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Protected Area Management in Central and Eastern Europe

BRIEFING • JULY 2020

A Green Recovery for protected areas

Protected areas form the centrepiece of conservation efforts around the world. The reason behind this is clear. The preservation of functioning ecosystems and the maintenance of their natural processes are crucial for the survival of species and biomes that cannot persevere in areas heavily impacted by human activity. In many cases, such **protected areas represent the last hope for critically endangered or endemic species otherwise threatened by extinction**. In Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), species on the brink include large carnivores such as bears, lynx and wolves, as well as sturgeon and primeval beech forests. Protected areas provide important space for ecological adaptation and evolutionary processes, thus playing a critical role in the face of climate change. Moreover, they generate direct human benefits in the form of ecosystem services.

Much has been achieved over the past years. The global community is on track to meet its 2020 goal to achieve effective and equitable management of 10% of coastal and marine areas and 17% of terrestrial areas as embedded in [Aichi Target #11](#) of the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#). By mid-2018, more than 20 million km² of the Earth's landscapes (15%) and almost 27 million km² (7%) of global seascapes had been classified as "protected areas."¹ This is a promising trend, one that is essential for the future of biodiversity and for stabilising the Earth's climate. However, it is also crucial that these protected areas (a term that encompasses a wide array of different land and water designations) are managed and monitored according to strict and ambitious guidelines that foster the conservation of species and habitats - not only on paper, but in practice.

What we mean by Green Recovery

The **Covid-19 pandemic** and its immediate health, social and economic impacts require an urgent response. Beyond this, however, public stimulus packages to relaunch the economy are already being developed, requiring crucial decisions on where these substantial financial flows should be directed or through which channels and vehicles, in order to bring most benefits.

Badly designed recovery plans in response to the Covid-19 outbreak risk exacerbating the social inequalities and environmental crisis. Instead, **governments must draw up their plans in a way that helps tackle social inequalities, climate and environmental breakdown, and the need to improve long-term resilience**, by taking a consistent approach across the board, and aiming clearly at a green, equitable and resilient recovery.

WWF is calling on the European Union and its governments to demonstrate leadership and foresight by continuing to follow, and reinforcing, a trajectory towards a resilient, sustainable and just economy and society, in line with the European Green Deal, the Paris climate agreement, biodiversity goals and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

¹ UNEP-WCMC, IUCN and NGS, *Protected Planet Live Report (2018)*, available at: https://liverreport.protectedplanet.net/pdf/Protected_Planet_Report_2018.pdf



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Boosted progress is also required to achieve a better representation of different habitat-types, in particular marine and freshwater areas.

In terms of surface area coverage, CEE is home to some of the last intact natural areas of their size in Europe. Natural treasures such as the Southwestern Carpathians, the Danube Delta and Maramures County (Romania) truly justify the region's labelling as the "[Green Heart of Europe](#)." The surface coverage of [Natura 2000](#) sites in the region ranges from 21.41% (19,912 km²) in Hungary to 34.37% in Bulgaria (38,146km²). Slovakia (14,607 km², 29.79%) and Romania (54,104 km², 22.71%) also register above the average 19.04% EU Natura 2000 coverage.

The employment effect of the Natura 2000 Network is also significant: an investment of EUR 1 billion into the network results in the creation 29,900 new jobs.²

What we need to do

How to make a recovery strategy 'green'?

Our decision makers in the EU, representatives in national governments and parliaments, and spokespersons at the municipal level must ensure just and sustainable recovery plans, by

1. directing **at least 50% of recovery plans into environmentally sustainable activities;**
2. **not supporting environmentally harmful activities;**
3. delivering social benefits through a "**just transition**" for all;
4. upholding and strengthening existing **environmental standards and policies;**
5. **communicating benefits** of improving the overall environmental health of societies;
6. and ensuring that **EU support to third countries adheres to the same principles.**

...and rethink regulation to strengthen resilience. This requires

7. strengthening and continuing the **implementation of the European green Deal;**
8. **ending environmentally harmful subsidies** and scaling up **environmental fiscal reform;**

Timeline

September 2020	WWF Living Planet Report
22.09-23.09.2020	UN Biodiversity Summit New York
20.10-22.10.2020	EU Green Week and launch of the EU State of Nature Report
23.10.2020	EU Environment Council conclusions on EU Biodiversity Strategy
10.-11.12.2020	European Council meeting and adoption of the 2021-2027 EU budget
07.01-15.01.2021	IUCN World Conservation Congress
21.01-26.02.2021	World Economic Forum
17-30 May 2021	COP 15 - Convention of Biological Diversity

IN THE FACE OF THE UNPRECEDENTED CRISIS OF NATURE LOSS, AS THE DOMINANT SPECIES ON THE PLANET WE HAVE THE MORAL RESPONSIBILITY TO PRESERVE THE DIVERSITY OF LIFE ON EARTH.

² GHK (2011), *Evaluating the Potential for Green Jobs in the next Multi-annual Financial Framework*, pp. 12-13.



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10. accelerating **EU sustainable finance policies** to shift the trillions;
11. ensuring **sustainable production and supply chains** within and to the EU;
12. and putting **people's wellbeing at the heart of the crisis response**.

Integrity of protected areas

In order to ensure the integrity of our protected areas, in particular Natura 2000 and [Emerald Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest](#), we call on **ministries of environment to ensure that 30% of EU territory is covered by effectively managed and well-connected terrestrial and marine protected areas by 2030**. The proper management of these protected areas is crucial in order to avoid mere paper parks which fail to deliver meaningful change. Therefore, we urge ministries of environment to **set up competent and well-funded agencies for protected areas management that work in a participatory manner** with key stakeholders such as environmental NGOs, farmers associations, forest management units and academia. Working in a participatory manner is fundamental to the development of management plans, implementing conservation measures, and monitoring and evaluating the status of species and habitats. Such an approach is imperative for ensuring transparency and efficiency of management efforts. The agencies should also endeavour to build the capacity of protected area professionals.

