

Centre for Econics and Ecosystem Management
at Eberswalde University for Sustainable
Development (HNEE)



National Transport University (NTU)



Scientific Report

Fellowship Project: Nature for Resilience. A biosphere network for veteran recovery

Reviews of existing rehabilitation and training formats: comparative analysis of Germany and Ukraine

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Introduction

In recent decades, the role of nature-based solutions in rehabilitating and reintegrating vulnerable groups has gained increasing attention worldwide. Among such approaches, utilizing biosphere reserves and protected areas offers significant potential for physical, psychological, and social recovery. In Germany, biosphere reserves have become essential platforms for sustainable development, environmental education, and innovative health-oriented practices. Their landscapes and ecosystems provide favorable conditions for restorative activities, eco-therapy, and structured rehabilitation programs, which are applied not only for the general population but also for specific groups, including military veterans, people with disabilities, and individuals facing psychological stress or social exclusion.

The German model of biosphere reserve management demonstrates how protected areas can serve a dual purpose: preserving biodiversity while fostering human well-being. Rehabilitation activities in such places often combine physical training, eco-pedagogy, vocational retraining, and therapeutic interaction with nature. This experience is particularly relevant for Ukraine, which, as a country facing the consequences of war, has an urgent need for innovative, sustainable, and evidence-based approaches to the rehabilitation of veterans, internally displaced persons, and other affected groups. Adapting German practices in Ukrainian biosphere reserves could strengthen existing rehabilitation formats and contribute to developing inclusive, community-oriented recovery programs.

The systematic integration of such reserves into rehabilitation strategies highlights their function as ecological, social, and therapeutic infrastructures. For Ukraine, where several biosphere reserves already exist (such as “Shatskyi” and “Carpathian”), adopting the German approach may open new perspectives for nature-based rehabilitation programs. This alignment could also support Ukraine’s progress in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those linked to health, well-being, and resilient communities.

Methodology and area of work

The fellowship duration was three months (1 June – 31 August 2025), implying physical presence at the HNEE in Germany and presuming desk work and site visits with colleagues or other experts and forest practitioners from HNEE and outside.

The method of work included (see below the breakdown):

1. **Literature Review.** A thorough review of the existing literature provided a foundational understanding of nature-based rehabilitation models, IT training programs for veterans, and global best practices in combining these fields.

The literature review guided the development of the research framework and informed the research design.

2. **Case Study Analysis.** A comparative case study approach was used to examine existing nature-based rehabilitation programs in Ukraine and Germany and IT training programs designed for different target groups (for example, veterans, children, etc.) in other parts of the world. The aim is to understand the regional context, identify challenges, and uncover insights from previous implementations. This method included analysis of documents and websites.
3. **Interviews with Experts and Practitioners.** A meeting was conducted with experts in ecotherapy, veteran rehabilitation, and digital education. This included interviews with professionals working in biosphere reserves and IT training organizations. These interviews offered expert perspectives on the feasibility of integrating IT training into nature-based rehabilitation and provided practical recommendations for successful implementation.
4. **Field Visits and Observational Studies.** Field visits to UNESCO Biosphere Reserves in Ukraine and Germany were conducted to observe existing rehabilitation programs. This observational research helped to assess how nature-based therapies are implemented in real-world settings and identify opportunities for improvement.
5. **Synthesis of Findings and Recommendations.** The final step involved synthesizing the findings from all methods to identify best practices and recommend strategies for integrating IT training into nature-based rehabilitation programs in biosphere reserves. This included policy recommendations, as well as implementation guidelines for future programs.

Results and Discussions

For this study, the following biosphere reserves in Germany were selected:

1. Berchtesgadener Land
2. Rhön (shared with Hesse, Bavaria, Thuringia)
3. Schorfheide-Chorin
4. Spreewald
5. Südost-Rügen
6. Vessertal-Thuringian Forest
7. Pfälzerwald
8. Bliesgau
9. Schaalsee
10. Karstlandschaft Südharz
11. Thüringer Wald
12. Schwäbische Alb

13. Niedersächsische Elbtalaue
14. Biosphärenregion Berchtesgaden

For the study in Ukraine, the following potential sites were identified as suitable locations for veterans' rehabilitation:

1. Chornobyl Radiation and Ecological Biosphere Reserve
2. "Roztochya" Nature Reserve
3. NNP "Desnyansko-Starogutsky"
4. NNP "Synyohora"
5. NNP "Hutsulshchyna"
6. Carpathian Biosphere Reserve
7. NNP "Holosiivskyi"
8. Shatsky NNP
9. NNP "Karmelyukove Podillya"
10. Uzhansky NNP
11. NNP "Buzky Gard"
12. Lower Dniester NNP
13. Drevlyansky Nature Reserve

