Nature Restoration in Europe: What is the role of Protected Areas?
The global and EU biodiversity crisis

Biodiversity loss and the degradation of ecosystems, continue at an alarming rate, across the broad range of ecosystem types in the EU.

In the EU:
- >80% of habitats in poor condition, peatlands, grasslands and dune habitats worst
- In Western, Central and Eastern Europe wetlands have shrunk by 50% since 1970
- 71% of fish and 60% of amphibians have been declining over the last decade

Source: IPBES Global assessment 2019
EU: Annex I habitat area in good, unknown and not-good condition (State of Nature in the EU 2020)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Habitat Type</th>
<th>Good (%)</th>
<th>Not Good (%)</th>
<th>Unknown (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coastal habitats</td>
<td>38.10%</td>
<td>39.32%</td>
<td>22.57%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dunes habitats</td>
<td>39.89%</td>
<td>40.73%</td>
<td>19.37%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freshwater habitats</td>
<td>59.67%</td>
<td>30.74%</td>
<td>9.59%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heath &amp; scrub</td>
<td>27.92%</td>
<td>63.75%</td>
<td>8.34%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sclerophyllous scrubs</td>
<td>56.28%</td>
<td>33.56%</td>
<td>10.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grasslands</td>
<td>35.62%</td>
<td>47.29%</td>
<td>17.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bogs, mires &amp; fens</td>
<td>56.52%</td>
<td>31.45%</td>
<td>12.02%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rocky habitats</td>
<td>75.67%</td>
<td>19.40%</td>
<td>4.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forests</td>
<td>48.31%</td>
<td>30.08%</td>
<td>21.61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All terrestrial Annex I habitats represent 24 % of the EU land territory (marine: 4.8 % of the EU seas)
Time is running out ... for biodiversity & climate

• Strong interdependence between biodiversity loss and climate change

• Restoring ecosystems will be fundamental in helping to combat climate change and also reduce risks to food security (IPCC, 2022)

• Example: drained peatlands under intensive agricultural use cover only 3% of EU’s agricultural land but are responsible for 25% of the green-house gas emissions from EU’s agricultural sector
The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030

Strategy adopted by the European Commission on 20th May 2020


- Overall goal: **to put biodiversity on the path to recovery** by 2030, by protecting and restoring nature and ecosystems in the EU

- **Headline targets:**
  1. Establish a **coherent network of protected areas** of at least 30% of the EU land and sea
  2. Develop an **EU Nature Restoration Plan**
     - Legally binding targets
     - Targets on better implementation ‘improvement target’ for habitats and species of the nature legislation
A nature restoration law?

“The Commission will put forward a proposal for legally binding EU nature restoration targets to restore degraded EU ecosystems, in particular those with the most potential to capture and store carbon and to prevent and reduce the impact of natural disasters”

• The Strategy was endorsed by Member States & the European Parliament – both calling for more ambition on nature restoration

• Public support for nature restoration is very high → Eurobarometer survey on biodiversity (2018-2019) respondents ranked restoration of nature among the most important actions that the EU should take to protect biodiversity

• The restoration of ecosystems is high on the international agenda - UN Decade for Restoration
Approach of the draft proposal

• Type of act: Regulation

• Complements, adds value to & reinforces the existing environmental acquis, in particular, the nature legislation, MSFD & WFD

• Synergies between climate change & nature restoration

• Targets at large scale restoration effort (on top of an effective protection/conservation efforts) via effort based & result based targets

• Targets building on Annex I habitats & beyond, habitats of species but also other ecosystems including urban.
Main elements of the draft proposal

- Overarching **objective** & a set of **targets and obligations for** 2030/2040/2050 for specific ecosystems, e.g. forests, wetlands, agro-ecosystems, coastal ecosystems, marine ecosystems, and other such as urban ecosystems.

- Key requirement: **National Restoration Plans** – MS to identify by when, where and how to put in place restoration measures to achieve the targets (plus policy coherence, public consultation, ...)

- Provisions on the **assessment & review** of these plans

- Provisions on **monitoring & reporting**.
**Concepts**

**Restoration** means the process of actively or passively assisting the recovery of an ecosystem towards or to good condition... - “highest level of condition attainable”

**Restoration measures** for habitat types and habitats of species include to...:

- Improve / Re-establish / Re-connect / Enhance species populations

**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;

For **Habitats Directive Annex I** habitats good condition is assessed and reported under Art.17 of the Habitats Directive (**structure & function** (including typical species) parameter)
Other targets of the EU Biodiversity Strategy
(not legally binding)

The “30% status improvement target” by 2030

Guidance: https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/fcb355ee-7434-4448-a53d-5dc5d1dac678/library/4d8f2f91-7708-4ed2-ba0e-e7a945a6d56a/details

... MS to ensure no deterioration in conservation trends and status of all protected habitats and species by 2030 & at least 30% of species and habitats not currently in favourable status are in that category or show a strong positive trend by 2030.

The “30% protected area target” by 2030

Guidance: https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/6f30d1d2-d6f2-4c6e-a4dc-1feb66201929/library/89652963-8cc4-459a-b24f-19373ea73fbf/details

Legal protection for at least 30% of EU land/freshwater area & of EU sea area including strict protection for at least 10% of EU land/freshwater area 10% of EU sea area

Both ‘voluntary targets’ complement & support legally binding targets
The role of protected areas

• Crucial & decisive in many ways!
• Restoration inside but also outside protected areas needed
• Example Annex I habitats:
  • 24% of EU land
  • Appr. 38% of total Annex I surface area in EU is inside Natura 2000 (SoN data 2020)
• Protecting restored areas

Your view?
Thank you!