

Chapter 3

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Tourism Assets of the Romincka Forest Landscape Park and Possibilities for Using Them for Sustainable Development

1. Introduction

The analysis of the history of tourism development in Poland indicates its rather direct relation to the political and economic situation of the country. In practice, back up to the 18th century only few people could afford the luxury of travelling for commercial, political, religious or health-related purposes. More dynamic development of seaside resorts and spas became noticeable as late as in the 19th century, and at that time these only offered options of passive recreation. Mountain tourism, being more active in character, also developed during the same period. An interest in the nature and culture of mountain areas bore fruit with the establishment, in 1873, of the first Polish tourism organisation, namely the Galician Tatra Society (*Galicyjskie Towarzystwo Tatrzańskie*), which subsequently operated under the name of the Tatra Society (*Towarzystwo Tatrzańskie*), and then as the Polish Tatra Society (*Polskie Towarzystwo Tatrzańskie*). As early as in 1874, thanks to active efforts of the Society's members, the first mountain shelter was built at the Morskie Oko lake and tourist trails were laid out, while at the end of the 19th century the beginnings of skiing in the Tatra mountains were noted. On the other hand, in the Russian sector of partitioned Poland, the Polish Sightseeing Society (*Polskie Towarzystwo Krajoznawcze*) was founded in 1906; in the period between the two World Wars it promoted the sightseeing tourism throughout the country. What contributed to the significant intensification of tourist traffic at that time were Acts of Law regarding working time and paid leaves, as well as the elimination of barriers to travel throughout Poland. During the period following the World War II, social tourism reached its heyday; it was organised by the Workers' Holiday Fund (*Fundusz Wczasów Pracowniczych*) in the form of workers' holidays, summer camps for the young, and periods of holiday rest. Social tourism was mass in character due to the

employing establishments' significant contribution to the costs of leisure activities, which made it available to almost everyone, especially to those employed in the public sector. Accommodation and catering facilities were provided by the Workers' Holiday Fund in the form of a network of holiday centres, extensively developed throughout the country. On the other hand, the Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society (*Polskie Towarzystwo Turystyczno-Krajoznawcze*, established in 1950 through the merger of the Polish Tatra Society and the Polish Sightseeing Society) deserves the credit for making various types of both adventure and sightseeing tourism generally available by means of further expanding the network of hostels and shelters, and laying out subsequent tourist trails. During that period, a significant role was attributed to the tourism also in the process of education and upbringing of children and young people, especially as regards the necessity for respecting the natural and cultural heritage and assets (Borne, Doliński 1998, Kurek 2007).

Recreational centres and tourist trails were located in areas distinguished by outstanding recreational, specialised and sightseeing qualities. Excessive visitor pressure repeatedly led to deterioration of the areas most attractive in this regard; therefore, their significance in the further development of the tourism function waned. An idea of the necessity for preserving the most valuable natural and cultural resources was germinating in the minds of connoisseurs and enthusiasts already at the time when the possibilities for getting to know them started to unfold. Pioneering activities in the sphere of protection of both individual nature's formations and natural assets were undertaken as early as in the beginning of the previous millennium under the so-called System of Royal Regalia (i.e. the rights and privileges of royalty). An example of conscious protection of species was an attempt made at preservation of the aurochs, which unfortunately ended in failure in 1627 (Olaczek 1998). The first legislation in this field was introduced by the Diet of Galicia only five years before the establishment of the Tatra Society. This included two Acts of Law: "on conservation of rare animal species of the Tatra mountains – alpine marmot and chamois" and "on conservation of singing and insectivorous birds". During this period, the protection of areas began to originate on the territory of Poland in the form of nature reserves, which were mainly created on private properties. In the period between the two world wars, legislation began to be prepared in order to establish the first national parks (Dobrzańska *et al.* 2008). After the World War II, the work on improving the legislation on nature conservation was resumed. This bore fruit with development of documents in the form of Laws on nature conservation (of 1949, and the subsequent of 1991). In the light of the latest updates of legal provisions, the following types of nature protection are currently applied in Poland: protection of areas (national parks, nature reserves, landscape parks, Natura 2000 areas, and protected landscape areas); species protection of plants, animals and fungi; and individual protection of nature monuments, documentation sites, ecological lands and nature-and-landscape complexes (Law of 16 April 2004 *on nature conservation*).