Literature Review

Research on the transition of military personnel to civilian life highlights the central role of identity and social connectedness in explaining differences in veterans' well-being. A quantitative study of Australian veterans demonstrated that multidimensional military identity correlates differently with the sense of social inclusion: private and public regard for the military and the absence of feelings of "outsiderness" strengthen social connectedness, whereas excessive centrality of military identity and the "familial" character of the military environment can weaken it; in this configuration, well-being is mediated primarily through social connectedness rather than direct effects of identity [1]. Qualitative research complements this focus by examining "relational legacies" — trajectories of gaining, losing, and reshaping the sense of belonging, which are particularly acute in cases of sudden discharge, stigmatization, and interaction with justice systems or addiction recovery; understanding this "disenfranchised grief" provides grounds for policies that recognize and support veterans' civilian status as a valued component of the community [2].

An important mechanism of successful transition is active engagement in social groups and the support of a "healthy" identity. Interviews with veterans revealed that military socialization shapes strong values of service and altruism, but the break from the military can bring conflicts of norms when re-entering civilian groups; interventions

that create “bridges” — volunteering, participation in support organizations, and social network mapping — improve adaptation and well-being [3]. In a broader perspective, the ageing of veterans should be understood through the lens of “active ageing”: programs that combine physical and cognitive activity with social engagement can prevent declines in mental and physical health and enhance quality of life; this conclusion is also relevant for non-military groups with increased needs [4].

Another body of research emphasizes the significance of interaction with nature and cultural ecosystem services for mental health and social integration. Reviews of empirical evidence demonstrate that contact with nature positively affects cognitive functions, emotional state, and overall mental well-being, and therefore such benefits should be systematically integrated into ecosystem service assessments and urban planning [5]. At the same time, a global synthesis shows heterogeneous trends of “disconnection from nature”: in many contexts, the connection is weakening, while in others it is growing, which opens opportunities for targeted interventions aimed at restoring contact with nature where it has eroded [6]. A systematic review of cultural ecosystem services highlights their importance for physical and mental health across different social groups, while also noting methodological diversity and gaps that limit comparability and scaling of best practices [7]. At the conceptual level, there is an ongoing debate between the approaches of “ecosystem services” and “nature’s contributions to people”: the latter offers a more context-sensitive, relational, and inclusive framework that captures the values of Indigenous communities, negative impacts, and non-instrumental relationships with nature [8].

Practical implementation of nature-based approaches requires attention to the accessibility of natural areas. A review of 167 biosphere reserves in Europe and North America showed that accessibility measures are present in 58% of cases, but they are mostly limited to infrastructural solutions for physical impairments; the authors emphasize the need for multidimensional, inclusive solutions that account for different types of disabilities and diverse user needs [9]. In conclusion, the interdisciplinary body of literature suggests a coherent agenda: to support social connectedness and a “healthy” identity among veterans; to provide pathways for active social engagement; to systematically integrate nature and cultural ecosystem services into program design; and to remove barriers to access in protected natural areas. Combining these components creates a foundation for effective, evidence-based pilot initiatives for recovery and reintegration, which can be adapted to specific groups and local contexts, with the prospect of scaling up best practices.

Case Study Analysis

The scientific research included analyzing available information on leisure and recovery activities offered by selected biosphere reserves. Particular attention was

given to rehabilitation programs for veterans and other initiatives such as excursions, workshops, and various activities targeting different social groups, including veterans, children, adolescents, families, older adults, and persons with disabilities. In cases where specific programs for veterans were not identified, the study also examined the readiness of biosphere reserves to initiate such cooperation. Moreover, the research explored the participation of reserves in related projects and programs relevant to the topic. The following section presents the list of studied biosphere reserves and summarizes the key research findings.

Biosphärenregion Berchtesgadener Land

The Berchtesgadener Land Biosphere Reserve in Bavaria represents a protected area that harmonizes natural diversity with cultural traditions.

Official website: <https://brbgl.de/>

Contact person: Meike Krebs-Fehrmann

Address: Biosphärenregion Berchtesgadener Land, Ludwig-Thoma-Straße 14, 83435 Bad Reichenhall, Germany

Activities and programs for different groups include:

- Vacation programs for children
- Guided excursions for civilians and seniors
- Bat-watching tours at Lake Höglwörther
- Fruit tasting and processing workshops
- Light mountain hikes with biosphere rangers
- Volunteer opportunities supporting biodiversity and sustainable food production

Rehabilitation-related aspects:

No dedicated rehabilitation programs for veterans are currently in place.

