Abiotic conditions
Kampinos National Park, together with its buffer zone, protects part of the former Kampinos Forest, lying within the alluvial terraces of the former ice-marginal valley of the Vistula River. Its area extends over 38,550 ha, 70% of which is covered by mixed forests. The remaining areas are partially drained wetlands and large areas of long abandoned semi-natural meadows. The climate of the area is moderate with an average annual temperature of 7.8°C, a mean yearly precipitation of 529.6 mm and a growing season of 185 days. The park borders the city of Warsaw, the capital of Poland with circa 1.8 million inhabitants.

Cultural history
The land surrounding the Kampinos Forest, was colonized early by humans due to the very fertile soils. The first villages of Czosnow and Kromnow date back to the 11th century, with the next ones being established in the 12th century. In these times, human impact on the landscape was limited to clear cutting of the surrounding forests. Since then, gradual development of settlements on the outskirts of the Kampinos Forest has continued to the present day. In contrast to the surroundings, the area of today's national park was inhabited quite late due to generally poor soils and unfavorable conditions for farming. The poor sands of the inland dunes did not attract agriculture, whereas mires and swamps restricted penetration to the inner areas. The first immigrants arrived around 1750 and settled on the higher ground. Their major occupation was clearing the forests. At the same time, the so called Dutch settlements were established near the Vistula River. They were only initially dominated by Dutch immigrants and were later replaced by German, Austrian and Czech people. The settlers introduced new land management practices, with regular systems of drainage ditches and dikes protecting houses from flooding. Thus, two types of farming developed in parallel in the park's territory: extensive and smaller scale inside the forests on fens and poor sandy soils and more intensive, with larger parcels closer to the river, on richer alluvial soils (Heymanowski, 1966). Within the borders of today's Kampinos National Park, most of the spring-flooded areas became accessible after large-scale drainage schemes carried out in the second half of the 19th century and these were converted to hay meadows. After World War II, the farmers started to abandon their land shifting with work to the cities, especially Warsaw. However, agriculture remained an important aspect of their life. New land reclamation works were carried out in the 1950s, resulting in intensive drainage of most of the area and leading to degradation of the wetlands and disappearance of wetland-related plant species. The negative impact of drainage on the whole area was one of the main reasons for initiating land purchase by the park. However, the high biodiversity value of the meadows was not recognized until recently and consequently, the majority of the bought land has been afforested.

Traditional land use and recent changes
Pastures on dry sand, meadows on peat
The traditional use of grasslands in the area of Kampinos National Park included cutting for hay, litter and grazing by cows. It was a regular rule that drier elevated areas were used as pastures, whereas the wetter sites, especially on organic peaty soils, served as meadows. Farming conditions on meadows improved after land reclamation schemes in the 19th century, when many fens were transformed into wet meadows. However, probably only a small percentage of