



WILD
EUROPE
PARTNERSHIP

Summary consultation draft

Options for building a strategy for old growth forest protection in Europe

V12a 07/06/2017

Summary consultation draft

V12a 07/06/2017

Options for building a strategy for old growth forest protection in Europe

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to catalyse development of a strategy for protection of remaining old growth forest areas in Europe.

A significant, if as yet undetermined, proportion of this most vulnerable and precious element of Europe's natural heritage lacks adequate protection – both within and outside the European Union. It is central to the wilderness and wild area agenda.

Moves to re-designate and develop core parts of Sumava National Park a five years ago showed how rapidly even the most seemingly secure areas can fall under threat. The situation in Bialowieza Forest echoes these concerns. At the same time, wider challenges are occurring across Europe: with rising timber prices and usage, illegal logging, impact of land restitution, fragmentation from new transport routes and pressure for measures to combat bark beetle as climate change takes hold.

Progress has been made with extending protection in Bulgaria and Romania, but in both cases this still has to be implemented at forest level.

Against this backdrop, there is a need to secure effective strategy for protection of remaining areas of old growth forest generally. Strong threats are often still being addressed piecemeal, and there is a lack of general awareness of the value of this resource and alternative means of ensuring it is preserved for posterity.

However, wilderness forest was, for the first time, recognized in the 2010 EU Biodiversity Strategy (Target 3B Action 12) and this can provide a useful basis for improved support along with a number of emerging initiatives and opportunities.

Focus should be placed on seeking consensus between conservation, landholding, forestry, local community and broader public interests.

Feedback requested on this document

The following summary suggestions are intended to establish an initial framework of reference.

They form a menu of options, and interested parties are invited to provide comments, amendments and additions for development of a working strategy.

Possible key elements of the Strategy

I Preparatory work: what, where and how

- 1) Establish an Old Growth Forest Protection Forum, comprising representatives from key organizations in conservation, forestry, landholding and other sectors – a mainly online entity enabling collation of expert advice and development of a joint approach on specific actions
- 2) Secure agreement on a practical definition of undisturbed, old growth (ancient), wilderness forest with uninterrupted habitat tradition, encompassing its interface with other habitat types (see ACT Report on Undisturbed Forests for EC, 2010) and the new EC validated definition of wilderness (produced by Wild Europe 10/09/2013)¹
- 3) Catalyze completion of a comprehensive map of old growth forest across Europe showing location and protective status. Liaise with European Environment Agency on location mapping. Identify priority areas with incomplete protection as a matter of priority within this task. Use appropriate High Nature Value and other appropriate mapping and cataloguing initiatives, to underpin this exercise
- 4) Identify, wherever possible in quantifiable terms, the non-extractive multiple benefit values of old growth forest: including ecotourism², education - and ecosystem services³
- 5) Evaluate the elements of protection in the field, including restoration, expansion and linkage for individual areas to secure longterm ecological sustainability & coherence.

II Promoting a policy framework – the EC and beyond

- 1) Promote implementation where relevant of the EU Biodiversity Strategy, viz Target 3B Action 12 – which calls for Member States to ensure that forest management plans or equivalent instruments include preservation of wilderness areas. This should involve proactive assessment of plans at relevant MS level (national, local authority). Catalyse identification, promotion and implementation of next steps towards full protection
- 2) Link to key elements of European Forest Strategy, Natura 2000 species categories, UNESCO World Heritage, regional initiatives (eg 2011 Carpathia Convention; the European beech OGF inventory initiative) and individual country opportunity so far as feasible – eg Germany wilderness & forest targets, Romania (WWF initiative), Bulgaria, UK forestry review
- 3) Promote the non-extractive multiple benefit value of old growth forest to the European Commission DGs including DG Environment: Natura 2000 and the EC

¹ Document available on request

² New market led approaches are being developed to allow more effective value added to local communities

³ Model initiatives being trialed using carbon credits to fund protection and restoration –for forest habitat (hence the proposal to FCC in Frankfurt July 2013) and peatlands (foundation of PPL Ltd by European Nature Fund)

Green Infrastructure Programme - biodiversity, ecosystem and socio-economic services