However, the region has implemented the project “Green Care – Nature and Mental Health” <https://brbgl.de/en/fields-tasks/research-and-monitoring/health-and-recreation-green-care/>, which applies mindfulness practices such as:

- Meditation
- Yoga
- Sensory experiences in nature

These methods have been successfully used for treating depression and could be adapted for veteran rehabilitation.

Target groups:

- Children
- Civilians and seniors
- Families
- Volunteers
- People with mental health challenges
- Veterans (potential future integration)

Potential synergies:

- The nearby Alpenland Clinic in Bad Reichenhall <https://www.klinik-alpenland.de/> provides rehabilitation services for Bundeswehr soldiers and could be a strong partner in joint initiatives.
- The natural landscape of Berchtesgadener Land offers opportunities for virtual reality experiences, making the reserve accessible to people with limited mobility or those in rehabilitation.

Overall potential:

The region demonstrates significant possibilities for integrating:

- Ecological tourism
- Volunteer engagement
- Therapeutic nature-based practices
- This combination could serve as a foundation for effective rehabilitation programs for veterans and other vulnerable groups.

Biosphärenreservat Rhön

The Rhön Biosphere Reserve, spanning Bavaria, Hesse, and Thuringia, is a model region for sustainable development that integrates nature conservation, cultural heritage, and ecological education.

Official website: <https://www.biosphaerenreservat-rhoen.de/>

Contact person: Lisa Jensen

Address: Oberwaldbehringer Str. 4, 97656 Oberelsbach, Germany

Activities and programs for different groups include:

- Environmental education through the “Rhöniversum” network (Oberelsbach Environmental Education Center, Bauersberg School Camp, Thüringer Hütte School Camp)

- Workshops and seminars on sustainability and regional traditions
- Junior Ranger programs and youth groups focused on nature exploration
- Guided excursions for families and tourists highlighting biodiversity, geology, and local culture
- Seasonal events such as traditional craft demonstrations, regional food markets, and cultural festivals
- Volunteer opportunities in conservation and community-based sustainability projects

Rehabilitation-related aspects:

- No specialized rehabilitation programs for veterans are currently established.
- However, the reserve offers a favorable environment for nature-based recovery through outdoor learning, creative workshops, and group activities.
- Immersion in nature, combined with educational and cultural programs, supports stress reduction, social reintegration, and psychological well-being.

Target groups:

- Children and youth
- Families and civilians
- Seniors
- Volunteers and civic groups
- People with health issues and socially vulnerable groups
- Veterans (potential future integration)

Potential synergies:

- Partnerships with local health and rehabilitation institutions (e.g., clinics in Bad Kissingen and Fulda) could enable pilot projects in Green Care and nature-assisted therapy.
- The extensive trail networks, accessible educational centers, and cross-generational programs provide opportunities for inclusive rehabilitation initiatives.
- Virtual and augmented reality applications could extend access to natural and cultural experiences for individuals with mobility limitations.

Overall potential:

The Rhön Biosphere Reserve demonstrates high potential for combining ecological education, sustainable tourism, and therapeutic use of natural landscapes. With existing infrastructure and educational programs, the region could become a strong partner in developing nature-based rehabilitation for veterans and vulnerable groups.

Biosphärenreservat Schorfheide-Chorin

The Schorfheide-Chorin Biosphere Reserve in Brandenburg is one of Germany's most significant UNESCO biosphere reserves, renowned for its ancient beech forests, diverse wetlands, and rich cultural landscapes. A key highlight is the Grumsin Beech Forest, part of the UNESCO World Heritage, which can be experienced through several marked hiking trails.

Official website: <https://www.schorfheide-chorin-biosphaerenreservat.de/>

Address: Angermünder Str. 1, 16278 Chorin, Germany

Activities and programs for different groups include:

- Circular hiking routes such as the Yellow Beech Leaf Trail (10 km from Altkünkendorf) and the Green Beech Leaf Trail (7 km from Groß-Ziethen), offering insights into heather landscapes, alder groves, glacial formations, and old beech stands.
- Guided tours with nature and landscape guides and rangers, providing a deeper understanding of biodiversity and conservation.
- Educational programs for school classes and youth groups under the motto “Living and Learning in the Grumsin Beech Forest”, focusing on sustainability, natural cycles, and global ecological connections.
- Courses, excursions, and themed days for different audiences, including professional visitors, ornithology enthusiasts, companies (team-building days), and organized hiking or cycling groups.
- Programs for families, children, youth, seniors (e.g., short walks, bus excursions, or activities in retirement homes), and academic groups from technical schools and universities.

