

## MTB Soča Outdoor (Slovenia) – A good case scenario

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The interest in extreme or adventurous sports has grown rapidly in the last decade. Activities such as skydiving, paragliding, zip lining, canyoning, swinging bungee etc. are experiencing a burst out in number of enthusiasts and challenge audacity. A huge progress has been made also in the corresponding technical equipment. Among mentioned adventurous sports, perhaps the most popular is mountain biking.

Since most of these activities happen outdoor, preferably in nature or even better in preserved and remote corners of nature, they inevitably have a significant impact on other users and inhabitants within these places; e.g. animals and their habitats, hikers, farmers, villagers, foresters, land owners, nature conservationists etc., who have been sharing the place more or less reconciled with each other since a long time. Now, this new presence has become an everyday reality and it brings a conflict between 'old and new users', which cannot be ignored. Therefore, these activities need to be properly integrated into the natural environment and into the legal system; which is easy to say, but much more demanding to accomplish.

The two major obstacles, which need to be taken into account are: (1) that these kind of activities evolve and spread much quicker than the legislation can handle and follow and (2) that the consequences of the impact of these activities on natural protected areas, species, their habitats and nature in general, will become evident and provable only after a certain amount of years, not immediately. Because of mentioned facts and issues, the legalisation and integration of extreme outdoor activities in the natural environment becomes a huge challenge. Furthermore, it becomes even more complex, when it comes to public events with 100, 200 or more people competing, e.g. racing on mountaineer paths, through the forests, etc.

In 2015 the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation (IRSNC), which is legally competent to decide regarding biking public events within nature protected areas, had to turn down a request for a planned mountain bike racing event – Soča MTB marathon as part of Soča Outdoor festival in Tolmin (Western Slovenia, Soča valley). The decision basically depended on the fact that part of the racing track was placed within the Triglav national park, where is necessary to respect the existing protection regime. The impact of this decision on the corresponding public - organizers, participants, tourism workers, municipal council, and nevertheless on national public offices and ministries was huge. The IRSNC was severely pointed out in the media, pictured as an incompetent and unreliable entity and blamed for a possible loss of financial funds. Most importantly, the public awareness about urgent need of proper legal regulation regarding the issue on the national level has raised a lot.

After the waters calmed down a little, the IRSNC approached the main organizer of the rejected event with a suggestion to collaborate in finding together a good solu-

tion for the SočaMTB marathon event next year 2016. The representatives from both sides worked together and the invested effort paid off. For the 2016 event a new racing track was designed fulfilling adequately all the expectations and demands from those involved. Yet, there is still a lot to be done regarding the legislation and the proper integration of these activities in the natural environment, including agreements with land owners.