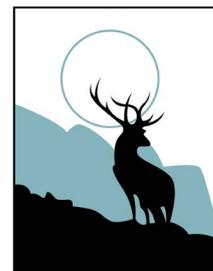


# Summary Action Plan

For large natural ecosystem areas, including old growth/primary forest, in Europe



**WILD**  
**EUROPE**





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# Summary Action Plan for large natural ecosystem areas, including old growth/primary forest, in Europe

We now have a historic opportunity for protection and restoration of these areas, particularly old growth/primary forest, in Europe. While there is still time.

To achieve this, we need to secure and then implement the strong targets in the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy, and their equivalents in non-EU countries.

**This will not happen by itself. Only with determined action from the whole conservation community.**

## PART I INTRODUCTION

### AIMS OF THE ACTION PLAN

This Action Plan lays out objectives and actions for the protection, restoration and management of large areas of natural ecosystem (wilderness and wild areas) in general and old growth/primary forest in particular.

In the immediate future, it aims to support implementation of the 2030 Biodiversity Strategy<sup>1</sup> for the whole of Europe, particularly its two key targets:

- 1) Strict protection of all remaining old growth and primary forest in the EU along with other biodiversity rich ecosystems
- 2) Strict protection and connectivity of 10% of the EU's terrestrial and marine areas (at least one third of protected areas which are set to cover a minimum 30% by 2030)

### PRINCIPLES OF THE ACTION PLAN

- **A Europe-wide approach.** As stated above, whereas the Biodiversity Strategy applies directly to EU countries, parallel actions in non-EU countries are equally important
- **Large natural ecosystems** (wilderness and wild areas) are the overall focus, with old growth/primary forest as a valuable sub-set
- **Partnerships.** We are currently seeking and developing partnerships for all activities in this Plan
- **Inter-sector consensus** is sought for key actions, wherever possible working from common ground with forestry, landholder and local community interests
- **Significant geographical and temporal timescales.** It is essential to have ambitious long-term, large-scale aims for successful address of biodiversity loss and climate change

<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-annex-eu-biodiversity-strategy-2030\\_en.pdf?utm\\_source=POLITICO.EU&utm\\_campaign=79c3c69368-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2020\\_05\\_20\\_10\\_40&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_10959edeb5-79c3c69368-189897713](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-annex-eu-biodiversity-strategy-2030_en.pdf?utm_source=POLITICO.EU&utm_campaign=79c3c69368-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_05_20_10_40&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_10959edeb5-79c3c69368-189897713)

## KEY TARGET INSTRUMENTS

The Action Plan seeks to provide appropriate input for key influences on this agenda:

- The 2030 EU Biodiversity Strategy
- The 2019 EU Green Deal
- The EU 2021 Forest Strategy
- National policy in EU and non-EU countries
- The UN Decade for Ecological Restoration
- The Bern Convention and other European instruments
- The CBD Post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework
- The UN Framework on Climate Change & the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement

## BACKGROUND

Since its formal launch in 2009 Wild Europe has developed a range of initiatives in support of wilderness and wild areas in Europe.

Our Brussels conference in 2017 highlighted the value of old growth forest, and proposed Europe's first comprehensive Protection Strategy<sup>2</sup> for this threatened habitat, raising over 550,000 Euro to begin its implementation.

Our follow-up Bratislava conference, in November 2019 under the patronage of Her Excellency Zuzana Caputova, President of Slovakia, took stock of achievements over the last decade for wilderness and its key element of old growth/primary forest.

Representations have subsequently been made for appropriate targets in the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy<sup>3</sup>, and a range of further initiatives developed.

This Action Plan combines these recommendations and initiatives, together with input from Wild Europe partners. We will greatly value all feedback.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.wildeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/old-growth-forest-strategy-outline.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> See latest representation on the Biodiversity Strategy, sent on 20<sup>th</sup> May [https://www.wildeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Timmermans-letter\\_final.pdf](https://www.wildeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Timmermans-letter_final.pdf)

# PART II THE PLAN

## 1) SETTING OUR KEY TARGETS

Targets outlined for Europe at the Bratislava conference are closely aligned to those produced by the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy:

### 1.1 Wilderness: overall target 10% of Europe's terrestrial area

This 10% target relates to the strictly protected core areas of natural ecosystem cited in the EU Biodiversity Strategy (one third of the overall 30% protection target) and is in line with CBD recommendations<sup>4</sup> post 2020 Global Biodiversity. It is comprised of:

- *5% of terrestrial area where minimum size and other attributes conform to Wild Europe's definition* (see Section 2 below<sup>5</sup>). This should include strict protection with non-intervention management of all known wilderness areas, including those in the 2013 EU Wilderness Register<sup>6</sup>, currently estimated to cover some 2% of Europe outside Russia. There should also be restoration to wilderness standards of near-wilderness areas. The target can be further supported by due implementation of IUCN recommendations for non-intervention on at least 75% of national park areas.
- *5% of terrestrial area with wilderness attributes but more flexible size criteria*, including areas identified as having wilderness characteristics in the 2013 EU Wilderness Register but not currently protected by Natura 2000 or other mechanisms. Roughly 2.3% of EU land area that is in the Natura 2000 network is considered to already have such wilderness attributes<sup>7</sup>, and many such areas exist in non-N2000 areas and non-EU countries. Wherever possible size of individual area should be upscaled to full wilderness criteria.
- Some 60% of the above target relates to natural forest (1.2 below) – with 15% of total forested area recommended for strict protection.