As follows from provisions of this Law, the above-mentioned forms were assigned different priorities, and the limits of compromise were determined between the protective functions and possible uses. In the case of areas endowed with the most attractive natural and cultural assets, each of them is treated in accordance with its specificity by means of developing individual conservation plans. A landscape park is, by definition, an area of multifunctional significance. The key role of a landscape park is to conserve valuable natural, cultural and landscape assets, and to make these areas available for varied forms of recreation under the conditions of sustainable development. Another significant objective of the parks is the environmental, natural and cultural education of the public (Law ... *on nature conservation*). All forms of activities conducted within such an area, including permissible sustainable agriculture- and forestry related uses, should be model examples of environmentally-friendly management. The uncontrolled and excessive expansion of the tourism and recreational infrastructure, observed in numerous naturally valuable areas, was one of the main causes for creating landscape parks in Poland (Rąkowski 2002).

The paper aims at describing and assessing the assets of the Romincka Forest Landscape Park (RFLP) in terms of possibilities for promoting varied types and forms of tourism, and the extent of their use in practice, as well as identifying the sources of potential conflicts as regards the sustainable development of this area.

2. Materials and Methodology

This paper is based on data, publications and cartographic documents concerning the natural and cultural assets of the Romincka Forest Landscape Park. Moreover, documents attached to the Conservation Plan for the Park were analysed, including the statement of environmental protection requirements "Natural, Socio-Economic and Historical Values of the Romincka Forest Landscape Park", "Rules for Conservation and Management", and the "Files of Cultural Resources". These materials were supplemented with information gathered during personal interviews conducted with employees at the Park Management Board in Żytkiejmy and the County Office in Gołdap, as well as with statistical data obtained at the Regional Statistical Office in Olsztyn. The materials gathered were verified during a field inspection. The field research also aimed at assessing the sources of potential conflicts between the nature's and environment's interests and the possible tourism-related uses of the Park.

At the time of editing the paper, both the method of context analysis and the technique of gathered material development (Łobocki 2000) were applied. The natural visitor capacity of the Park was calculated using both the parameters indicated by Krzymowska-Kostrowicka (1999) and the surface area occupied by forest communities. A comparative analysis was performed on the results obtained, using the number of potential visitors derived on the basis of the number of beds for visitors, and of the permanent residents of the area. The assessment of the Park's assets was performed based on the division suggested by Lijewski *et al.*

(2002), while the classification of types and forms of tourism was adopted from Faracik *et al.* (2007).

3. Description and Assessment of the Park's Tourism Assets

The Romincka Forest Landscape Park was established pursuant to the Regulation of the Provincial Governor of Suwałki in 1998. In terms of geographical location, the Park is situated in the western part of the Lithuanian Lakeland, known as the Suwałki and Augustów Lakeland, in the Romincka Forest mesoregion (Kondracki 2000). As regards the administrative structure, currently it covers a part of the area of Goldap and Dubeninki communes in the Goldap County, Warmińsko-Mazurskie Province. The Park with an area of 14 620 ha, together with a buffer zone with an area of 8 500 ha, covers the Poland's part of the Romincka Forest including its edges. This forest complex with a distinct northern character is unique on the national level. A dark and humid spruce coniferous forest with a thick carpet of mosses, called "the Polish taiga", is found there. The relief was shaped during the Pomeranian phase of the last glacial period. Moraine hills are cut through with deep basins and channels, and the differences in height reach up to 150 m. Depressions of land are filled with peat bogs and watercourses, while the steep slopes are mostly covered with forest communities. Due to the varied mosaic relief, the marshy coniferous forests, typical of the Park, border on broad-leaf forests; isolated stands of European beech, beyond its geographical limits, are found there as well (Rąkowski 2002).

The woodland and marshland areas are overgrown with an exceptionally rich flora, including post-glacial relic boreal species (cloudberry *Rubus chamaemorus*, shrubby birch *Betula humilis*, swamp willow *Salix myrtilloides*, small cranberry *Oxycoccus microcarpus*, Lithuanian mannagrass *Glyceria lithuanica*, lesser twayblade *Listera cordata*, sedge *Carex vaginata*) and montane species (*Conioselinum tataricum*, sedge *Carex magellanica*, ostrich fern *Matteuccia struthiopteris*, ramsons *Allium ursinum*, and mountain speedwell *Veronica Montana*). The list of other protected species is also very impressive: Cupola bogs and hanging bogs are also valuable from the environmental and cognitive point of view (Conservation Plan...).

