

Social Community Awareness on Forest Health in Protected Areas: Insights from Divjakë – Karavasta National Park, Albania

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Abstract:

Protected areas are indispensable for the preservation of biodiversity, the maintenance of ecosystem diversity, and the promotion of sustainable development. However, the effectiveness of conservation efforts is strongly influenced by the awareness and involvement of local communities. This study assesses the awareness levels and perceptions of the local community in the Divjakë – Karavasta National Park, with a specific focus on their understanding of the critical role of forest health within the protected area. Utilizing a survey-based methodology, the research explores the community's perceptions and knowledge, regarding forest conservation in the Divjakë – Karavasta area aiming to understand the attitudes toward conservation efforts.

The findings reveal a notable lack of awareness and understanding among community members about the significance of forest health and the overarching purpose of protected areas in maintaining ecosystem balance. This limited awareness highlights a pressing need for targeted educational initiatives and robust community engagement strategies designed to address knowledge gaps and foster a deeper appreciation for conservation efforts. By empowering local communities with knowledge and encouraging active participation, the strategies can build stronger support for sustainable management practices. The study emphasizes that enhancing community awareness is pivotal for sustaining long-term conservation initiatives and ensuring the resilience of forest ecosystems, not only in the Divjakë – Karavasta National Park but also in other protected areas facing similar challenges. Effective community integration into conservation efforts is a cornerstone for achieving ecological stability and safeguarding natural resources for future generations.

Keywords:

Forests, awareness, local community, conservation, Divjakë – Karavasta.