#### Key elements of the wilderness target:

- *Sufficient scale for core areas of non-intervention* to enable: an adequate gene base for sustainable populations, maximum possible ecosystem functioning from natural process management, effective climate change mitigation and potential for resilience, adaptation, migration and hosting of dependent species
- *Planning with a zonation system* – including core, buffer and transition zones, alongside adjacent production areas, thus allowing reconciliation of different types and intensities of land use
- Wherever feasible wilderness areas should be *connected with green or blue ecological corridors* of adequate scale and design
- *Other habitats*, in addition to natural forest types, would include eg: natural grassland, peatland, wetland and litoral/salt marsh
- *Areas to be prioritized* for protection and restoration would include those closest to nature, with best existing combination of criteria for wildness, ecosystem service potential and scale

<sup>4</sup>See <https://www.cbd.int/doc/c/9a1b/c778/8e3ea4d851b7770b59d5a524/wg2020-02-l-02-en.pdf> pages 23 point (t), and page 24 "Proposal to Merge targets"

<sup>5</sup>See <https://www.wildeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/OGFPrimary-Forest-070920.pdf> for Wild Europe definition with zonation, size and other criteria

<sup>6</sup><https://www.wildeurope.org/wilderness-register/>

<sup>7</sup>EC, Stefan Leiner, European Parliament forum 31/01/2012 <https://www.wildeurope.org/about-us-history-key-events-wild-europe-events-2012-forum-at-eu-parliament/>

- Size and naturalness of process provides economies of scale for the Payment for Ecosystem Services agenda
- This PES agenda in turn needs to be fully activated to provide adequate compensation for private sector protection and restoration, alongside grant funding
- 2035 is the deadline date suggested for achievement of the above targets, with interim stages to be agreed.

## 1.2 OLD GROWTH/PRIMARY FOREST: 15% MINIMUM TARGET OF EUROPE'S FORESTED AREA

All remaining virgin/old growth/primary forest should be strictly protected<sup>8</sup>, comprised of the following percentages of total forested area:

The 1.05% already mapped by Francesco Sabatini et al (2018<sup>9</sup> + 2019 unpublished). Plus a further 3% the existence of which is known but so far not formally identified and mapped. There is thus currently a likely total of around 4% intact old growth/primary forest<sup>10</sup>.

To this should be added:

- Approximately three times the total of remaining intact old growth/primary, ie a further 10-12%, comprised mainly of near-natural forest immediately adjacent to remaining old growth/primary forest that can be restored and strictly protected with grant compensation and Payment for Ecosystem Service benefits, particularly focused on ensuring full ecological functioning for appropriate address of climate change and species recovery.
- This additional element should be linked and assessed for its PES benefit, with emphasis on reaching agreement with state agency, private landholding and community interests on potential for fully compensated protection.

The total target of c 15% can be more precisely defined once relevant areas have been identified, mapped and collated.

It equates to 6% of total terrestrial area (ie 15% of forests that in turn cover 40% of Europe), which for such a valuable, biodiversity-rich and fragile ecosystem is an appropriate proportion of the 10% overall EU Biodiversity Strategy strict protection target. It also accords with objectives from the CBD's Post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

The overall total for strict protection of c 15% can enable:

- Sufficient scale of individual core areas to provide sustainable protection and effective ecosystem functioning
- Economies of scale for associated ecosystem services addressing climate change in the PES agenda (higher carbon storage & sequestration, flood mitigation, water table stabilization, water quality, ecotourism), with improved funding opportunity. Large scale delivery of high quality ecosystem services could also secure a premium price from VCO and flood mitigation schemes with private sector funding.
- Consolidation of fragmented remnants where ecosystems cannot otherwise function appropriately, or in many cases even survive, minimizing the 'edge effect' of human disturbance with temperature, humidity and other impacts on old growth/primary core areas

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.wildeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/OGFPrimary-def-210720.pdf> for definitions and explanation of overall protection and restoration strategy

<sup>9</sup> See <https://www.efi.int/articles/where-are-europes-last-primary-forests> 1.4m has in 34 countries, 46% of which is not under strict protection. A further 0.7m has since been mapped (Sabatini et al, presentation at Bratislava Conference 11/2019)

<sup>10</sup> Reference The State of Europe's Forest report (which includes European Russia) <https://www.forest-europe.org/docs/fullsoef2015.pdf>

- Sustainability and recovery for a wide range of dependent species (eg capercaillie as one indicator species<sup>11</sup>), with scale again being adequate for gene pool and territorial requirements
- Encompassing a range of forest habitat types, biogeographic conditions, latitudes and altitudes – the latter including richer lowland alluvial soils (assessing differentials in carbon value) as well as poorer upland soils
- Appropriate targets for ecological connectivity, with specified criteria for corridors, to maximise biodiversity benefit from old growth/primary by enabling free movement of dependent fauna (and of flora by vectors)
- As with wilderness, targets can be determined at country level, with EU level collation to ensure the aggregates match overall targets.
- Similar targets should be actively promoted in non-EU countries
- This 15% target should be achieved as soon as possible, if feasible involving an interim moratorium on further logging in all areas thought to be old growth/primary forest

### **The remaining 85% of forest cover**

The remaining 85% of forests in Europe, with particular focus on High Nature Value Forest where some form of anthropocentric intervention is required for conservation purposes, should have their biodiversity capacity upgraded through a measures including selective restoration, diversification of species and age classes, with adoption of ‘closed cover forestry’ rather than clear felling – particularly adjacent to buffer zones for strictly protected areas.