- 4) Link to relevant DGs: DG Environment, DG Clima, DG Reggio, DG Agriculture and Rural Affairs (Wild Europe CAP reform proposals), DG Science & Innovation, DG Social & Employment Affairs (social benefits etc – and DG programmes eg Cohesion, Rural Development
- 5) Promote benefits and link to the Emerald Network
- 6) Incorporate calls for OGF protection into EU Parliamentary Questions and Resolution. These follow the successful Resolution in February 2009 passed by 538 votes to 19 which also endorsed the Wild Europe initiative
- 7) Promote the non-extractive multiple benefit value of old growth forest to key forest, landholding, local community and other institutions
- 8) Ensure old growth forest is well profiled in promotion and implementation of the new EC guidance on Non Intervention Management in the Natura 2000 Network. Identify key opportunity sites , promote direct and indirect benefits for biodiversity.
- 9) Correlate with input of key areas to the first edition of the EC Wilderness Register, and promote infill of the remainder including incorporation of non EU countries with maximum speed – with linkage where relevant to effective individual protection plans where these are absent.
- 10) Promote to key EU and non EU individual governments at relevant levels
- 11) Assess potential for leverage in non EU states: Neighbourhood Agreements, transition arrangements, trade and aid agreements, exchange of best practice, linkage with local NGOs etc to determine strategy

III Protective action

- 1) Support creation of an Early Warning System, for identifying and addressing new threats as soon as they emerge, before resource is invested by loggers or developers to influence planners and decision takers.
- 2) Support appropriate action where old growth forest and its wilderness principles are under threat - viz Sumava National Park⁴, Romanian virgin forest petition – and link to decision taker targeting and multi media campaigns. Disseminate best practice here. Promote support & capacity building for local campaign groups
- 3) Catalyze opportunities for development of appropriate protection plans linked to individual areas identified in the future Wilderness Register but not yet adequately covered, based on multi-sector consensus approach underpinned by incentives where feasible.
- 12) Legal protection – no new legislation is feasible presently at EC level, but promote better implementation and enforcement of existing law, collate and disseminate information on best practice legislation at all levels: EU, including EU Timber Regulations (EUTR), Member State and local authority levels. Identify weaknesses in existing protective legislation.
- 4) Link to current initiative assessing wilderness legislation at Tilburg University⁵, including assessment of effectiveness of existing Natura 2000 legislation for protecting identified wilderness areas, particularly where highlighted by

⁴ Further information on the Wild Europe coordinated petition and current situation is available on request

⁵ Currently led by Kees Bastmeijer,

implementation of new EC guidance (also assess possibility for including new species/habitats).

- 5) Support use of opportunities for addressing the felling and trade of illegal timber.
- 6) Ensure existing legal instruments are supported by appropriate research – including collection of investigative information as necessary to achieve practical results: support for full disclosure of timber sourcing in corporate accounts, liaising with investigations of timber industry where appropriate. Ensure promotion of effective protective coverage through FSC and other accreditation systems.
- 7) Identify existing incentives for protection – eg: subsidy best practice at EU, national and local level. Identify requirement for further incentives for OGF protection and restoration.
- 8) Collate information on models for securing funds for landholders and communities for forest protection (avoided deforestation) and restoration from ecosystem services: carbon sequestration, flood mitigation, pollution alleviation. Identify in particular EC measures that could help facilitate payment for ecosystem services (PES).
- 9) Develop a practical project to illustrate the value of OGF to private landowners (PES, tourism etc), identifying what further incentives may be required (consultant and format identified)
- 10) Assess impact on OGF of renewable energy, including biomass, wind farms, HEP. Role of perverse subsidies.

IV Management practice

- 1) Ensure old growth forest is well profiled in promotion and implementation of the new EC guidance on Non Intervention Management in the Natura 2000 Network at field level. Identify key opportunities for enhanced protection, promote direct and indirect benefits for biodiversity.
- 2) Promote strategy to address the impact of climate change - including fire, wind throw and bark beetle that - in tandem with the forestry sector (institutions, government agencies and private landholders) and other interested parties. This could include ensuring that new work on bark beetle management is disseminated for assessment at local level where appropriate⁶.
- 3) Promote effective approach at EC and national level to disease management generally where relevant – viz: ash dieback, sudden oak death, alder canker
- 4) Promote best practice in management planning– eg the TENT project with BSPB in Bulgaria for District Authorities⁷.
- 5) Profile, as model organizations, forest agencies that change structure from 100% timber production and develop restoration and protection strategies, particularly in less economically viable areas: eg Coillte (Republic of Ireland)⁸, Staatsbosbeheer (Netherlands)
- 6) Ensure linkage to protective coverage by FSC and other certification systems.

