



THE VOICE OF EUROPEAN HUNTERS

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Next Steps for Protected Areas in Europe

Context

Hunting is one of the oldest forms of consumptive use of renewable natural resources and provides important social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits within and outside protected areas within Europe. Sustainable hunting also represents a strong incentive to support the maintenance of habitats and species. In this regard, hunters frequently contribute to the conservation of game and other species through, for example, habitat creation and management and the control of mammalian predators. Furthermore, some of the most important wildlife sites in Europe, which are now designated sites, have survived the pressures of development and destruction due to game management interests.

Protecting 30% of Europe

The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 requires Member States to step up their conservation efforts to protect 30% of both Europe's land and sea by 2030, of which 10 % will have to be strictly protected. The Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework includes a similar 30% target, however, a 10% strictly protected area target was excluded in early stages of the negotiations. The current draft for adoption at the CBD COP15 in Montreal this December stresses that protected areas should be effectively and equitably managed, and integrated into the wider landscapes. This follows evidence that good site management is more important than level of protection when delivering benefits for biodiversity.

For the Europe's protected area target, there will be a need to expand the network of terrestrial protected areas by circa 4% and of strictly protected areas by circa 7%. More work is required for marine protected areas, which must see an increase of 19% by 2030. According to the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 all primary and old-growth forest should be strictly protected, as should other biodiversity-rich areas which thrive through natural processes.

It is worth remembering that with over 130 000 sites, Europe has already more protected areas than any other continent, mainly through the Natura 2000 Network, and amongst the highest proportion of its area covered by protected areas.

It is important to note that these targets do not need to be achieved at national level but per biogeographical region. Via a national pledge process, Member States should report on existing protected areas by the end of 2022 and will also identify new areas to be classified as protected or strictly protected areas to reach the targets.

To support Member States with the designation of protected areas, the European Commission (EC) published a Staff Working Document on [criteria and guidance for protected areas designations](#). The criteria and guidance are non-binding and aim to help Member States fulfilling their political commitment.

New EC criteria and guidance

The objective of this work under the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 is to preserve the integrity of high biodiversity areas with particular focus on carbon-rich ecosystems such as peatlands and ancient woodlands.

While previous draft versions of the criteria and guidance for protected areas designations document had foreseen a blanket ban on hunting and fishing in the new category of strictly protected areas covering 10% of EU land, the final version does not include such provisions. Instead, strictly controlled recreational activities can take place in strictly protected areas when such activities are compatible with the conservation objectives of the areas on the basis of a case-by-case assessment.

The exclusion of users from protected areas, without a solid scientific reason, would quickly weaken public support for this type of regime. Hunters' conservation efforts are important in protected area management and key to ensuring community-based support and conservation efforts at the local level. Numerous hunting-related conservation projects in protected areas are document in the FACE Biodiversity Manifesto (www.BiodiversityManifesto.com).

Current State of Play

The EU comprises of nine biogeographical regions that host a variety of ecosystems, habitats and species. This diversity includes boreal forest ecosystems in the north, as well as biodiversity-rich river deltas and arid lands in the south. It ranges from the steppe landscapes of Eastern Europe to the extensive heathlands of the west. However, protected areas are not equally distributed among these regions (source: Biodiversity Information System for Europe). While for some regions (e.g. Atlantic, Black Sea, Continental, Macaronesia) the 30% target is already achieved, others would require national cooperation to reach the target.

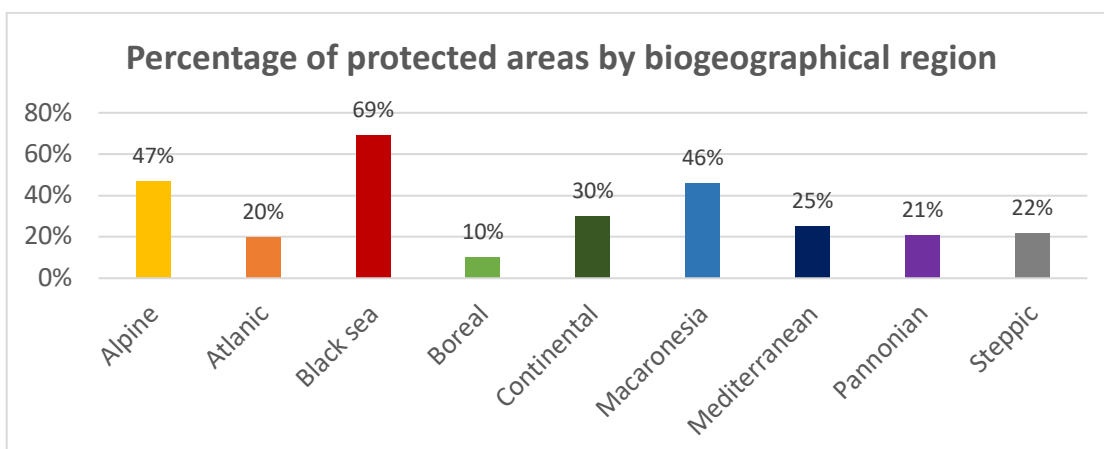


Figure 1 Percentage of the EU protected areas network (national sites, Natura 2000 sites and the overlap between them) by biogeographical region (source: Biodiversity Information System for Europe).