There is potential for multi-purpose projects where such ‘sustainable forestry’ occurs, with focus on improved forestry productivity, involving eg 1) research into seed improvement and optimal species location for climate change, 2) improved value added component in the timber production chain 3) support for product marketing.

### **Sources of funding for natural forest protection**

Protection of old growth/primary and near natural forest is the most efficient and cost-effective means of addressing climate change and biodiversity loss, ahead of reforestation or afforestation. With limited conservation resources, this should be borne in mind in decisions on funding allocation.

In addition to institutional grants for compensation and income related to ecosystem services (Sections 10.2 and 11.2), part of the extra investment required could come from reallocation of current subsidies for forest bioenergy, a low efficiency high emission use of consumer and taxpayer resource that worsens climate change (see Section 10.1).

This reallocation, leading to cessation of forest biomass usage for commercial forest bioenergy, will not only conserve forest with high carbon sequestration and storage capacity, it can also replenish any shortfall in timber production resulting from implementation of the strict protection target above.

There is a highly cost-effective case to be made for such protection to be funded by securing a significant element of the 25% EU budget committed to addressing climate change, as emphasized in correspondence with Environment Commissioner Virjinijus Sinkevicius<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> See example of capercaillie study: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/306433188\\_Forest\\_management\\_impacts\\_on\\_capercaillie\\_Tetrao\\_urogallus\\_habitat\\_distribution\\_and\\_connectivity\\_in\\_the\\_Carpathians](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/306433188_Forest_management_impacts_on_capercaillie_Tetrao_urogallus_habitat_distribution_and_connectivity_in_the_Carpathians)

## 2. PROMOTING A CONSENSUS ON DEFINITIONS

As identified by the 2030 Biodiversity Strategy, there is a need to secure final agreement on definitions, and to apply this.

Scope will remain for ongoing modification, but standardisation of approach is important.

### 2.1 Definition of “wilderness”

Wilderness is essentially a charismatic label for large natural ecosystem areas. The following Wild Europe definition<sup>13</sup> was developed subsequent to our 2009 Prague conference in response to a request from the European Parliament.

*“A wilderness is an area governed by natural processes. It is composed of native habitats and species, and large enough for the effective ecological functioning of natural processes. It is unmodified or only slightly modified and without intrusive or extractive human activity, settlements, infrastructure or visual disturbance.”*

The definition is used as the basis for EC Guidelines on management of wilderness and wild areas in the Natura 2000 network<sup>14</sup> and the EU 2013 Wilderness Register<sup>15</sup>, as well as a growing list of areas Europe<sup>16</sup>.

It is closely linked to the Payment for Ecosystem Service benefit agenda, particularly in relation to climate change mitigation, and includes a focus on socio-economic benefit for local communities and landholders.

### 2.2 Definition of “wild area” [currently under final consultation]

- Wild areas have similar characteristics to wilderness but are generally more degraded with less well-established ecosystems and some presence of human infrastructure
- There is massive potential for restoration, extension and linkage of such areas, together with marginal or abandoned agricultural land or formerly managed forest, through the ‘rewilding’ agenda. This should form a central part of the forthcoming Restoration Strategy
- Multiple benefits include address of climate change and species loss and cost-effectiveness from large-scale conservation involving natural process management. This in turn facilitates the range of ecosystem services that can also offer income and employment to local communities and landholders
- A consultation document for the definition of wild areas is currently being circulated as a basis for implementation, initially to the UK (Rewilding Britain) and France (PRELE), then more widely

### 2.3 Definition structure for “old growth/primary forest”

- We have coordinated a definition structure document<sup>17</sup> for old growth/primary forest (and virgin forest in Romania) within the overall context of primary forest
- This includes central focus on the Buchwald classification (2005)<sup>18</sup> adopted by the Sabatini team for its mapping programme (See Section 3)

<sup>12</sup> See Commissioner Sinkevicius letter 04/08/2020, particularly page 2: <https://www.wildeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/reply-to-wild-europe-initiative.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> See <https://www.wildeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/WEl-defs-200720.pdf> for definition with zonation, size and other criteria

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.wildeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/guidelines-on-wilderness.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/wilderness/pdf/Wilderness\\_register\\_indicator.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/wilderness/pdf/Wilderness_register_indicator.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.wildeurope.org/wild-areas-definitions-current-use-of-the-wild-europe-definition-of-wilderness/>

- The current consultation on this definition structure seeks consensus within the conservation sector and with forestry, landowning and other interests, along with promotion of the multiple benefits from strict protection
- The structure would support, standardise and influence but not seek to supplant different national definitions, producing common standards for protection and restoration
- The work undertaken so far will contribute to the process of developing an EU definition through the EC Working Group on Forests and Nature

## 2.4 Definition of “strict protection”

- So far as wilderness, wild areas and key habitat elements such as old growth/primary forest are concerned, strict protection means non-intervention and absence of any extractive activity
- It is essential that these management aspects are adopted in full, particularly for old growth/primary forest and slow-growth ecosystems where minor impacts can have damaging and long-lasting effect. This maximises: overall carbon storage, absorption of precipitation for flood mitigation & water table stabilisation, humidity levels for addressing drought and fire risk, richness of ecosystems and species survival
- In high fire risk regions, each area should be assessed separately, and special provision made with regard to key causal issues
- Other principles can be found in the Wild Europe definitions referred to above. Their practical application in land use planning can be determined by a zonation system

## 3. IDENTIFICATION AND MAPPING

This is a key priority as a framework for achieving the targets. It is again highlighted for old growth/primary forest in particular in the 2030 Biodiversity Strategy, and will be needed to underpin the Restoration Strategy.