The primeval forest is a dwelling place for numerous species of game. Most large mammals live there; European bison *Bison bonasus* frequently pay visits to the forest, and even a transitional presence of brown bear has been noted there. The species deserving special attention is the deer. Specimens of the local population have exceptionally grand antlers, which allowed distinguishing a separate type of the Romincki deer. These animals have made the Forest famous, also among foreign hunters. For several centuries it was the hunting grounds for Prussian princes and kings, and then for German Emperors. Other notable smaller mammals found there include ermine, northern birch mouse *Sicista betulina*, and bats. Birds worthy of attention are, *inter alia*, osprey, lesser spotted eagle, black kite, black stork, and white-backed woodpecker. In the rivers of the Forest the following species of fish are found: trout, common minnow *Phoxinus phoxinus*,

and grayling, as well as thick shelled river mussel *Unio crassus*, typical of clean waters. Insects are also abundant in the Forest (Rąkowski 2000).

6 nature reserves have been established within the Park (Fig. 1). The "*Mechacz Wielki*" peat bog reserve is intended to conserve an extensive peat bog complex with the thickness of peat of up to 5 meters, and with numerous rare plant species. In the "*Czerwona Struga*" reserve, a part of a wood stitchwort-and-alder riparian forest, with a rich site of ostrich fern, is under protection. Forest reserves "*Boczki*" and "*Dziki Kąt*" were sectioned off in order to protect the well-preserved parts of the Romincka Forest including distinctive forest complexes. Forest-and-peat bog reserves "*Struga Żytkiejmska*" and "*Uroczysko Kramnik*" (the latter sectioned off within the buffer zone) are forest and marsh vegetation communities with rare and relic flora species, which are unique on the national level. Altogether, the reserves cover an area of 836.82 ha (3.6 % of the total surface area of the Forest), and all of them are partial. Within the Park and the buffer zone, 21 individual and collective nature monuments were registered (Conservation Plan..., Zarzecka *et al.* 2007). Moreover, the Park was included in the Natura 2000 network as a Special Area of Conservation "Romincka Forest" with the status of a Site of Community Importance (SCI) approved by the European Commission (Hołdyński, Krupa, 2009).

As regards the cultural assets, the oldest ones are the archaeological relics of the settlers' migrations period, namely remains of Yotvingian fortified settlements and burial grounds in Orliniec and Żytkiejmy. Historic Evangelical churches are found in Dubeninki (19th century) and Żytkiejmy (built in 16th century, reconstructed in 19th century). The palace-and-park as well as manor-and-park architectural substance has survived in various technical condition. The recently restored buildings, i.e. a palace in Galwiecie and a manor house in Zawiszyn, look most presentable. The palace-and-park landscaping complex in Rogajny remains in a good shape as well. Another interesting element of the cultural landscape are the monuments of railway engineering, namely viaducts in Botkuny, Kiepojcie and Stańczyki, as well as a number of less impressive structures. Other notable buildings include those associated with the history of forestry and hunting in the Romincka Forest, *inter alia* a hunting manor of the forest inspector Joseph Speck von Strenburg, and a forester's lodge, the former forestry headquarters in Żytkiejmy (Conservation Plan...). The days of the German Emperor Wilhelm II's visits to the Romincka Forest, and his greatest hunting achievements, are commemorated by boulders with inscriptions, now partially embedded in the ground. (Kibiń 2006). Evangelical cemeteries are a significant part of the Park's landscape; there are altogether 60 of them, including 25 historic ones, but unfortunately these are abandoned and squalid, except for 2 war cemeteries (in Dubeninki and Żytkiejmy) and a catholic cemetery in Białe Jeziora. Other examples of the cultural assets include the well-preserved 19th century residential buildings in Żytkiejmy, as well as religious and secular monuments situated on the edge of the Park of Gołdap (Harajda *et al.* 2010, Krzywicki 2000, Rąkowski 2002).

