



## THE VOICE OF EUROPEAN HUNTERS

FACE  
Rue Belliard 205  
B-1040 Brussels

+ 32 (0)2 732 6900  
info@face.eu  
www.face.eu

### FACE INFO NOTE

## Engagement of hunters in private conservation land within the Natura 2000 Network

### Introduction

By adopting the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2020, the European Commission committed to maintain and enhance ecosystems and their services through the effective management of the Natura 2000 (N2K) network. Although the network has been a major success to improve the condition of natural habitats, too much attention has been put on species protection. In order to be effective, Europe's most important green network requires the involvement from all stakeholders to ensure that the areas are utilised in a sustainable manner for both consumptive and non-consumptive resource use. FACE, with the support of the European Commission, seeks to promote dialogue between various stakeholders to ensure that these areas are managed with a holistic view.

As many of the sites are privately owned, the N2K network is a much broader concept than nature reserves. Therefore, emphasis is put on achieving the conservation objectives while considering the economic, social, cultural, regional and recreational requirements of the human population. Since N2K sites can be considered as areas not being strictly protected, farming, forestry, hunting and other socio-economic and cultural activities are allowed to occur as long as these are conducted sustainably and do not negatively impact on the conservation objectives of the sites.

### EU Action Plan for nature, people and the economy

In response to an evaluation of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives, the EU Action Plan for nature, people and the economy (EUAP) was adopted in 2017. Through its 15 actions, the Action Plan intends to strategically improve the implementation of the EU Nature Directives and realise their full potential to ensure the conservation and sustainable management of Europe's wild birds and protected fauna and flora.

Due to the high cost-to-benefit ratio of the implementation of the N2K network, funding shortages are preventing the network from delivering benefits in full. Therefore, the EUAP sets out measures to make nature more attractive for private investment through green infrastructure and nature-based solutions (Actions 8-12). Such measures include a 10% increase of the support for nature under the LIFE Fund, result-based schemes under the CAP and support for private land stewardship.

### Hunters' engagement to private conservation land within the Natura 2000 network

The coexistence of activities within a site gives the opportunity for land users to collaborate in creating management plans that allow consensus to be reached, while integrating different activities into conservation policy. Although, the creation of a dialogue between stakeholders may appear antagonistic at first, it allows the interested parties to overcome problems and to agree on pragmatic management solutions for the area concerned in order to moderate potential conflicts.

Over 32% of FACE's Biodiversity Manifesto (BDM) projects are undertaken in N2K sites. This supports the previously mentioned recommendations to enhance the mutual benefits between hunting and private conservation land within the N2K network. Actions lead by hunters include monitoring activities, predator control, improvement of public awareness, conflict prevention/resolution as well as review of management practices. For example, in Andalusia (Spain), stakeholder cooperation helped increase the recognition of the presence of the Iberian lynx (*Lynx pardinus*) by managing private hunting estates within the N2K network in a lynx-friendly way, thus preventing conflict between hunters and conservationists. Furthermore, hunters in the Languedoc-Roussillon region (France) gained support for sustainable hunting by improving stakeholder dialogue through the implementation of the ChasNat2000 scheme by the Regional Federation of Hunters. This awareness-raising project characterizes N2K hunting activities through mediation, communication and, educational workshops and working groups.

Furthermore, the Natura 2000 Users' Forum (N2KUF) brings FACE<sup>1</sup> together with foresters (CEPF<sup>2</sup>), farmers (COPA-COGECA<sup>3</sup>), anglers (EAA<sup>4</sup>) and landowners (ELO<sup>5</sup>). Collectively, these organisations represent a range of environmental, socio-economic and socio-cultural activities linked to rural areas; areas which host the largest proportion of the EU biodiversity. Thus, N2KUF represents over 45 million EU citizens which own, manage and use land and the renewable natural resources.

## Conclusion

With the onset of the EU Green Deal, the European Commission may propose to increase N2K sites in view of halting biodiversity loss. However, as the N2K network only represents the most special (threatened) species and habitats, the sole establishment of N2K sites constitutes a very limited tool to preserve Europe's biodiversity. Thus, in FACE's opinion, instead of focusing exclusively on protected areas, the Biodiversity Strategy 2030 should also put effort into Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures" (OECMs). Such measures would also improve the ecological connectivity between sites.

In order to enhance the mutual benefits between hunting and the N2K network, FACE and its Members deem it important to concentrate on the following actions: (i) establish an effective cooperative system between hunters and environmentalists, as well as farmers, landowners, and relevant competent authorities, thereby promoting a bottom-up approach to conservation (ii) recognise the strong incentive of sustainable hunting towards conservation objectives within the framework of wide landscape management plans, (iii) accept the potential requirement of temporary no-take zones in N2K sites, (iv) raise awareness of environmentalists regarding hunting practices and educate hunters on conservation issues, (v) fully comply with the legislation, (vi) adapt (when necessary) sustainable practices as a result of impact assessments, (vii) collect good quality data (bag data, population data), monitor species and habitats in order to make the best possible science-based management decisions and finally (viii) develop information exchange networks in order to transfer relevant expertise and best practices.

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<sup>1</sup> European Federation for Hunting and Conservation

<sup>2</sup> Confederation of European Forest Owners

<sup>3</sup> Committee of Professional Agricultural Organisations – General Confederation of Agricultural Cooperatives

<sup>4</sup> European Anglers Alliance

<sup>5</sup> European Landowners' Organisation