



THE VOICE OF EUROPEAN HUNTERS

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FACE's initial recommendations on the EC's proposal on restoration

Introduction

On 22 June 2022, the European Commission presented its proposal on binding restoration targets (the so-called Restoration Law). Restoration is an integral part of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. Without it, protection alone cannot bring nature back to good health across the EU, in protected areas and beyond. [FACE has openly welcomed the proposal](#) as it aims at putting in place time-bound obligations for ecosystem restoration together with an overarching EU target, i.e., 20% of EU's land and sea areas must be restored by 2030 and all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050.

FACE's recommendations

- FACE has long advocated for habitat **restoration as the most effective way to bring significant benefits to biodiversity, including huntable species**, which have been heavily affected by land use change in Europe.
- FACE stresses that a strategic framework for the restoration of habitats and ecosystems requires priorities at sub-national level and **involvement of regional and local authorities as well as key stakeholders from an early stage in the planning process**.
- As restoration requires a landscape level approach, **the role of stakeholders, including farmers, land managers and hunters, is key to develop workable conservation measures**.
- **As restoration will also take place on private land, the right incentives to promote community-based conservation must be provided to increase local acceptance and support by relevant stakeholders to make sure that restoration projects become success stories**.
- To ensure that the EU Nature Restoration Plan can translate into successful local initiatives on the ground, it is important to recognise the contribution of hunters to the conservation of nature, including the restoration of habitats (e.g. creation and maintenance of wetlands and other natural features in the wider landscape). For more information on hunters' work on restoration, please see [The FACE Biodiversity Manifesto](#).
- Enabling transformative change requires doing things differently. FACE requests the European Commission to give greater priority to tackling the major drivers of biodiversity loss and land degradation in a way that incentivises key stakeholders.

Questions and Answers on the EC's proposal on restoration

Why there is the need to adopt a new proposal?

Habitats are in poor conditions across Europe. According to the European Environmental Agency's State of Nature report, 81% of EU-protected habitats are in poor condition, 9% of all habitats with poor or bad conservation status show improvement, while 36% continue to deteriorate at the EU level.

Grasslands, dunes, and bog, mire and fen habitats show strong deteriorating trends, while forests have the most improving trends. On average, 6 % of all habitat assessments¹ show improvements in conservation status and/or trends due to targeted management and restoration measures or expansions of the habitat area. Agricultural activities (and abandonment) and urbanisation are the major pressures for habitats and species, followed by pollution.

As the eyes and ears of the forest, hunters have directly witnessed the decline of huntable and non-huntable species, especially small game, over the past decades. In this respect, FACE has always called for habitat restoration, which is capable to produce significant benefits for plant and animal species.

What does restoration mean?

As described in the proposal, **"restoration means the process of actively or passively assisting the recovery of an ecosystem towards or to good condition, of a habitat type to the highest level of condition attainable and to its favourable reference area, of a habitat of a species to a sufficient quality and quantity, or of species populations to satisfactory levels, as a means of conserving or enhancing biodiversity and ecosystem resilience."**

What "good conditions", "favourable reference areas" and "sufficient quality and quantity"?

"Good conditions", "favourable reference area" and "sufficient quality and quantity" can be considered as the building blocks of the proposal. They help translate the time-bound obligations in clear commitments Member States have to fulfil.

'Good Condition' means a state where the key characteristics of an ecosystem, namely its physical, chemical, compositional, structural and functional state, and its landscape and seascape characteristics, reflect the high level of ecological integrity, stability and resilience necessary to ensure its long-term maintenance.

'Favourable Reference Area' means the total area of a habitat type in a given biogeographical region or marine region at national level that is considered the minimum necessary to ensure the long-term viability of the habitat type and its species, and all its significant ecological variations in its natural range, and which is composed of the area of the habitat type and, if that area is not sufficient, the area necessary for the re-establishment of the habitat type;

¹ They represent 105 habitat types.

‘Sufficient Quality of habitat’ means the quality of a habitat of a species which allows the ecological requirements of a species to be met at any stage of its biological cycle so that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its habitat in its natural range;

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What targets are set in the proposal?

The overarching target includes **restoration measures covering at least 20% of EU’s land and sea areas by 2030 and all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050**. It goes hand in hand with specific time-bound targets for ecosystems.

Restoration measures shall be in place on **at least 30 % of the area of each group of habitat types listed in Annex I of the proposal² that is not in good condition by 2030, on at least 60 % by 2040, and on at least 90 % by 2050**.

