competitiveness and to access and make effective use of the structural support provided by the MAFWM. Adopting best practice EU measures, this component will build upon and enhance existing GoS systems, in which research and extension activities are carried out through transparent, competitively awarded contracts including private sector delivery. While extension delivery must be tailored to specific country environments, systems such as those in the UK and Holland, where government funds up to 70% of the privately delivered advisory services, provide working models for Serbia.

The component will include:

(i) Improvement of Agricultural Extension Delivery
   a. Strengthening of MAFWM capacity: the project will support the establishment and capacity building of a Division for Extension and Applied Research (DEAR) within the MAFWM to oversee the Serbian applied research and extension system, with responsibility for adopting an Agricultural Extension Strategy and approving contracts and making payments to Extension Service Providers. Project inputs will include office and computing equipment and vehicles for the DEAR, technical assistance and capacity building in extension management and effective communication for DEAR staff and trainers and support for annual workshops and training programs.

   b. Incremental funding for extension services contracts: over the project life, existing funding for contracts to service providers for training of extension contractors, extension services to farmers and for facilitating farmer's rural development grant applications will be doubled. Demand driven extension contracts, co-financed by the project and the MAFWM, will be awarded on a competitive basis
to certified service providers, including restructured agricultural stations, academic institutions (e.g. agricultural schools), NGOs, private companies and private individuals.

(ii) **Improving Applied Research Delivery:** A national Advisory and Applied Research Fund would be established as defined in the 1991 Law on Agriculture Departments. The project would co-finance separate applied research and extension services programs supporting competitively awarded contracts based on EU best practice, including:

   a. **Capacity building for applied agricultural research:** to strengthen the relevance and effectiveness of the applied research program, the project will support technical assistance and training in applied research management and implementation and regional study tours for the members of a project supported Applied Research and Extension Council.

   b. **Incremental funding for applied research contracts:** up to EUR 1.3 million will be provided annually for co-financing, with the MAFWM, contracts for demand driven applied agricultural research, which will be awarded on a competitive basis to accredited research institutes and, at a lower level of funding, to innovative farmer, agro-industry and civil society groups for technology testing and demonstration.

(iii) **Development of stakeholder representation:** The MAFWM extension and applied research program will be overseen by a multi-sectoral Agricultural Extension and Applied Research Council including representatives of the MAFWM, MSEP, civil society and target beneficiaries (agricultural producers and processors). The project will also support the establishment of a system supporting democratic, gender-balanced stakeholder representation in local extension and applied research management. Project inputs will include a consultation and communication package on the development of stakeholder representation, funding for Okrug-based farmer representative elections and TA and capacity building in support of effective representation. The project will also fund TA and capacity building in applied research management at both scientific and Council levels and stipends for national Council members.

**Component 3: Management of the Stara Planina Nature Park**

Component 3 will support aspects of improved management and biodiversity conservation and sustainable natural resource use within the non-core conservation areas (Zones 2 and 3) of the SPNP. This includes TA, training and some equipment for the management authority (Srbijasume) and support for preparation of management and operational plans for the SPNP, public awareness raising, strengthening of cooperation with local authorities and communities, strengthening trans-boundary cooperation, ecological restoration of priority sites (particularly degraded high elevation meadows), development and certification of ‘SPNP-branded’ products based on sustainable use of natural resources, incentives to farmers for maintaining rare indigenous livestock breeds, small scale infrastructure to support rural/eco-tourism, and establishing an ecological monitoring system. GEF co-financing will be used to strengthen MAFWM capacity in areas such as agro-environmental production and agro-tourism. While targeted toward the SPNP, these competencies will be applicable anywhere in the country.

In the Stara Planina area EUR 1.8 million (US$2.4 million) of GEF funds will be provided as competitive grants to support the global objectives of promoting sustainable land use (particularly well-managed extensive grazing), ecological restoration, sustainable rural tourism and related enterprises, and preservation of natural and agro-biodiversity, including using the LEADER approach where appropriate. This will supplement the limited funds available from GoS for these purposes (in 2005, approximately EUR 103,000 equivalent went to farmers in the 4 Stara Planina municipalities). The GEF investment grants will fund up to 100% of investment costs, to encourage recipients to undertake activities with a high public goods element (such as ecological restoration) or higher than usual financial risk.
The grants, to be managed through a Stara Planina Advisory Committee, will support integrated strategies for sustainable local development, prepared through decentralized, integrated and bottom-up approaches. In the agriculturally marginal SPNP area, GEF funds will help to pilot approaches to introduce sustainable farming and forestry practices and to diversify household and local economies.