### 3.1 Old growth/primary forest mapping

- We propose adoption of Francesco Sabatini’s initiative to map old growth/primary forest
- Stage I was completed in 2017<sup>19</sup>. Stage II, funded by FZS in tandem with Wild Europe, will be published shortly<sup>20</sup> and bring the total recorded so far to 1.05% of forested area
- The further 3% remaining to be formally recorded could be identified and mapped by the Sabatini team as Stage III of its programme. This exercise should in turn be linked to parallel assessment covering: 1) the extra c 11% adjacent near-natural forest for restoration and connectivity (Section 1.2 above), 2) a MAES (Mapping & Assessment of Ecosystems and their Services) analysis to define ecosystem service potential and 3) leading to local activation of the PES agenda
- We are also proposing adoption of Wild Europe’s proposed LEAF (Last European Ancient Forest) network of local NGOs and individuals to monitor forest condition and provide an Early Warning System of threats – linked to mapping<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.wildeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/OGFPrimary-def-210720.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> See [https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/50f4/5cdd524b0eb6d7393fb268b34cbd40665370.pdf?\\_ga=2.11739892.1905156927.1595782118-1889878601.1595782118](https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/50f4/5cdd524b0eb6d7393fb268b34cbd40665370.pdf?_ga=2.11739892.1905156927.1595782118-1889878601.1595782118)

### 3.2 Wilderness and wild area mapping

- We are liaising with the EU on responsibility for implementation: how far this lies with EC and EEA; the latter was originally mandated for this task in the 2009 EU Parliamentary Resolution, and how far individual EU member states should perform the mapping and inventory programmes to define further areas requiring protection and restoration, including those outside the Natura 2000 network.
- A key objective is to ensure all remaining areas of wilderness in Europe are strictly protected, and those identified in the 2013 EU Wilderness Register should be checked for necessary updates.
- There also should be identification and mapping in parallel for areas with best potential for rewilding/restoration: to upgrade or extend existing ecosystems, consolidate and connect – the latter also including focus on transnational linkage. (See Section 6 Restoration Strategy).
- Mapping of existing and potential restoration areas should be related to targets and opportunities for each country. There should be correlation with rewilding NGOs and existing and rewilding/restoration strategies. Wilderness indicator mapping can be used for identification of existing and potential areas
- All mapping should be linked to the Payment for Ecosystem Services agenda through a MAES approach (Mapping and Assessment of their Ecosystem Services)
- Similar mapping initiatives should be actively promoted in parallel for non-EU states. In the case of wilderness this is a key element in our proposal for Stage II of the EU 2013 Wilderness Register (Section 4.3).

## 4. PROTECTION OF WILDERNESS

Protection of existing wilderness (natural ecosystem) areas is the fastest, most efficient and cost-effective means of addressing climate and extinction crises – followed by restoration.

Key elements of protection include:

- 4.1 Definitions, identification and mapping, as above
- 4.2 Support for the Biodiversity Strategy targets for strict protection of 10% of the EU's terrestrial and marine area
- 4.3 Developing Stage II of the 2013 *EU Wilderness Register*, involving:
  - a) update of the Register to include changes in designation and condition
  - b) incorporation of new wilderness areas
  - c) reinforced capacity for implementing the socio-economic agenda in support of protection & restoration (Payment for Ecosystem Services)
  - d) registration for non-EU countries
  - e) identification of further potential areas following restoration and protection

<sup>19</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/ddi.12778>

<sup>20</sup> See <https://www.wildeurope.org/next-stage-in-primary-forest-mapping-completed/>

<sup>21</sup> See <https://www.wildeurope.org/leaf-initiative-to-support-2030-biostrategy-forest-protection-target/#more-2768>

- 4.4 Linkage with EC 2013 *Guidelines on management of wilderness and wild areas in the Natura 2000 network*, to ensure adequate monitoring and enforcement of protective measures
- 4.5 Ensuring the values of wilderness and its non-intervention principles are adequately collated and promoted, particularly in respect of their value in addressing biodiversity loss, climate change and socio-economic benefit for local communities
- 4.6 Parallel arrangements for protection outside Natura 2000 areas and in non-EU countries
- 4.7 Development of the European Wilderness Forum, in support of improved protection policies for wilderness, launched at the Bratislava conference, which will proceed during 2020/21
- 4.8 Reform of the problematic Environmental Impact Assessment procedure to be proposed, involving establishment of responsibility for selection and appointment of appropriate consultants for EIAs by an independent agency. This will avoid the conflicts of interest that can and do arise under present arrangements where consultants are directly chosen and employed by the developer or other party creating the impact

## 5. PROTECTION OF OLD GROWTH/PRIMARY FOREST

**This section should be read in conjunction with the 2017/18 Strategy for Protection of Old Growth Forest<sup>22</sup>.**

Protection is the most efficient, and cost-effective, means of addressing climate and extinction crises, followed by restoration. Key elements include:

- 5.1 Support for recognition that the Forest Strategy is a shared competence between the EC/EU and Member States, with over-riding requirements for addressing the climate change and species extinction crises
- 5.2 Promotion of the EU Biodiversity Strategy targets for strict (non-intervention) protection of all remaining old growth/primary forest (4% of forest cover), and restoration followed by strict protection of a further 10 – 12% immediately adjacent (Section 1.2)
- 5.3 Adoption of the definition structure in Section 2.3
- 5.4 Adoption of the mapping exercise by Francesco Sabatini et al, promoting implementation of a further Phase III as the basis for identification and mapping to achieve the aims of the Biodiversity Strategy, in tandem with planning for large-scale restoration and identification of practical MAES potential (Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystem Services)
- 5.5 Promotion of the LEAF Network<sup>23</sup> (Last European Ancient Forest) of local NGOs and activists to provide a monitoring service. This would include an Early Warning System for information on threats, ideally before they develop, where national systems may not prove effective at local level. There can be two formats: 1) involving simple assessment of condition and referral of threats, and 2) a longer-term version with add-on features: collective representation, training and capacity building for protection and restoration

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.wildeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/old-growth-forest-strategy-outline.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.wildeurope.org/leaf-initiative-to-support-2030-biostrategy-forest-protection-target/#more-2768>

- 5.6** Comprehensive updates for *EC Natura 2000 and Forest (2015)* guidelines (Section 6), cited by the EC for provision of management practice in implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy target for old growth/primary forest. These should include:
- a) collation of old growth/primary forest management best practice
  - b) special focus on old growth/primary forest
  - c) implementation of cash flow mechanisms for a strong PES (Payment for Ecosystem Services) agenda
  - d) linkage to verification of areas outside the N2000 network – and areas in non-EU countries, with special emphasis on the Emerald Network and UNESCO World Heritage and MAB sites
- 5.7** Overview of the current legal and policy framework for forest protection, identifying gaps – report finalization and representation
- 5.8** Production and promotion of a preliminary report on incentives for landholder protection of old growth/primary forest in the private sector: effective compensation and Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) funding
- 5.9** Promoting development of a network of PES mechanisms, converting known ecosystem values into cashflow to support and incentivize protection
- 5.10** Developing existing dialogue with EUSTAFOR (association of state forestry agencies) for establishment of a working group to assess common ground: showcasing existing protection initiatives and identifying further protection potential
- 5.11** Address of illegal logging: EUTR reform and Citizen App replication
- 5.12** Promotion of private sector initiatives (Section 9)
- 5.13** Representation of key policy elements (Section 10)
- 5.14** Highlighting the need for appropriate capacity building (Section 11)

## 6. RESTORATION STRATEGY FOR WILDERNESS AND OLD GROWTH/PRIMARY FOREST IN EUROPE

In 2010 Wild Europe held an EC Presidency conference in Brussels, with input from the Convention on Biodiversity (in particular Jo Mulongoy, then Chief Scientist for CBD), which produced a strategy for restoration of large natural ecosystem areas in Europe.

There is currently good potential for advancing this, underwritten by the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy targets, and the 2018 JRC Report<sup>24</sup> which estimates some 5.4 million hectares of land, or 3.9% of agricultural area, will be abandoned in the EU by 2030. The abandonment figures are unlikely to be lower for non-EU states.

An updated Restoration Strategy will be circulated, as our contribution to the forthcoming EU Nature Restoration Plan, including the following elements:

<sup>24</sup> See <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/sites/jrcsh/files/jrc113718.pdf>

- 6.1** Establishment of clear definition-driven targets with 5 yearly progress assessments to 2050 EU Biodiversity Strategy overall target of universal good condition status, and compulsory MS plans to develop these
- 6.2** Focus on non-intervention, natural process driven management with a) large connected areas adopting integrated ecosystems, mixed habitats, ecotones;  
b) smaller linked rewilded areas, also adopting non-intervention principles
- 6.3** Strong emphasis on cost-effective (minimalist) management, internal generation of conservation funding from non-extractive ecosystem services and innovative financing agendas, designed to maximise incentives for local land users, communities and the rural economy
- 6.4** Proposals for update of the EC 2015 guidelines document Natura 2000 and Forest to cover all key aspects of restoration for old growth/primary forest
- 6.5** Extension of the above document to cover non-intervention, natural process driven management for non-forest habitat, involving implementation of cash flow mechanisms for a strong PES (Payment for Ecosystem Services) agenda
- 6.6** Adoption on our proposed project for a project application for Stage II of the *EC Management Guidelines on Wilderness and Wild Area Management*, with collation of best practice from non-intervention, natural process management to date; linkage to areas in non-EU countries, and special emphasis on the Emerald Network and UNESCO World Heritage and MAB sites
- 6.7** Promoting restoration with strict protection for the 10 -12% area adjacent to the 4% intact core areas of old growth/primary forest (15% total) - a vital component for the Biodiversity Strategy. Natural regeneration to play key role. Further proposals for the remaining 85% include mixed species and age classes, and avoidance of clear fell [See separate specialist Definition and Briefing documents.]
- 6.8** Proposals for the 3 billion tree planting initiative in the EC biodiversity Strategy: natural forest, with non-intervention management, planted at lower biodiversity-friendly not commercial densities, focus on natural regeneration where possible, and food plants to fast-track biodiversity recovery
- 6.9** Target proposals for other habitat types, linked to the PES agenda. For example, linkage of the 25,000 km river restoration target to a river basin approach to flood management, including upland watershed restoration and maximizing private sector funding potential.
- 6.10** Connectivity, promoting blue and green eco corridors: location and design, including width, habitat mix and non-intervention management practice tuned to local biogeographic requirements
- 6.11** CAP Reform proposals enabling creation of new areas of natural ecosystem (see Section 10.2)
- 6.12** A launch symposium prepared for the Society for Ecological Restoration Alicante conference, originally in August 2020, is now rescheduled for 2021