Rehabilitation-related aspects:

Currently, there are no specific rehabilitation programs for veterans or people with disabilities. Accessibility is limited, as the hiking routes in the Grumsin forest are not barrier-free and unsuitable for wheelchairs or mountain bikes. Nevertheless, the educational and nature-based programs have strong potential to be adapted for therapeutic and rehabilitative purposes, particularly in ecological education, sustainable living, and mindfulness in nature.

Target Groups:

- Schoolchildren
- Youth
- University and technical school students

- Families with children
- Nature enthusiasts and birdwatchers
- Tourist groups (hiking and cycling)
- Professional visitors
- Companies (team-building activities)
- Seniors

Overall potential:

The Schorfheide-Chorin Biosphere Reserve demonstrates a high level of engagement in environmental education and public outreach. Its structured programs for children, youth, families, seniors, and professional audiences highlight strong foundations for integrating restorative and therapeutic approaches. Although direct veteran rehabilitation programs are absent, the reserve's ecological diversity and established network of educational and conservation institutions create opportunities for future cooperation in this area.

Spreewald Biosphere Reserve

The Spreewald Biosphere Reserve in Brandenburg, Germany, is a UNESCO-recognized protected area covering around 475 square kilometers. It is famous for its intricate network of natural waterways, canals, and wetlands, forming a unique landscape in Central Europe. The region combines ecological diversity with rich cultural heritage, including traditional Sorbian villages, historic architecture, and local agricultural practices such as cucumber cultivation.

The reserve supports various flora and fauna, including rare water birds, amphibians, and plant species. It is highly valued for sustainable tourism, outdoor recreation, and environmental education. Visitors can explore the area via hiking, cycling, and paddling, while local educational programs emphasize biodiversity, conservation, and sustainable lifestyles. The Spreewald thus represents an exemplary model of balancing human activity, cultural traditions, and ecological protection.

Official website: <https://www.spreewald-biosphaerenreservat.de/>

Contact person: Dr. Nico Heitepriem

Address: Lindenstraße 1, 03222 Lübbenau/Spreewald, Germany

Activities and programs for different groups include:

- Paddling through the unique network of Spreewald canals (boat rentals available)
- Guided water tours using expert water hiking maps

- Fishing in designated waters
- Cycling routes such as the Cucumber Cycle Path (260 km) and Crane Tour with cultural and natural highlights
- Hiking trails including Stage 13 of the 66-Lakes Trail, the European Long-Distance Trail E10, and local circular trails (Lehder Route)
- Nature and adventure trails such as the Fishponds Trail (20 km), focusing on birdwatching and ecological observation
- Educational programs for school classes, youth groups, and families on local biodiversity, conservation, and sustainable practices

Rehabilitation-related aspects:

- No dedicated rehabilitation programs for veterans or people with disabilities are currently available
- Some trails and water activities are not fully accessible
- Strong potential exists to adapt educational, nature-based, and recreational programs for therapeutic purposes
- Calm waterways, guided experiences, and nature immersion provide opportunities for developing future rehabilitation initiatives for veterans and other vulnerable groups

Target Groups:

- Families & children
- Young people
- School classes / educational groups
- Seniors
- Nature enthusiasts & hikers
- Cyclists

Overall potential:

The Spreewald Biosphere Reserve combines ecological richness with cultural heritage, offering diverse recreational and educational programs. Its extensive waterways, trails, and structured activities provide a solid foundation for developing rehabilitation and nature-based therapeutic programs. The reserve's unique landscapes and community engagement make it a promising site for inclusive, restorative initiatives for veterans, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable populations.

Biosphären-reservat Thüringer Wald

The Thuringian Forest Biosphere Reserve is in central Germany and covers around 337 km² of forests, meadows, moors, and traditional cultural landscapes. It is famous for the Rennsteig, Germany's oldest high-altitude hiking trail, and offers a vast network of hiking, cycling, and winter sports routes. The reserve has rich biodiversity, including rare species and unique raised bog ecosystems. It also promotes sustainable tourism, environmental education, and health-oriented activities, such as the breathing and Kneipp trail AtemWeg and barrier-free nature paths. As a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, it combines nature conservation with cultural heritage and sustainable regional development.

