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**Title:**

# **Rehabilitation Opportunities for Veterans in Protected Areas of Ukraine and Europe.**

**Authors:**

* Khrutba Viktoriia1, KhrutbaYuliia1, Pierre Ibisch2, Angela Dichte2 V. Pokynchereda3, І. Yonash3.
* 1National Transport University, 2 Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development, 3 Carpathian Biosphere Reserve.

**Abstract text:**

War veterans, returning home, often realize that they are not ready for a normal civilian life. Physical and mental health issues related to military service remain a challenge for many veterans. A veteran may feel like a burden on society as dealing with physical and mental trauma becomes a part of their daily life. According to the Ukrainian Veterans' Fund, as of July 1, 2022, the total number of persons covered by the Law of Ukraine "On the Status of War Veterans, Guarantees of Their Social Protection" constitutes 851,068 people (war veterans and members of their families). Of these, there are 438,834 people who are directly participating in the military activities at the ATO/OUF as of July 1, 2022. There are 7,072 people with disabilities as a result of the russian-Ukrainian war, and there are 111,530 family members of dead (deceased) war veterans. [1]. Considering that the military actions on the territory of Ukraine continue, the number of veterans of the russian-Ukrainian war will increase, the needs for rehabilitation and adaptation to civilian life will change according to the requirements of the time.

The rehabilitation of war veterans in Ukraine is one of the national priorities, where cooperation with volunteers plays a key role, as stated by acting Minister of Youth and Sports of Ukraine Matviy Bidnyi in his speech at the round table "Rehabilitation of servicemen and veterans: the role of the volunteer community in overcoming modern challenges" [2].

For centuries, nature has been used to improve health. "Nature therapy" is a general term for therapies based on experiences and activities in the natural environment. A large number of different therapies use the environment, from wild forests to specially built therapeutic gardens, as the environment for therapy. For example, wilderness therapy, ecotherapy and therapeutic gardening have been used in projects for veterans suffering from PTSD[3]. Published results of scientific studies prove the positive impact of nature-oriented therapy on veterans by repurposing veterans' skills to heal the environment and each other [4].

Volunteering in nature, as rehabilitation, is an effective mechanism that allows ex-servicemen to return to civilian life. A good example is the veteran humanitarian environmental restoration project GuardianGrange[5], which was founded by US Navy combat veteran Mark Matzeldelaflor with the goal of protecting natural resources, strengthening communities, and adapting veterans to civilian life. The project focuses on promoting individual healing and community restoration through regenerative agriculture, environmental restoration, and other community-oriented natural restoration practices that inspire collaborative projects to create and maintain a healthy environment. This experience can become a good example for the organization of volunteering in nature for the rehabilitation of veterans in the establishments of the Nature Res erve Fund of Ukraine (protected areas).

Rehabilitation is a hard, systematic work. At present, there is no information on the exact number of defenders (male and female) who need rehabilitation, but it is more than 100 thousand people. However, the culture of rehabilitation for Ukraine is relatively young, because previously rehabilitation was perceived mostly through recreation - sanatoriums, rest. Now the philosophy of rehabilitation is gradually changing — evidence-based rehabilitation is the basis of the modern paradigm throughout the world and in Ukraine in particular. According to the definition of the Ministry of Health, active rehabilitation includes the daily work of the patient and a team of specialists on the gradual return of lost functions and/or their compensation, which includes classes on special simulators, physical exercises, developing new mechanisms of interaction with the surrounding world and nature [6].

At the same time, in Ukraine there are already examples of the organization of such activities in the protected areas. For example, recreational horse-riding courses for the defenders of Ukraine (hippotherapy for the military) in the National Nature Park "Hutsulshchyna". Kyiv region became a pilot region within the scope of work on the integration of war veterans into the social project "Active parks — locations of a healthy Ukraine." Employees of the Synevyr National Nature Park provide support to soldiers returning from the front and their families, have introduced free visits to interesting places, tourist hikes and meaningful rest in the park.

However, in order to organize the rehabilitation of veterans in protected areas of Ukraine, it is necessary to study the existing international and domestic experience, analyze the legal framework and the needed financial and human resources.

*The aim of the research*. To study the possibilities of implementing the project of rehabilitation of veterans in the protected areas of Ukraine based on the analysis of the existing international and domestic experience, the existing regulatory and legal framework, and the necessary financial and personnel resources.

As a result of the work, a rehabilitation program for war veterans and their families in the Carpathian Biosphere Reserve will be developed.

The results of the research can be used for the development and implementation of projects and programs for the rehabilitation of veterans in the protected areas of Ukraine and Europe.

**Keywords:**

War veterans, rehabilitation, nature therapy, establishments of the Nature Reserve Fund, protected areas

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