## 7. SUPPORT FOR NATIONAL STRATEGIES

This includes Wild Europe's existing and planned input to national strategies and proposals. The following are examples, not a comprehensive list, in support of the Action Plan, which can be used to catalyse development of national strategies across Europe:

**Austria** – The Hohe Tauern NP wilderness designation, recently completed using criteria from Wild Europe definition, as a model for wilderness protection and restoration. The Austrian Association of National Parks has adopted the Wild Europe wilderness definition for wider application, and further model examples are planned

**Bulgaria** – links with State Forestry Executive on use of their protection initiatives as a model, particularly in relation to the extra 109,000 hectares of old growth forest set aside in 2016

**France** – promoting criteria to re-gain President Macron's 2019 10% "*pleine naturalité*" target and funding mapping of wilderness through its membership of the IUCN France Wilderness Group, as the basis of a wilderness strategy. Promoting and supporting formation of *France Sauvage*, an NGO network concept dedicated to collective representation of wilderness and wild area creation

**Germany** – in tandem with our close partner, Frankfurt Zoological Society, promoting the model value of the NGO wilderness network which secured a fund for annual 10 million Euro of Federal funding for land purchase in 2019, helping to achieve wilderness targets

**Romania** – see Fundatia Conservation Carpathia under model areas (Section 8)

**United Kingdom** – support through trusteeship representation with Rewilding Britain and other NGOs for projects promoting species reintroduction and PES funding to achieve largescale restoration: natural flood mitigation, decarbonising (a costed proposal proposing 25% terrestrial restoration<sup>25</sup>) and, currently under development, a major connectivity proposal

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## 8. SUPPORT FOR MODEL AREA INITIATIVES

Again, the following are examples in support of the Action Plan:

**Bialowieza Forest:** Relaunch of our presentation to NP authorities and Forest Agency in 2015 and thereafter, for large expansion of NP into 2014 UNESCO designated area, non-extractive community enterprise and world class eco destination

**'Clima Carpathia':** the vision for 50% protection/restoration of the Carpathian Mountains as a European icon to mitigate climate change, enrich biodiversity and support rural livelihoods. We are providing extensive input

**FCC Fagaras:** represented via trusteeship of an initiative to create a 200,000+ hectare National Park in the Fagaras Mountains based around protection/restoration of non-intervention wilderness forests and other habitats

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.rewildingbritain.org.uk/assets/uploads/Rewilding%20and%20Climate%20Breakdown%20-%20a%20report%20by%20Rewilding%20Britain.pdf>

**Sumava/BayerischerWald:** Replication of the threefold strategy of representation, economic appraisal and enterprise implementation for protection and trans-frontier linkage of this NP, formerly threatened with logging and development in core areas

**Wolf Mountains** – a collaborative project with FZS lead in E Slovakia, SE Poland and W Ukraine involving 9 key protected areas: raising protective status, promoting linkages and evolving enterprise initiatives in support of welding these into a 100,000 hectare model area enabling natural migration in one of Europe’s wildest and least developed regions

## 9. ENGAGING THE PRIVATE SECTOR

The scale of funding and land provision required to meet the targets for addressing biodiversity loss and climate change create a challenge of engaging the much larger private sector, without compromising principles of wildness or conservation generally. The following recommendations are made:

### 9.1 Effective incentives – report

A preliminary report is being produced, commissioned by Wild Europe, to provide outline assessment of current arrangements for provision of payments to incentivise private sector landholders (individuals, communities, churches) to protect old growth/primary forest on their land. Addressing both compensation for loss of timber income and funding potential from monetising ecosystem services, the report will lead to a programme of liaison with private sector representatives, including CEPF, to reinforce identification of common ground and build a consensus approach to incentivised protection.

### 9.2 Long-term legal protection

Four years ago an initiative was jointly launched by Wild Europe with international law firm Clifford Chance LLP and LifeScape conservation charity to develop a legal mechanism whereby private landowners wishing to create a wilderness legacy could continue to have direct access and use of their estate but also secure long-term protection for their vision through application of a lease for 150 years or more.

That mechanism is now developed for legal systems in England/Wales and Scotland, with a technical brochure drafted, and it is being proposed alongside a second mechanism – involving US style easements – for land owners to choose from. Further proposals will follow for elsewhere in Europe.

### 9.3 Promotion of effective PES mechanisms

There is urgent need to promote more effective use of ecosystem service payments (see 10.2), as a means of compensating and incentivising private sector owners, in parallel with official grant payments which can be inadequate or hard to access.