National Progress

Looking at the national level, the proportion of protected area coverage per Member State is highly diverse. As of 2020, most countries have a terrestrial coverage of around 20 % (e.g. France, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia and Norway). The country with the highest coverage is Luxembourg with over 50 %. Countries like Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, Estonia, Germany, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia have a coverage of around 40 %.

While these national data give an interesting overview, for Member States it will be also important to understand how many protected areas (size and % of biogeographical area) are dedicated to each biogeographical region.

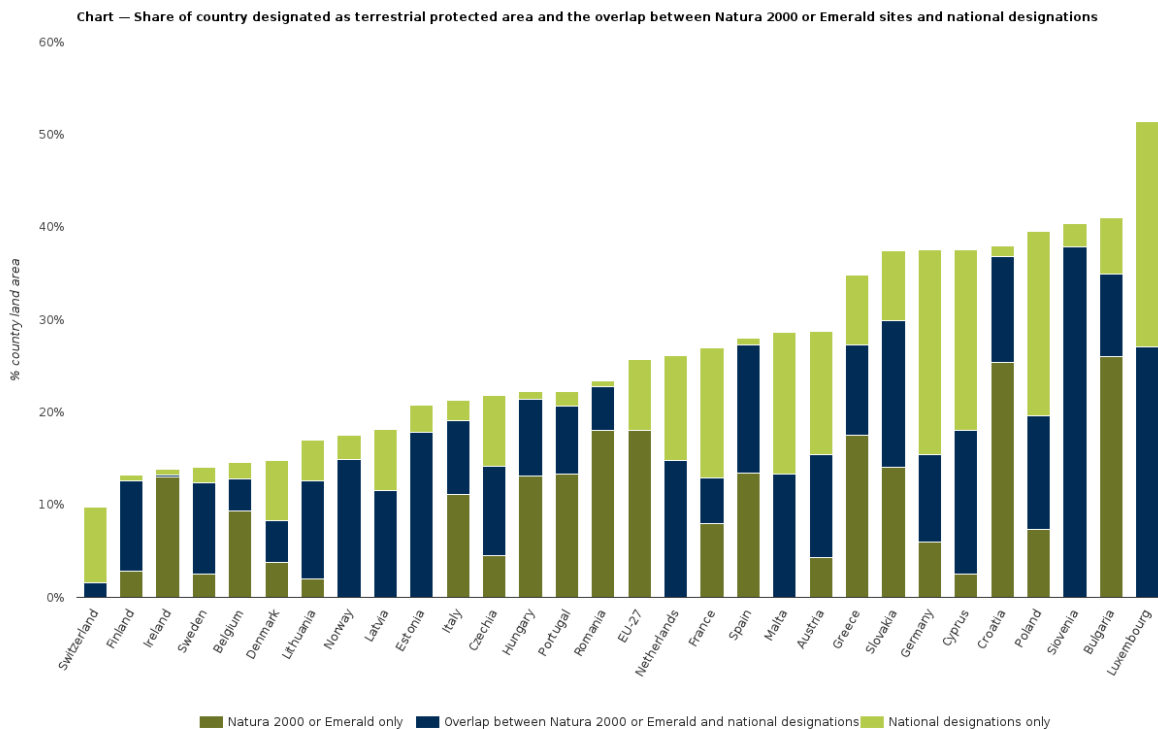


Figure 2 Share of country designated as terrestrial protected area and the overlap between Natura 2000 or Emerald sites and national designations (source: EEA Data and Maps).

No specific datasets are available for strictly protected areas. The EEA made a calculation based on the areas belonging to the IUCN Categories Ia (strict nature reserve), Ib (wilderness area) and II (national park). According to this calculation, the EEA calculated that 3.42% of the land area of the EU is reported as strictly protected areas. Due to the non-inclusion of Nature 2000 site and the incomplete reporting on IUCN categories, the EEA concluded that the percentage mentioned above underestimate the actual coverage of strictly protected areas.

Recommendations

National cooperation to achieve 30/10 target at biogeographical level

It will be key for Member States to collaborate with neighbouring countries which have the same biogeographical regions.

Stakeholder involvement

Effective stakeholder participation is crucial in all stages of protected area management, from the designation phase to the management and monitoring. It is vital that Member States involve all relevant stakeholders (landowners, hunters, foresters, local communities and NOGs) in a fair and participatory way. It is clear that many Member States have not had the capacity to properly consult and work with local stakeholders to ensure there is adequate support for protected area management. With the new targets set, it's essential that Member States involve relevant stakeholders at an early stage to ensure there is community-based support for site conservation.

Inclusion of OECMS

Other effective area-based conservation measures offer an alternative approach to delivering biodiversity, where conservation is mainly achieved as a by-product of other management objectives. They can support, amongst other objectives, EU targets for 30 % of land and water to be protected by 2030.

Infonote on Natura 2000 and hunting:

<https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/info/pubs/docs/factsheets/hunting.pdf>