**Component 4: Project Management and Coordination**

The project will be managed as an integral program of MAFWM, without the establishment of an independent project implementation unit. This component will support incremental costs of consultant services, training, equipment and operations to facilitate project implementation including procurement and financial management, monitoring and evaluation and reporting. A Project Implementation Team within MAFWM, working under the direction of a MAFWM Project Manager, will provide technical, procurement and financial management support to participating MAFWM Sectors. A small technical advisory team will be located in the Stara Planina area to support MAFWM and Srbijasume in implementation of the GEF-financed activities, particularly under Component 3. Day-to-day implementation of the project sub-components will be the responsibility of the associated MAFWM Divisions, Directorates and Sectors and Srbijasume in the case of for the SPNP program.

5. **Financing**

Source: ($m.)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>BORROWER/RECIPIENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International Bank for Reconstruction and Development</td>
<td>16.90</td>
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<tr>
<td>Global Environment Facility (GEF)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Communities</td>
<td>0.60</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>35.40</strong></td>
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6. **Implementation**

The project will build on and expand existing World Bank project implementation capacity within the MAFWM. The technical aspects of project support for rural development payments will be overseen by the MAFWM’s Sector of Agrarian Operations (SAO), with the Sector for the Development of Rural Areas and Agriculture (SDRAA) responsible for rural development planning and research/extension services, and the DGRGMO (within the SDRAA) responsible for agro-biodiversity aspects. A new Division responsible for agriculture extension and applied research policy and programming will be established in the MAFWM SDRAA, building off an existing Extension Unit. The Institute of Science Application in Agriculture (ISAA) will be restructured and contracted by the MAFWM to administer the applied research and extension support program, which will be implemented on the basis of competitively awarded contracts. For the implementation of the rural development and biodiversity conservation GEF financed grants, SDRAA will also establish Stara Planina Advisory Committee that will include representatives of MAFWM, Local Government and non-governmental stakeholder groups. The MAFWM will appoint a Project Manager who will coordinate project activities across all components and a Project Implementation Team (PIT) for day-to-day planning and management support, including a support team in the Stara Planina area. The PIT, located within MAFWM, will provide technical and administrative support to the SAO and SDRAA, which will be responsible for the management of their respective components of the STAR project. As the project is implemented almost entirely within the MAFWM, the existing MAFWM management and committee structures will take responsibility for project implementation, obviating the need for a Steering Committee. Activities within the SPNP such as ecological restoration and development of small scale tourism-related infrastructure will be implemented by MAFWM in coordination with Srbijasume and local municipalities.
The workload of the core MAFWM staff currently exceeds its capacity due to the competing demands of the regular MAFWM work program and the numerous donor funded programs. The project will mitigate this absorption capacity constraint by mobilizing long term national consultants who will reinforce relevant MAWFM units (e.g. grant management and administration, rural development planning and extension/research management). Subject to their satisfactory performance, these consultants will be converted to regular MAFWM positions by project-end. The DGRGMO and Srbijasume will be strengthened to support implementation of the GEF-financed activities (Component 3), with particular attention to increasing public participation, introducing ecosystem management objectives and supporting the development of sustainable rural tourism.

Stakeholder participation, both male and female, in agriculture extension and applied research management will be strengthened through the establishment of a network of democratically elected farmer and agri-business representatives who will participate in a tiered governance structure including Committees at Okrug level and a national Applied Research and Extension Council. The Council will review and approve the annual work plan and budget of the DEAR and monitor its impact.

7. Sustainability

A core objective of the project is to enable Serbian farmers and agricultural processors to find their place within a rapidly growing regional market. Serbian agriculture can only sustain itself and contribute to the sustainability of the national economy by becoming more competitive within this context. The project minimizes the creation of potentially unsustainable programs and institutional structures by supplementing and building the capacity of existing ones, to which the GoS has already demonstrated a strong commitment, particularly as they represent an important part of the process toward EU accession. This will represent an important first step towards establishing the much greater capacity that the MAFWM will require in order to absorb EU pre-accession funds.