## 10. KEY POLICY ELEMENTS

These address key issues that require separate programmes, but have great impact on our objectives. The following list is not comprehensive:

### 10.1 Biomass energy, particularly forest bioenergy

Consumption of wood for bioenergy has grown rapidly over the last decade, now exceeding 300 million tonnes pa in Europe and responsible for widespread destruction of forest biodiversity. Yet clear scientific evidence that it worsens climate change in the periods required for effective mitigation (to 2030 and 2050) has so far failed to stem its expansion. Our contribution currently involves:

- Combating unintended bias towards wood bioenergy in the EU: eg a joint petition with BLI on flaws in EC consultation<sup>26</sup>; a reminder to DG Agri/Ag Cttee in European Parliament of the opportunity cost to rural development of wood bioenergy subsidies
- Promoting opportunity for a cross-sectoral alliance engaging renewable energy, taxpayer, consumer and investor associations in support of conservation interests
- Advocating transfer of subsidies from wood biomass to other lower emission forms of renewable energy (wind, solar, marine, geothermal) together with improved incentives for protection and restoration of carbon absorbent habitats (natural forest and peatlands), and other more effective means of addressing climate change: improved insulation, recycling, emission reducing technology
- A project to calculate the relative cost-benefit of the above subsidy transfer
- Promoting reform of Renewable Energy Directive II, to exclude wood biomass as a form of renewable energy thereby removing public subsidy for widespread forest destruction
- Highlighting the risk element for wood bioenergy investors from subsidy cuts – EIB, UNDP Biofin, input to standard investor circulars
- Promoting a central database for wood bioenergy campaigners

### 10.2 Facilitating the PES agenda/innovative funding

The economic value of ecosystem services is well established, and the range of public and private sector financial instruments for converting them to funding mechanisms is growing in sophistication. However the interim mechanism, for translating value into cash flow potential through local provisioning projects, remains greatly underdeveloped. The following actions are required:

- Promotion of a project for identification, collation and linkage of enterprises engaged in this mechanism and best practice involved; highlighting best practice from initiatives that can translate the economic value of OGF ecosystem service benefits into funding for conservation
- Assess potential for an online PES Enterprise Forum: matching available opportunity with provision of carbon and flood mitigation funding

- Advocating new initiatives for creating appropriate funding opportunity – eg a supplementary levy on insurance premium tax ring-fenced for natural flood relief
- Further support, additional to that already provided via Griffith funding through Frankfurt Zoological Society, for projects to better assess the value of natural forest carbon storage and sequestration capacity
- Develop and promote best practice “toolkit” programmes to support protection and restoration that include appropriate combinations of representation, economic valuation, and non-extractive enterprise implementation aimed at local community, landholder and general society benefit

## 10.2 CAP reform

Agricultural subsidies still take up 34.5% of the EU budget, costing 58 billion Euro per year. Reallocation of 50% of this budget, in progressive increments over the next 10 years, would offer huge potential for the natural ecosystem agenda. Working in tandem with other organisations, we promote:

- The “public goods for public funding” agenda to reallocate subsidies towards ecosystem service provision (eg carbon, flood mitigation, ecotourism agendas) and investment in productivity-improving research where farming is profitable
- Support for political and enterprise capacity to enable farmers to deliver these ecosystem services – for example with a model proposal to the UK National Farmers Union to become the National Farmers and Rural Enterprises Union
- A 3% supplement to the Ecological Focus Area allocation, tradable at regional level that can be consolidated into creation of new long-term ecosystem areas using CAP funding, including for subsidised third party land purchase by conservation NGOs
- Support for young farmers through targeted capacity building to benefit from the PES agenda, reallocating from current provision of generalised land-related subsidies that hinder their entry to the sector by artificially raising farmland prices
- Awareness raising of the opportunity cost of subsidising uneconomic agricultural production to create “rural museums”, paid for by taxes on productive inner urban enterprise which contribute much higher employment and social benefit, and by hard-pressed consumers

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.wildeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Representation-to-EC-on-EU-2030-Climate-Target-consultation-másolata-2.pdf>

## 11. SUPPORTING INFRASTRUCTURE - CAPACITY BUILDING

### 11.1 Institutional structure

Linkage of Natura 2000, UNESCO (WH & MAB) and Emerald Networks at strategic and field level – to ensure best practice is shared and complementary abilities are jointly exercised, in the latter case involving eg the legal remit of N2000, conservation-friendly use of the enterprise experience in UNESCO sites

Ensure continuity of the Emerald Network: with continuity of high standards of protection and sharing of expertise, whatever the fate of the Bern Convention and links with Council of Europe

### 11.2 Capacity building at all levels

- Identify and address requirements for capacity building, training and consultancy support 1) for NGOs - to strengthen effectiveness in OGF/primary forest conservation and socio-economic and enterprise agendas and 2) for local communities and landholders to ensure maximisation of local benefit from the OGF/primary forest non-extractive enterprise agenda
- Develop networked capacity for translating ecosystem service benefits into cash flow for the benefit of local land users and communities, thus also providing incentives for protection and restoration of natural habitat to supplement grant provision
- Promotion of an EC strategy in line with our proposals for Stage II of the EC Guidelines on Management (Section 6.5) and/or reform of the EC 2015 document on Natura 2000 and Forests (Section 6.6). To include examples involving 1) good practice ecological management, 2) benefit-based incentive systems for local communities and landholders, and 3) zonation planning
- Identify and promote model projects for OGF protection and restoration in other key networks: Emerald and UNESCO World Heritage, and with other key initiatives – eg Clima Carpathia.
- A strategy to input ecology content to agricultural and forestry college curricula, at summer schools and via wider internet and CPD courses for practicing farmers and foresters. These could involve new qualifications and be embedded in existing qualifications; in either case they should be made a condition of grant provision
- Promote closer coordination between EC Natura 2000, Emerald and World Heritage & MAB networks at strategic and field levels

### 11.3 Research gaps

There are a number of ongoing and new elements.