Scientific data

Successful conservation measures hinge on the availability of reliable scientific data stemming from the careful monitoring of species and their habitats, and the effectiveness of activities implemented on the basis of this data. Consequently, we appeal to **ministries for environment / agencies for protected areas to develop and apply scientific monitoring of the status of species and habitats** at the national level, based on the latest technologies and field surveys. The responsible authorities should utilise result (not procedural) indicators from this data to measure the effectiveness of Natura 2000 management. Furthermore, the independence of the monitoring and evaluation authorities from the management authorities needs to be ensured for transparency and impartiality, and the assessments must be subject to peer review and public consultation. Ministries for environment / agencies for protected areas should **monitor and improve site-level conservation measures for protected areas every 5 years, taking into account changing conditions due to climate change**.

Key facts & figures

- As of 2018, the Natura 2000 Network covers 38,146 km² (34.37%) of the territory of Bulgaria, 19,912 km² (21.41%) in Hungary, 54,104 km² (22.71%) in Romania and 14,607 km² (29.79%) in Slovakia;
- In the EU, only 16% of assessed habitats have achieved a favourable conservation status. In total, 77% have yielded unfavourable assessments (47% unfavourable-inadequate, 30% unfavourable-bad). The situation in the CEE Region is similarly dire: 35.1% of habitats in Romania, 88% in Bulgaria, 55.5% in Slovakia and 80.4% in Hungary were found to have an unfavourable conservation status;²

THE WORLD MUST COME
TOGETHER TO REVERSE
NATURE
LOSS AND SAFEGUARD THE
FUTURE OF HUMANITY

³ EEA, *State of Nature in the EU - EEA Technical Report No2/2015 (2015)*, available at: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/state-of-nature-in-the-eu>

Harmonisation of laws and regulations

For the right enabling environment to be in place to allow for these management practices to be adopted, decision-makers must ensure that the right financial and legislative frameworks are in place. We call on **ministries responsible for forests, water, agriculture and environment to work together to harmonise laws and regulations to eliminate conflicting provisions of sectoral legislation; secure proper zoning of protected areas; and maximise synergies and coherence** of forest, river basin management, protected area management plans and strategic agriculture plans.

Ensuring proper funding

In order to guarantee proper funding of protected areas, we appeal to the **ministries for environment to issue solid Prioritised Action Frameworks outlining costed management measures to assure the integrity of the Natura 2000 network**. In addition, ecological connectivity needs, with references to budget implications for other sectors such as the agriculture and transport sectors or green business development, must be structured to safeguard buy-in from local populations. We call on ministries of finance to **allocate sufficient resources for meeting the management needs of the protected areas network**. The needs assessments should be grounded on up-to-date conservation measures, management plans and species and habitats status reports. Financial allocations for biodiversity demands ought to be tied to result-based indicators and correspond with a Prioritised Action Framework that is scientifically informed (results from monitoring) and subject to public consultation.

Collaboration across borders, ministries and agencies

Collaboration with other ministries and stakeholders is extremely important, particularly for those working in sectors that have strong impacts on biodiversity. Therefore, we urge **ministries of agriculture to acknowledge their responsibility for maintaining [High Nature Value Farmland](#)** and to allocate sufficient resources and management capacity to this issue. **Ministries of transport, energy and development should integrate protected area objectives into the planning of transport, energy and other infrastructure measures** from the outset in order to avoid, and where necessary and possible, mitigate impact on the ecological integrity and connectivity of the affected sites.

Key facts & figures

- The 2019 report of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) found that more animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction than ever before in human history - around 1 million, many within decades;³ and
- The WWF [Living Planet Report](#) from 2020 shows an average 68% decline in monitored populations, since 1970. This is a real crisis which will increasingly affect our lives.

Current trends can still be reversed if transformative changes are implemented that address the root causes of nature deterioration.

IN 2020, WE HAVE AN UNMISSABLE OPPORTUNITY TO CHART A NEW COURSE. WORLD LEADERS AND CITIZENS CAN DELIVER THE CHANGE REQUIRED TO SAFEGUARD THE FUTURE FOR PEOPLE AND LIFE ON EARTH; THROUGH A NEW DEAL FOR NATURE AND PEOPLE

⁴ IPBES, *Summary for Policy-makers of the Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services* (2019), available at: <https://www.ipbes.net/news/ipbes-global-assessment-summary-policy-makers-pdf>

⁵ WWF, *Living Planet Report 2018* (2018), available here: http://www.wwf.eu/campaigns/living_planet_report_2018/



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Awareness raising

Lastly, in order to secure the support of the wider public throughout the CEE region for the safeguarding of our natural heritage, we call on **ministries of education to integrate education on the value of nature conservation** into school curricula

Further reading

- WWF, Building resilience: WWF recommendations for a sustainable and just recovery after Covid-19 (2020), available at: https://www.wwf.eu/wwf_news/media_centre/?uNewsID=362052
- WEF, The Future of Nature and Business Policy Companion: Recommendations for policy-makers to reset towards a new nature economy (2020), available at: http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_NNER_II_The_Future_of_Business_and_Nature_Policy_Companion_2020.pdf
- IPBES, Summary for Policymakers of the Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (2019), available at: <https://www.ipbes.net/news/ipbes-global-assessment-summary-policymakers-pdf>
- WWF, Living Planet Report 2020, available here: <https://livingplanet.panda.org/>
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For more information

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