A FEASIBILITY STUDY ON ECOTOURISM POTENTIAL AREAS USING RS AND GIS

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ABSTRACT:

Ecotourism is considered as the most attractive subset of tourism industry which can contribute natural resource conservation and local development if it is properly managed. Ramzani Gouraei, 2003, stated several advantages of establishing forest parks and natural recreation areas such as attracting larger numbers of tourists through providing a place for spending their leisure times as well as creating new jobs and natural resource conservation. Although great numbers of people annually visit Abbasabad area, in Veresk, Mazandaran, to enjoy its brilliant landscape and its moderate ecologic condition; still there isn't an applicable ecotourism plan for many natural attractive zones in this area. As a result, some specific most known areas would be threatened by being overused by visitors while other unknown or less familiar ones remain unvisited. Therefore, proper comprehensive ecotourism plans are required to prevent overusing most widely known forests as well as new integrated plans for introducing the unknown potential areas to people. In this research, a feasibility study was conducted to identify potential ecotourism zones within the study area, and then applicable strategies were suggested for optimal exploitation of the area. Both Geographic Information System (GIS) and Remote Sensing (RS) techniques had accelerated our research process, enhanced the accuracy and reduced the expenses of this study. In continue, the map of slope, height and orientation had been produced using a topographic map in an ARCVIEW environment. These three maps were overlaid to provide the Land shape map of the study area. The primary evaluations of available ecotourism potentials in the study area were carried out using Makhdom model (2001). To make an accurate decision about the most appropriate ecotourism land use, two maps of soil and vegetation cover were overlaid to produce a bioenvironmental unit map. The ecotourism potential map was obtained via measuring the available bio-environmental units on this map based on our predetermined factors in this study. We used RS to perform the following steps: a) image correction, b) image classification, c) optical studies on the area, d) establishing a meaningful relationship among various ecotourism activities throughout the study area. Although the results of studies on maps and images showed no potential areas for class I ecotourism, the largest part of the area was identified suitable for class I alternative ecotourism. Moreover, two villages of Abbasabad and Bezmilesh made the study area appropriate for establishing an ecotourism village. According to the results of this study, Abbassabad Veresk forest area was proved to be appropriate to construct a natural forest park.