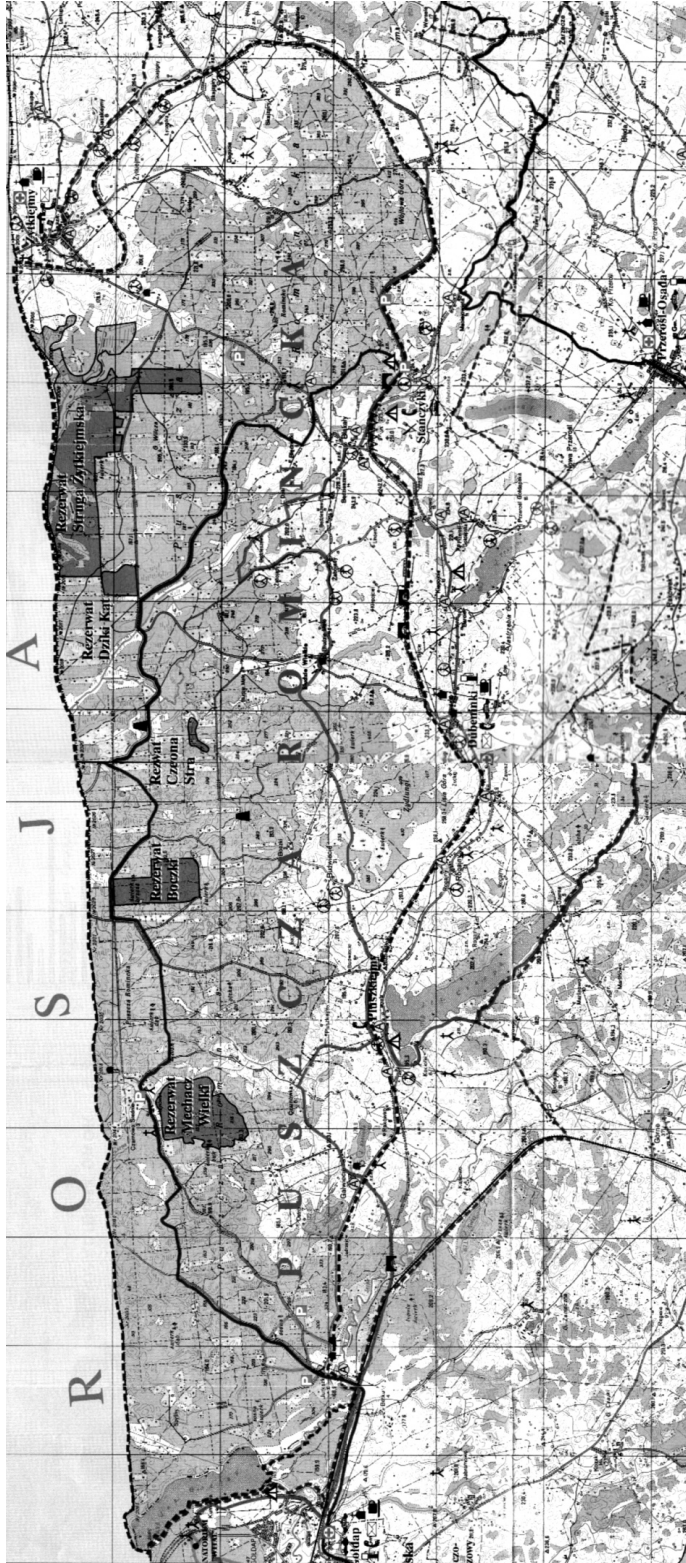


Fig. 1. Map of the Romincka Forest Landscape Park

As can be seen from the above description, the Romincka Forest Landscape Park is primarily a treasury of assets associated with the nature barely touched by man. What is more, this translates into outstanding recreational values. The forestation rate within the Park reaches 80%; within the buffer zone this rate is indeed significantly lower, since these are farming areas; apart from the few service centres and industrial plants (food and timber processing), there are no industrial plants being burdensome to the environment in the area. According to the data provided by the Statistical Office in Olsztyn, zero emissions of particulate and gas pollutants have been recorded in the vicinity of Gołdap, and the region ranks among the cleanest in Poland. Moreover, the recreational assets are increased by the high quality of local waters which show many of the features of mineral waters, and the rich deposits of therapeutic peat mud, due to which Gołdap obtained in 2000 the status of a spa town (Statistical Office...). As compared to other lakeland areas, not many lakes are found there. Within the limits of the Park, 1.5 % of the area is covered by water bodies and waterways; these include Lake Gołdap (234 ha on the Poland's side) as well as rivers Jarka and Błędzianka with tributaries. Within the buffer zone, water bodies cover 5.8 % of the area; these include lakes Czarne, Przerośl and Poblędzie, and several smaller ones. Nonetheless, clean waters guarantee both leisure and attractions for anglers. Kayaking river tours are also possible there, though the rivers are considered difficult. Other specialised assets include cycling, horse-riding and hunting. The area in question can be attractive to tourists even during the winter months. Forest tracks provide excellent opportunities for cross-country skiing, while the Piękna mountain, situated on the edge, attracts downhill skiers and sledge riders.