The GoS agricultural research and extension services are already partially delivered through milestone based contracts. The project will improve the relevance and sustainability of this approach through democratic stakeholder participation in setting agricultural knowledge priorities and strategy and supervising and monitoring their implementation. The project will also assist service providers to restructure and commercialize, will build individual and institutional capacities and accredit individual service providers in areas of core competencies.

The GEF co-financing will support the GoS strategy for conservation of agro-biodiversity, which aims to preserve autochthonous varieties not through ex situ or artificial “museum” approaches, but by integrating them into the overall livestock sector by taking advantage of their special properties such as adaptation to local conditions and suitability for unique products (e.g. dairy products of indigenous Pirot sheep). It will also support environmentally, economically and socially sustainable land use and rural development in southern Serbia, providing urgently needed alternatives to unsustainable activities such as intensive livestock production and ski resorts.

8. Lessons Learned from Past Operations in the Country/Sector

Experience from several countries demonstrates the importance of harmonizing national systems and policies with those of the EU, in advance of EU accession. EU agricultural/rural development and environmental policies and requirements have proven to be among the most difficult and time-consuming to meet. Therefore, the GoS is interested in starting the harmonization process as soon as possible using its national rural development program as a building block for future IPARD program implementation.
Experience gained from other projects aimed at improving agricultural growth and competitiveness within the EU framework has shown the importance of improving male and female agricultural producers’ and processors’ knowledge of modern methods, standards and market requirements, as well as initial capital to enable them to put this knowledge into practice.

The successful implementation of structural payment measures requires sufficient, well trained and equipped administrative staff and systems and the early introduction of systems approximating the EU IACS, including a modern LPIS.

9. Safeguard Policies (including public consultation)

The project triggers OP 4.01 on Environmental Assessment. The project is rated Category B, since environmental impacts are expected to be limited, and mainly positive or neutral. The objective of facilitating harmonization with EU requirements and accessing EU markets with the associated cross-compliance requirements, in itself, promotes movement towards more environmentally sound methods. This will be supported by agricultural research and extension on aspects such as integrated pest management, organic production and reduction in pollution from processing plants. The project will supplement and strengthen the GoS’s existing provisions for supporting agri-environmental activities and sustainable tourism. The project will also directly support improved management and ecological restoration in the SPNP, which is a globally significant biodiversity area. While the project aims to increase livestock numbers, there is little risk of triggering overgrazing as the overall trend is towards depopulation of these areas, and the objective is to encourage the use of a few currently under-utilized high elevation meadows which are suffering from bush encroachment. Also, while the project aims to help develop markets for livestock products, the increased production will be from a very low base. Furthermore, the project will emphasize development of niche products whose market value will depend directly on certification as being ecologically friendly and supporting the sustainable use of the nature park. The project will also support a sustainable, ecologically friendly and socially supportive tourism development model, providing an alternative to current pressures for an unsustainable, infrastructure-intensive model based on ski resorts. Any tourism-related infrastructure to be supported by the project will be small scale (e.g. visitor centers, trails) and consistent with the SPNP management plan, as well as being subject to prior environmental assessment.

The project also triggers OP 4.04 on Natural Habitats. The policy is triggered since the project will support investments, which aim to improve the conservation of Stara Planina Nature Park, including restoration of priority sites such as degraded high elevation meadows, and support environmentally sustainable agriculture and tourism development within the multiple-use zones of the Park. No critical natural habitats are expected to be converted.

OP 4.36 applied since the project aims to bring about changes in the management of Stara Planina Nature Park, which has about 40% forest cover (with the remainder being pasture and cultivated land). The project will provide general support for strengthening the capacity of the responsible authority (Srbijasume) to manage the nature park. Ecological restoration and biodiversity conservation activities will focus on pastures and cultivated lands, while rural tourism investments (including some small scale infrastructure) will involve both forest and non-forest areas. The project will not finance exploitation or planting in the forested areas.

10. List of Factual Technical Documents

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