Official website: <https://www.biosphaerenreservat-thueringerwald.de/>

Address: Bahnhofstraße 4–8, 98574 Schmalkalden, Germany

Activities and programs for different groups include:

- Hiking: Rennsteig (Germany's oldest high-altitude hiking trail), seasonal hikes through forests, meadows, and valleys
- Cycling: Schleusetal Cycle Path (34 km), Rennsteig Cycle Path (195 km), Ilmtal Cycle Route (120 km, 4-star quality)
- Winter sports: skiing, snowboarding, snowshoe tours on a well-developed trail network
- Adventure & nature trails:
 - AtemWeg Stützerbach – breathing & Kneipp exercises, health-focused circular trail
 - Schützenberg Moor Trail – barrier-free walkway through a raised bog
 - Dwarf Trail Frauenwald – interactive family trail with puzzles and activities for children
 - Schmiedefeld Adventure Trail – discovery activities, sensory trail, family-friendly exploration
- Environmental education (ESD programs): extracurricular learning activities for schools, kindergartens, and youth groups on topics such as streams, meadows, forests, and moors

Rehabilitation-related aspects:

- The AtemWeg trail explicitly supports physical and mental well-being through breathing meditation, relaxation, and circulation-strengthening exercises.
- The barrier-free Schützenberg Moor Trail ensures access for people with limited mobility.

- Strong potential for therapeutic and rehabilitation programs for veterans and people with disabilities, building on existing health-focused and accessible infrastructure.
- The region's status as a climatic health resort (Stützerbach) creates health and wellness integration opportunities.

Target Groups:

- Families & children
- Young people
- School classes & kindergartens
- Seniors
- Cyclists, hikers, and winter sports enthusiasts
- Health & wellness visitors

Overall potential:

The Thuringian Forest Biosphere Reserve combines rich biodiversity with cultural landscapes, offering year-round recreation and education. With established health-oriented trails, barrier-free infrastructure, and extracurricular environmental education, it is well-positioned to expand into rehabilitation and therapy initiatives for vulnerable groups, including veterans and people with special needs. The combination of natural diversity, active experiences, and wellness-oriented offers creates strong opportunities for future integrative programs.

Ukraine's potential sites for veterans' rehabilitation

The survey was conducted in June 2025 among 13 Ukrainian organizations to identify the potential for implementing rehabilitation programs for veterans. The participating institutions were asked questions regarding their readiness to join such initiatives, the availability of existing rehabilitation programs, and the possibility of developing new activities based on the resources of their nature reserves. They were also asked about their capacity to host small groups for short-term recovery stays and the technical opportunities to conduct classes and training sessions on-site, including the availability of premises, internet, and equipment.

The collected responses provide insights into these organizations' current level of preparedness and highlight their capacities, from organizing excursions and small activities to hosting recovery groups. Some organizations demonstrated readiness for rehabilitation initiatives, while others expressed partial possibilities or required additional support. Four organizations did not respond, indicating a need for further communication and involvement. The results underline the importance of building partnerships and selecting pilot sites with the necessary infrastructure and interest.

This creates a foundation for launching tailored rehabilitation programs that combine natural environments, physical activity, and educational opportunities to support veterans' recovery and well-being.

Summary Indicators:

- Total organizations: 13
- Ready to join: 8 (≈ 61.5%)
- Have/develop rehabilitation programs: 4 (≈ 30.8%)
- (Additionally: 2 have related elements/projects that can be quickly adapted into programs)
- Impossible to conduct activities within the reserve territory (but possible outside): 1 (≈ 7.7%)
- No information provided: 4 (≈ 30.8%)

Summary by Question

1. Is the institution ready to join such an initiative?

Most organizations (about 62%) expressed readiness to participate in rehabilitation-related initiatives, demonstrating openness to collaboration. A smaller share remained undecided or did not respond.

2. Are there currently any rehabilitation programmes planned at this nature reserve?

Only about 31% already have or are developing rehabilitation programs. Some institutions have projects or activities that could be adapted for rehabilitation, while most do not plan such initiatives.

3. Is it possible to develop rehabilitation programmes based on the NR?

Several organizations confirmed the potential for developing such programs, mentioning excursions, small-scale activities in nature, or eco-based practices as suitable formats. Others indicated limited capacity due to infrastructure or staff availability.

4. Can the institution accommodate a small group for short-term recovery stays?

Some reserves have facilities that could host small groups, though capacities are generally limited. Several organizations noted that they lack proper accommodation or logistical arrangements.

5. Is it technically possible to conduct classes and training on the territory of the NR?

Some institutions confirmed the availability of basic infrastructure (electricity, internet, premises), though equipment such as projectors and laptops is not always present. Others highlighted technical restrictions or the need for additional resources.