4. Possibilities for Sustainable Development of Tourism Function

Landscape parks should be made available to tourists, since this is *inter alia* provided for in their statutory objectives (Law on nature conservation...). Indeed, the relevant literature occasionally states that it is sometimes difficult to reconcile people's interests and the progress of civilisation with sustainable development of such areas. This particularly concerns structures located in the vicinity of large urban agglomerations (Maruniak, Młotkowska 2003). However, quite opposite opinions seem to be predominant; these suggest that there are still considerable reserves as regards the tourism-related uses of protected areas, which should be taken advantage of in order to improve the economic development of regions (Szwichtenberg 2003, Woś 2009). According to Żarska (2009), the following environmentally-friendly types and forms of tourist activities are permissible in landscape parks: sightseeing tourism, adventure tourism (hiking, cycling, horse-riding, kayaking, and cross-country skiing), ecotourism and agritourism. In any case one should always remember to respect the restrictions resulting from the leading protective function, and to adapt the intensity of visitor pressure to the capabilities of natural environment. This problem should be treated on an individual basis, taking into account both the natural determinants and the tourists' interest in a particular structure or area. One of the conditions of sustainable

combination of the protective and tourism functions is an assessment of the natural capacity of vegetation communities and the tourist penetration rate.

As follows from the data included in the Conservation Plan for the RFLP, forest communities cover almost 12 000 ha there. A third part of these resources has been attributed specialised protective functions (water-protecting and soil-protecting forests, wildlife refuges, and nature reserves). The remaining 8 000 ha can be made available for sustainable visitor penetration. These are mainly habitats of fresh mixed coniferous forest, fresh mixed forest and fresh forest (Conservation Plan...). When adopting capacity rate for such vegetation communities from Krzymowska-Kostrowicka (1997; for play-safe reasons, the lowest possible rate of 4 persons per 1 ha per day was adopted), the natural capacity of vegetation communities was determined. As follows from calculations, 32 000 people could sojourn in the forest areas in question without detriment to the vegetation cover, provided that the visitors' pressure is evenly distributed throughout the area. The uses of existing assets are reflected by statistics concerning the visitors. The local accommodation facilities are rather modest. Hotels, boarding houses and agritourism farms in Goldap and Dubeninki communes offer tourists a total of slightly more than 700 beds (as well as 480 beds for sanatorium patients) (Statistical Office ...). Even when baldly assuming that the half of 23 000 permanent residents would use the Forest's assets on a daily basis, and that the number of tourists would increase several-fold due to the so-called visitors, there are still vast possibilities for a further development of the tourism function without worrying about the hazards to the nature.

According to Źarska (2009), an effective way to reconcile the interests of both the protective and recreational functions in the areas of natural value is to appropriately control the tourists' movements, and provide extensive education. In practice this is accomplished thanks to the network of tourist trails and educational paths. Also in this field, there are very considerable reserves in the area in question. A 32 kilometres' long section of the "green" international hiking trail E-11 runs through the northern part of the Park, going past 3 nature reserves along the way: "*Mechacz Wielki*", "*Boczki*", and "*Dziki Ką*". All the reserves in the Park are partial; therefore, these can be made available for visitors, especially from the perspective of a laid out trail or a vantage point. The assets of the southern part, including the picturesque valley of the river Błędzianka along with the Stańczyki viaducts linking its edges, come into view along the "Red" trail. Sections of 3 other trails of various ranks were constructed along the limits of the Park and within the buffer zone. Tourists can be in better contact with the natural assets thanks to 4 educational paths: "*Czworolist*", "*Rechoł*", "*Niezapominajka*" and "*Porosty*". The direction of development of this type of infrastructure in the Park seems to be straight and conflict-free in relation to the protective function. First of all, the currently closed narrow-gauge railway embankments on the route from Goldap to Źytkiejmy should be developed, for example to be used as a horse-riding or cycling trail. The area of the Park is cut through with only a short section of the regional road, while the others have a status of county or commune roads. With the low