With regard re-establishing habitats, restoration measures shall be in place on areas representing at least 30% of the additional overall surface needed to reach the total favourable reference area of each group of habitat types listed in Annex I, as quantified in the national restoration plan referred to in Article 12, by 2030, at least 60 % of that surface by 2040, and 100 % of that surface by 2050.

What habitats are included in the proposal?

With regard to terrestrial, coastal and freshwater ecosystems, the following groups of habitat types are included:

1. Wetlands (coastal & inland), 2. Grasslands and other pastoral habitats 3. River, Lake, Alluvial and Riparian habitats, 4. Forests, 5. Steppe, Heath and Scrub Habitats 6. Rocky and Dune habitats.

Equally noteworthy for huntable and non-huntable species are restoration measures, which must be put in place for the habitats of terrestrial, coastal and freshwater species listed in Annexes II, IV and V to the Habitats Directive and of wild birds covered under the Birds Directive, that are necessary to improve **the quality of those habitats, reestablish those habitats and create sufficient connectivity among those habitats corresponding to the ecological requirements of those species**.

With regard to agriculture ecosystems, Member States must implement restoration measures for habitat types listed in Annex I of the proposal³. Further, they must adopt the necessary measures to enhance biodiversity. An increasing trend must be reached for (a) grassland butterfly index;(b) stock of organic carbon in cropland mineral soils; (c) share of agricultural land with high-diversity landscape features and (d) farmland birds index. Ambitious measures are specifically listed for the restoration of wetlands.

² Annex I of the proposal includes the same habitats listed in the Annex I of the Habitats Directive.

³ Agriculture ecosystems include many habitat types listed in Annex I of the proposal.

With regard to forest ecosystems, Member States must put in place the restoration measures necessary to enhance biodiversity of forest. In addition, they must adopt the necessary measures to enhance biodiversity. An increasing trend must be reached for (a) standing deadwood; (b) lying deadwood; (c) share of forests with uneven-aged structure; (d) forest connectivity; (e) common forest bird index; (f) stock of organic carbon.

In the future, once a common method for assessing the good condition of the Union's ecosystems for which methods do not yet exist are developed, additional targets based on these common methods may be established by amending the regulation.

What's the final goal?

- **An increase of habitat area in good condition** for habitat types listed in Annex I until **at least 90 % is in good condition** and until **the favourable reference area for each habitat type in each biogeographic region of their territory is reached.**
- **An increasing trend towards the sufficient quality and quantity** of the terrestrial, coastal and freshwater habitats of the species referred to in Annexes II, IV and V to the Habitats Directive and of the species covered by the Birds Directive.

What is the link between restoration and protection?

Restoration goes hand in hand with maintenance, and so an obligation is set out in the proposal to ensure that the condition of ecosystems does not deteriorate before or after restoration. That said, this does not imply that restored areas will be protected even if some of them could be. If this is the case, they could contribute to the protected and strictly protected area targets. As underlined by [the Commission](#) *“nature restoration does not imply stopping economic activity in restored ecosystems, but it is primarily about living and producing together with and more respectfully towards nature.”*

Are the Birds and Habitats Directives still valid legal tools?

Both directives are still valid legal tools albeit they present some limitations.

The Habitats Directive sets an objective to maintain or restore, to favourable conservation status, natural habitats, and species of Community interest, **but without deadlines or timeframes, i.e., there are no time-bound targets to reach favourable conservation status.** The Birds Directive sets a similar objective for all species of naturally occurring birds in the wild state in the EU, **also without a deadline to reach secure status.** Both directives also lack effective requirements to restore habitats outside the Natura 2000 network.

What economic benefits the Restoration Law will bring?

According to the Commission, several detailed economic analyses demonstrate that the monetary value of the benefits derived from restoration are on average **8–10 times greater than the initial investment costs, and this is consistent across all types of ecosystems.**

In the case of the biodiversity-rich habitats protected under the Restoration proposal, restoring them to a good condition over 10% of the total EU territory, is estimated to cost in total 154 billion. By comparison the projected benefits are expected to reach 1,860 billion € – a cost benefit ratio of 1:12 in favour of benefits. The cost of inaction is also much higher than the restoration costs, estimated at 1,700 billion €.

How will the Restoration Law operate in practice?

Member States have to build their **national restoration plans** and carry out the preparatory monitoring and research needed to identify the necessary restoration measures to meet the targets and obligations. Importantly, Member States must involve stakeholders and local communities when drafting restoration plans.

National restoration plans must cover the period up to 2050 and must be reviewed at least every 10 years. The Commission will assess the draft national restoration plans within six months of the date of reception. Monitoring and reporting obligations for Member States are also laid down in the proposal.