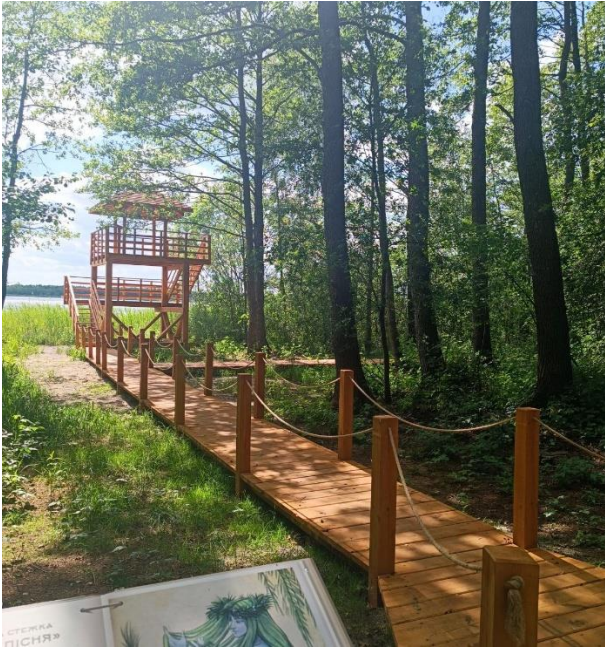
6. Notes (comments)

Specific organizations underlined ecological, educational, or local community aspects as potential strengths. However, around 31% of institutions provided no information, leaving gaps in understanding their potential contribution.

Offline events and activities during the internship

Shatsk National Nature Park

In June 2025, a working meeting was held on the Shatsk National Nature Park territory, dedicated to developing opportunities for the recovery and rehabilitation of veterans. During the event, participants became acquainted with existing initiatives and potential resources that can be used in relevant programs. At the Melnyky Forestry site, a recovery center is operating, which already includes a blueberry plantation, a pheasantry, a spruce nursery, a lake with fishing opportunities, and sheep breeding. Particular attention was drawn to the prospect of launching hippotherapy programs, which are currently at the planning stage and may become an effective tool for psychological support of service members. The blueberry plantation produces environmentally friendly products and may serve as a basis for occupational therapy. Pheasantry and sheep farming create conditions for practical activities that contribute to recovery and social adaptation. The spruce nursery performs an environmental function and allows veterans to feel involved in restoring nature.



For health improvement and recreation, the park has an equipped recreation site “Peremut” with gazebos, walking trails, and kayaking opportunities. An additional resource for recovery is the ecological trail “Forest Song,” which combines health, educational, and cultural elements. Such routes can be used for both group and individual activities with veterans. Combining active and calm recreation in a natural environment creates favorable conditions for comprehensive rehabilitation.



Development prospects include the implementation of hippotherapy, the creation of new therapeutic programs, and the expansion of the recovery center's infrastructure. Another vital direction may be the involvement of psychological support specialists and partnerships with veteran and international organizations. The outcome of the meeting was an understanding that the park has great potential for integrating environmental protection activities with social support programs. In the future, Shatsk National Nature Park may become a rehabilitation hub, where nature will serve as the leading resource for healing and harmonious veterans' recovery.

Forest Day in the Lower Oder Valley National Park: Presenting the “Schöneberg Wild Forest” and “HealthyForestRegions” Projects

On Thursday, July 10, 2025, the Forest Day event occurred at the Lower Oder Valley National Park. The event lasted from 10:30 to 16:30 and brought together scientists, representatives of environmental institutions, local communities, and other stakeholders. The event's primary purpose was to present the results of two projects — “Schöneberg Wild Forest” and “HealthyForestRegions” — and to discuss their importance for regional development. In the first half of the day, participants took part in a guided tour of the Schöneberg Forest, where the progress of the project launched in September 2024 was presented.

Special attention was given to the issues of natural regeneration and forest adaptation to climate change. The Schöneberg Forest is unique due to its high diversity of biotopes and isolated location within an agricultural landscape. Since 1995, the area has been under special protection, excluding human intervention. A new information board was unveiled during the event, providing details about the project and the forest site. Representatives of the local press and regional stakeholders attended the presentation.

Participants had the opportunity to visit several research plots and learn about methodological monitoring approaches. The first data collection results and prospects for further studies were presented. In addition to the excursion, a key event element was the professional exchange of ideas. In the afternoon, the focus shifted to a joint discussion on the spatial analysis of the Schorfheide-Chorin-Odertal region based on remote sensing data.



