



The NATURA 2000 Network Position of FACE

Statement

FACE welcomes the establishment of a network of protected sites which will support the valuable conservation work already carried out by the hunting community. Proper wildlife management is essential to maintain bio-diversity and it is important that this is reinforced by the "FFH" Directive. Where necessary the Directive should encourage those sustainable activities, such as hunting and angling, which help to ensure a high level of bio-diversity.

Situation

- Hunting commands seven million active conservationists throughout Europe, influencing the management of many millions of square kilometres.
- Many protected areas having been designated because of their high ecological value are currently managed by individual hunters and hunting associations
- Many areas have only achieved the levels of bio-diversity that merit preservation because hunters have developed the natural habitat.
- Hunters already co-operate on international projects to conserve migratory species.
- The new kind of legal protection afforded by the "FFH" Directive is important because, as the European Commission has frequently stated, it recognises the essential management role performed by local stakeholders who practise the wise and sustainable use of natural resources.
- On several occasions (e.g. Green Week 2002), the European Commission has made it clear that hunting constitutes acceptable exploitation and is in principle compatible with the designation of NATURA 2000 sites.

Recommendations

Management of habitat for hunting has produced considerable benefits for bio-diversity. FACE welcomes the opportunity for this to be formally recognised, and for national efforts to be integrated into a Europe-wide plan to create a coherent network of wildlife habitats.

Hunters manage their land for the benefit of all wildlife and it is important that this should continue without unnecessary constraints. Laws alone cannot create bio-diversity: it can only be achieved through the active participation of people who manage land for recreational, social and economic use. Member States must therefore ensure that the NATURA 2000 designation is not used as an excuse to restrict hunting, since this would be seriously detrimental to wildlife conservation.

What the national organisations and seven million hunters that FACE represents expect from the EU is:

- a clear, public position on the positive contribution hunting makes to bio-diversity, both inside and outside the NATURA 2000 Network
- a clear commitment from all parties, including the European Commission and the other EU institutions, as well as the conservation movement, that hunting and hunters are a key component in achieving the aims of NATURA 2000.

These undertakings will give hunters the confidence to continue to devote considerable resources and efforts into preserving vital natural habitats from the many threats facing them.

(Adopted by the FACE Board on 13.09.03)