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*The concept “buffer zone” in the Polish legal system*

**Summary**

This paper outlines legal considerations connected with the concept of a “buffer zone” presented on the basis of Polish and foreign legislation, theory and practice. The statutory regulation of a “buffer zone” is laconic and therefore it is necessary to interpret it basing on the doctrine in order to avoid problems with its practical application by administrative bodies and judicial authorities. The paper contains different understandings of the concept of a buffer zone defined in law and in literature. And yet, buffer zones fulfill many important functions and therefore an analysis of their constitutive features seems to be necessary for correct making and application of the law. Foreign examples presented in the paper illustrate the universality of the issue. Based on legislative texts, the doctrine and judicial decisions as well as other legal acts regulating land use and spatial planning, an attempt is then made to present the impact of a buffer zone on the functioning of the areas in its neighbourhood. Further, the current lines of case law of administrative courts with respect to the issue of a buffer zone are shown, followed by a proposal to amend the statutory definition of a buffer zone. References to non-legal considerations regarding the issue in Polish and foreign literature have also been included to ensure a more holistic approach to the subject, since its full understanding requires taking into account the reasons for which a buffer zone has been established, and the functions it has to fulfill in nature conservation. Legal regulations governing buffer zones reflect environmental concerns and other related issues covered by widely understood ecology and cannot be only discussed from the legal point of view.

**Keywords:** buffer zone, protected areas, nature conservation in Poland