Thus, Forest Day became a platform for scientific presentations and a venue for discussing long-term conservation and forest ecosystem research. The event raised awareness of nature conservation activities and the importance of sustainable forest development. It also demonstrated that cooperation between science, local communities, and conservation institutions is essential for the future of the region's forests.

Spreewald Biosphere Reserve

On August 12, 2025, a meeting took place with the representative of the Spreewald Biosphere Reserve, Dr. Nico Heitepriem. During the event, he guided participants through the reserve and introduced them to this unique natural area's main points of interest. Since 1990, the Spreewald has been included in the UNESCO list of biosphere reserves and is considered one of the most valuable landscapes in Europe.



Dr. Heitepriem presented the current programs available to visitors. In particular, he highlighted the RangerTour: Forest in Change initiative, which offers a 2.5-hour walk together with rangers of the nature conservation service. Participants of such tours can experience the richness of species, learn about the role of deadwood, insects, and birds, and understand why untouched forests are essential for both nature and people. This program provides insight into the primeval forest of tomorrow and the natural dynamics of ecosystems.



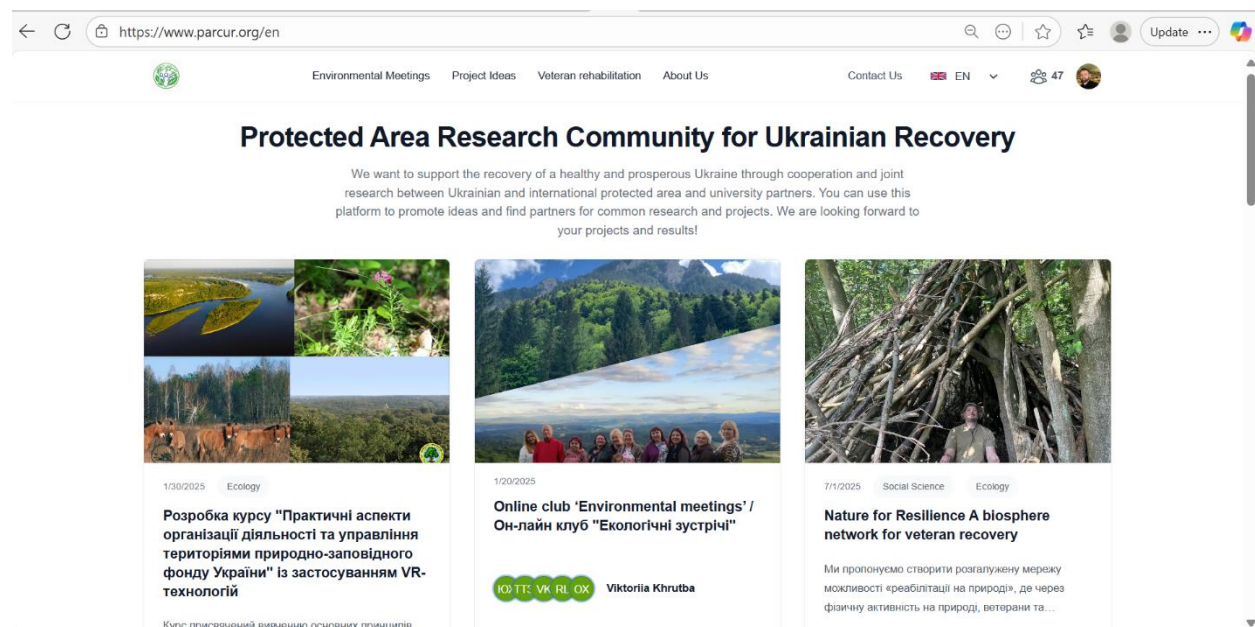
Another opportunity for visitors is the Wotschofska Trail. It passes through numerous streams, wet forests, meadows, and fields, making it both picturesque and educational. Along 11 excursion stops, visitors can discover the Spreewald's rich plant and animal world. The trail also introduces traditional “wooden benches” — bridges raised above the waterways to allow boats to pass easily. In earlier times, boats were the primary means of transport, and even agricultural products were delivered by water.



Throughout the year, the trail is decorated with flowering plants, many of which require abundant wet habitats that the Spreewald provides. Through such excursions, visitors gain a deeper understanding of the uniqueness of the reserve and its importance for biodiversity conservation. The meeting offered a chance to enjoy the beauty of the Spreewald and learn about modern approaches to nature protection.