population density (16 people per 1 km² in Dubeninki commune, and 55 people per 1 km² in Gołdap commune), the intensity of motor traffic is low, and the roads could also be used successfully as cycling or horse-riding trails. This solution seems convincing, taking account of the additional fact that many forest roads have retained their landscape character and are not bitumen-surfaced. The transportation infrastructure could be very usefully supplemented with watch towers and vantage points, as well as parking spaces, equipped with simple elements of structural landscaping.

Accommodation and catering facilities should be developed within the buffer zone in two directions. In rural areas the agricultural function is predominant, which clearly indicates the purposefulness of the extension of agritourism facilities, obviously with the traditional architecture retained, ideally in combination with sustainable agriculture or organic farming. From a societal point of view, it is also important to rationally use the already existing commercial and residential property resources, whose modernisation for tourism-related purposes will allow protecting them from degradation. Agritourism can be very harmoniously connected with both the educational and adventure tourism, while a farm can provide a starting point for tourists to set out on the trail. It is worth mentioning that agricultural areas are marked by a significantly higher natural capacity as compared to the forest communities, therefore such a direction of the multifunctional use of agricultural space is permissible and recommended even in areas with a stricter protection regime being in force in national parks (Mazurek 2003).

According to the "Map of Agritourism Farms in Warmia and Mazury", only 9 agritourism farms are found in the area of the Romincka Forest Landscape Park (including the buffer zone), as compared to the total of 1 859 agricultural farms. On the other hand, there are considerable reserves in Gołdap as regards the possibilities for expanding the sanatorium function, and the proximity of the Park could provide an extra magnet attracting health resort visitors. Investments in the health resort infrastructure ensure extending the season to cover the whole year; moreover, the facilities utilisation rates significantly increase. The sanatorium function is relatively minimally invasive for the nature and environment, since most activities of the tourist-cum-health resort visitor are performed in "artificially" prepared surroundings. Moreover, there is specific feedback there, for it is not possible to create a positive image of a health resort without due care for its surroundings, including the natural assets. It should be mentioned that the vast majority of "health resort tourists" are friendly towards the environment, and that they appreciate the conscious use of its resources (Młynarczyk 2002).

The assessment carried out indicates that the degree of utilisation of existing assets within the framework of tourism function development, and the directions of its possible extension without a conflict with the nature's interests, has so far been rather low. The only thing to raise some concerns is the recommendations included in the Conservation Plan for the RFLP as regards promotion of the summer resort buildings in some places within the Park. As follows from provision of the Law on nature conservation, new investments in landscape parks are

permissible provided that they are in line with the so-called public interest, and harmoniously integrated into the existing fabric. Individual buildings restrict, and more than once even prevent a wider group of interested people from getting availability of the assets, and not infrequently disharmonise the regional character of the native landscape. Single-family recreational housing is often developed without proper sanitary supervision, which poses an additional risk. Certain villages and towns located in the Mazurian Landscape Park provide a glaring example of such adverse effects (Jaszczak, Marks 2009).

5. Summary

The Romincka Forest Landscape Park is an area well suited for development of various types and forms of environmentally-friendly tourism, often harmoniously connected with one another. The landscape assets can be made available within the framework of both recreational and adventure tourism, individual or organised for small groups. Hiking, cycling, horse-riding and kayaking forms of tourism should be promoted in the Park by means of laying out properly managed, subsequent tourist trails. The basis for development of the accommodation and catering facilities should be agricultural farms converted into agritourism farms and other rural tourism structures. Another factor important to the economic development of the region can also be the extension of the health resort function in the vicinity of Gołdap, which would guarantee extending the season to cover the whole year. During the winter months, the areas of the Park should tempt visitors with, aside from the above-mentioned offers, the picturesque cross-country skiing trails. At the moment, no conflict areas between the implementation of the protective function and other uses have been noted.

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