6 <http://www.wildeurope.org/images/pdf/national-parks-austria-position-paper-on-bark-beetle-management.pdf>

7 A model project promoting recognition and protection of wilderness forest in the planning process. Further information available from the European Nature Trust.

8 Collaborative project between Irish Forest Agency and Ballycroy National Park to create 11,000 hectares declared as forest and wetland wilderness in County Mayo, North West Ireland, personally supported by Irish PM while EU President, and launched at conference co-chaired by Wild Europe in May 2013.

V New opportunities for long-term protection, linkage and restoration

- 1) Highlight examples of new wilderness forests creation: through protection and restoration of existing near natural forest (CCF Romania, Durrenstein Austria⁹); natural or assisted regeneration on marginal farmland – with reference to Target 2 of EU biodiversity Strategy in tandem with CBD GBO Report (2010).
- 2) Catalyze restoration, expansion and linkage of old growth forest areas. Promote individual projects – eg Bialowieza Poland/Belarus.
- 3) Assess and promote alternatives for landholding in perpetuity – land purchase: eg the Danish model for purchase, input of restrictive covenant and resale of key areas; opportunities for REDD+ support or purchase of boreal forest.
- 4) Promote concept for land purchase fund¹⁰, identifying multiple sources
- 5) Assess and promote model projects for forest protection and restoration in N2000 network: takeover of N2000 area management, identifying wilderness areas with zonation system, inputting benefit based incentive systems and securing lasting protection through National Park designation.
- 6) Assist and catalyze development of national wilderness strategies¹¹
- 7) Implement ‘business support packages’ (see Wild Europe proposals for Green Infrastructure programme and CAP reform¹²)

VI Funding and implementation of plan

- 1) Canvass the ability of Wild Europe partners and other organizations to implement elements from the above strategy
- 2) Assess opportunities for funding support: EC DGs, LIFE+, institutions, philanthropy, individual project partners
- 3) Secure finance for a small secretariat: 1 FT coordinator within the Wild Europe structure, supported by Wild Europe promotion and administration
- 4) Develop an EC backed conference for 2017¹³ to publicly launch and promote the OGF Protection Programme (see separate document)
- 5) Assess opportunity for developing a communications strategy - website based initially - encouraging a culture of old growth forest awareness in a wilderness/wild context: targeting key programmes such as N2000 and sharing information on best practice initiatives at national and local level.

9 Where the wilderness, non-intervention area was protected through a one-off LIFE+ payment, and more recently extended through annual funding from national sources

10

11 For example, Wild Europe is currently liaising with IUCN France on development of a national strategy for wilderness, including forests

12 CAP reform proposals from Wild Europe developed during Danish EC Presidency - document available on request

13 Modeled on Wild Europe’s EC Presidency conferences on wilderness in Prague (2009) and Brussels (2010)

Suggested objectives for the Strategy

Short-term (18 months)

- All key OGF areas recorded and recognized, highlighting those without adequate protection
- Natura 2000 management recognizes and plans for 'OGF' forest protection within its network
- Improved protection promoted for key OGF areas in EU external to N2000 network
- Greater awareness of OGF benefits and threats among key interests
- 'OGF' protection included in EU Parliament Resolution
- Credible policy leverage programme in place for non EU OG forests
- Effective Early Warning System in place for addressing key threats
- Stronger populist political mandate for OGF protection (Europarlament etc)

Medium term (3-5 years)

- All key OGF areas recognized and protected, with restoration and linkage plans
- Facilitation of funding opportunities from low impact, non-extractive benefits of OGF
- Credible incentivized protection initiatives in place for private sector
- Designation of new protected OGF areas, with restoration and connectivity
- Next stage of EU Biodiversity Strategy OGF support (implementation of Target 3B, Action 12) under way
- Network for land purchase fund established
- Opportunity considered for targeted protection legislation, if needed

Contact: tobyaykroyd@wildeurope.org

+ 44 7793 551 542

www.wildeurope.org