- Precise and, where feasible, quantified requirements for improvement to the compensation system for protection of natural forest and other habitats
- Cost-benefit of alternative natural solutions to addressing climate change, with particular focus on protection of natural habitats (viz old growth/primary forest) and restoration to maximise mitigation and adaptation
- Promote adequate funding at EC and national level for research into control of arboreal pathogens e.g. ash dieback, sudden oak death, alder canker

## 12. REPRESENTATION OF ACTION PLAN

The various aspects of the Action Plan are being and will be represented to different audiences. Further information of approaches being made is available on request: European Commission

### **Application to non-EU countries in Europe**

As indicated at the start, it is important that strict protection for old growth/primary forest be implemented as strongly as possible outside in non EU countries.

Processes facilitating this include: Neighbourhood Agreements, Accession Treaties, trade and aid policies, exchange of best practice and other mechanisms. Non EU bodies need to be engaged including UNESCO with its World Heritage and Biosphere sites particularly outside the EU. And the Council of Europe/Bern Convention with its Emerald Network - with special attention to ongoing support for the latter.

### **Individual institutions for representation**

#### **12.1 General**

- Continue to promote the non-extractive multiple benefit value of old growth forest to key institutional decision takers at the EC, UNESCO, Council of Europe, Bern Convention, Emerald Network, other entities

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#### **12.2 European Union**

- A five-pronged approach to secure the Biodiversity Strategy targets proposed, currently contested by land user associations:
  - 1) briefings to conservation NGO members of the EC Working Groups on the EU Biodiversity Strategy, and proposal for a Biodiversity Forum
  - 2) Direct input to the Forest & Nature Working Group via our participation as a member
  - 3) Liaison with EC entities (JRC, EEA) implementing its key elements – eg definitions, mapping, targets, restoration
  - 4) Inputs to European Parliament, Member State governments (Environment Ministries) and via them the Council of Ministers
  - 5) Securing our proposal for a joint body (task force/forum) to coordinate conservation sector input for promotion and implementation of the EU Biodiversity Strategy
- Within the EC structure, ongoing links to relevant DGs: DG Environment, DG Climate, DG Agriculture and Rural Affairs (Wild Europe CAP reform proposals), DG Regional Development, DG Science & Innovation, DG Social and Employment Affairs (social benefits) etc
- Representations to the EU Parliament – in particular to the Environment and Agriculture/Rural Development Committees, currently on 1) the Biodiversity Strategy 2) Bioenergy subsidy removal

- Promotion of EU leverage for Biodiversity Strategy in non-EU states: 1) Via MS ministries and international entities 2) through referral to Neighbourhood Agreements, transition arrangements, trade and aid agreements, exchange of best practice, linkage with local NGOs etc to determine strategy

### **12.3 Governments and institutions**

- National EU and non EU governments – via local NGOs or direct, particularly as follow through from previous representations
- CBD, links originating in our CBD/EC restoration conference (2010) and thereafter, particularly on restoration strategy
- Bern Convention – ongoing liaison based on previous representations for old growth/primary forest at collective and individual ministry level
- IUCN – via the old growth/primary forest Resolution, direct links to Regional HO in Brussels and individual country groups
- European Investment Bank: proposals on long-term funding for habitat restoration

### **12.4 Sector interest groups**

- Conservation NGOs – ongoing liaison on policy development and lobbying. Proposals for a coordinated Biodiversity Strategy Forum
- EUSTAFOR – ongoing liaison with their Brussels office, based on existing proposals for permanent set aside of uneconomic and old growth/primary forest. Securing public agreement from EUSTAFOR President on the validity and value of old growth forest
- CEPF – ongoing liaison with their Brussels office, based on existing promotion of OGF value, and proposals for a joint approach to improved compensation for protection as well as address of climate change (bark beetle, fire hazard in particular) Securing public agreement from CEPF President on the validity and value of old growth forest
- EFI – ongoing liaison with their Brussels office based on existing promotion of OGF value
- FSC – ongoing liaison through their European regional directorate. Proposals on ecosystem service accreditation
- COPA Cogeca et al – representation on CAP and funding for forest protection

## 13. FUNDING AND INCENTIVES

Funding requirements can be linked directly to the 2021-27 budget period for Green Deal, Climate, New Generation and other source programmes.

There are four areas with scope for reform:

- 13.1** Institutional grants for restoration and subsequent management and protection, with focus on improved return on financial inputs, noting that non-intervention management driven by natural processes is a more economical means of achieving many conservation objectives – a vital consideration for COVID impacted budgets
- 13.2** Compensation payments, ensuring the system applied to land user restoration and protection is adequately reformed [Wild Europe commissioned document being finalised]
- 13.3** Income related to the ecosystem services, including new and innovative private sector inputs
- 13.4** Reallocation of current subsidies for CAP and forest bioenergy to restoration and subsequent management and protection of habitats with most productive ecosystem service provision (eg carbon absorption, flood mitigation, water purity)

There is a highly cost-effective case to be made for restoration and subsequent management and protection to be funded, among other sources, by securing a significant element of the 25% EU budget committed to addressing climate change, as cited in correspondence with Environment Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevicius<sup>27</sup>.

Funding specifically for non-EU states also needs to be identified and secured for parallel projects involving identification, mapping, monitoring, galvanising the PES agenda and other aspects.

Aside from the mechanisms listed above, sources could also include the 45% Europe component of the new Neighbourhood, Development, International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) to address climate change, as well as PES related funding mechanisms.

<sup>27</sup> See Commissioner Sinkevicius letter 04/08/2020, particularly page 2: <https://www.wildeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/reply-to-wild-europe-initiative.pdf>





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