Development of a Platform for Posting Events and Various Opportunities for Veterans

A digital platform has been developed to provide veterans and other stakeholders with access to information about events, initiatives, and opportunities. Its primary purpose is to support communication, knowledge sharing, and engagement by presenting relevant resources user-friendly. The platform serves as a central point where users can stay informed about upcoming and past events, training opportunities, and activities of interest.



One of the platform's core features is the event section, where information about planned and completed activities is published. In addition to events, the platform hosts links to training courses of different focus areas, enabling veterans to access educational opportunities for professional and personal development. A dedicated section with VR tours of biosphere reserves and national parks allows users to virtually experience natural landscapes, which can be educational and beneficial for rehabilitation.

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Programs

[Sort](#)[Author](#)[Organization](#)



GERMAN-UKRAINE VETERANS

7/7/2025

Nature & IT: A new program for veteran rehabilitation in Ukraine's protected areas

A new initiative offers rehabilitation and psychological support to Ukrainian veterans in national parks and nature reserves. The program combines mental and...



GERMAN-UKRAINE VETERANS' RECOVERY

7/7/2025

Природа та IT: стартує програма відновлення ветеранів у природоохоронних зонах України

Нова ініціатива передбачає реабілітацію та психологічну підтримку українських ветеранів у національних парках і заповідниках. Програма...

Partners Programs

Curated courses and programs from our partners

STRATEGIC ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT FOR...

Базовий курс «Моніторинг і оцінка проєктів/...

Базовий курс «Моніторинг і оцінка проєктів/стратегій» зміцнить Вашу експертну спроможність проводити...

The platform also provides functionality for publishing various types of content, such as project descriptions, supporting documents, and screenshots. This makes it possible to share announcements and build a broader picture of ongoing initiatives. In this way, it fosters collaboration among institutions and creates a space for presenting projects and outcomes that may be of value to veterans and the wider community.



About Us

Our Mission

Who We Are

Teams & Partners

Join Us

About Us

Protected Area Research Community for Ukrainian Recovery is a collaborative initiative supporting Ukraine's ecological, social, and educational recovery through nature-based solutions, joint research, and international cooperation.

We bring together partners from biosphere reserves, national parks, and universities to co-develop and implement projects focused on environmental rehabilitation, biodiversity conservation, and community capacity building.



Conservation

Research

Education

Highlights

Key directions of our activity



Our Mission

We're a dynamic group of individuals who are passionate about what we do and



Research for Restoration and Resilience

Facilitate joint research in ecosystem



International Collaboration for Nature and Knowledge

Encourage international cooperation

To ensure personalization and security, the system includes user authorization. In addition, the platform contains sections describing its objectives and presenting the leading developers behind its creation. This transparency helps users better understand the platform's mission and the team's expertise that stands behind it. The platform is available at: <https://www.parcu.org/en>.

Conclusion

The conducted analysis of Ukrainian protected areas has shown that some of them already possess potential for organizing activities aimed at the recovery of veterans and other target groups. Although only about one-third of institutions have or are developing rehabilitation programs, many already have certain elements that can be adapted — excursion routes, educational projects, and ecological activities. This demonstrates the existence of a foundation on which pilot initiatives can be implemented. At the same time, it is essential to note that some organizations face limitations in infrastructure and a shortage of personnel to implement recovery programs fully.

As initial steps for a pilot project, it would be reasonable to consider organizing short-term recovery visits for small groups of veterans to those protected areas where minimal conditions for accommodation already exist. Such activities may include ecotherapy walks, group sessions in nature, ecological volunteering practices, and VR tours to explore other natural areas. It would also be beneficial to include educational or training modules, conducted within the available infrastructure or with the help of mobile equipment. This would allow testing the effectiveness of the approach in practice and identifying which elements should be scaled up.

At the same time, the analysis of biosphere reserves in Germany shows that they do not have experience in implementing recovery programs for veterans at their sites. This means that Ukrainian initiatives in this area can be innovative and tailored to the target group's specific needs. However, it is worth considering other activities already carried out in German reserves and adapting them accordingly. For instance, educational programs for local communities, eco-tours, or small-scale conservation projects could complement specific methodologies for veterans' recovery.

In conclusion, the results of the analysis indicate the feasibility of pilot projects in several selected Ukrainian protected areas with sufficient potential and basic infrastructure. This would allow testing rehabilitation formats, assessing their effectiveness, and developing recommendations for broader implementation. At the same time, the experience of European reserves in conducting ecological, educational, and cultural activities can be transformed to meet the needs of veterans. Such an approach would contribute to recovering participants' health and psychological well-being and strengthen partnerships between protected area administrations, communities, and international organizations.

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