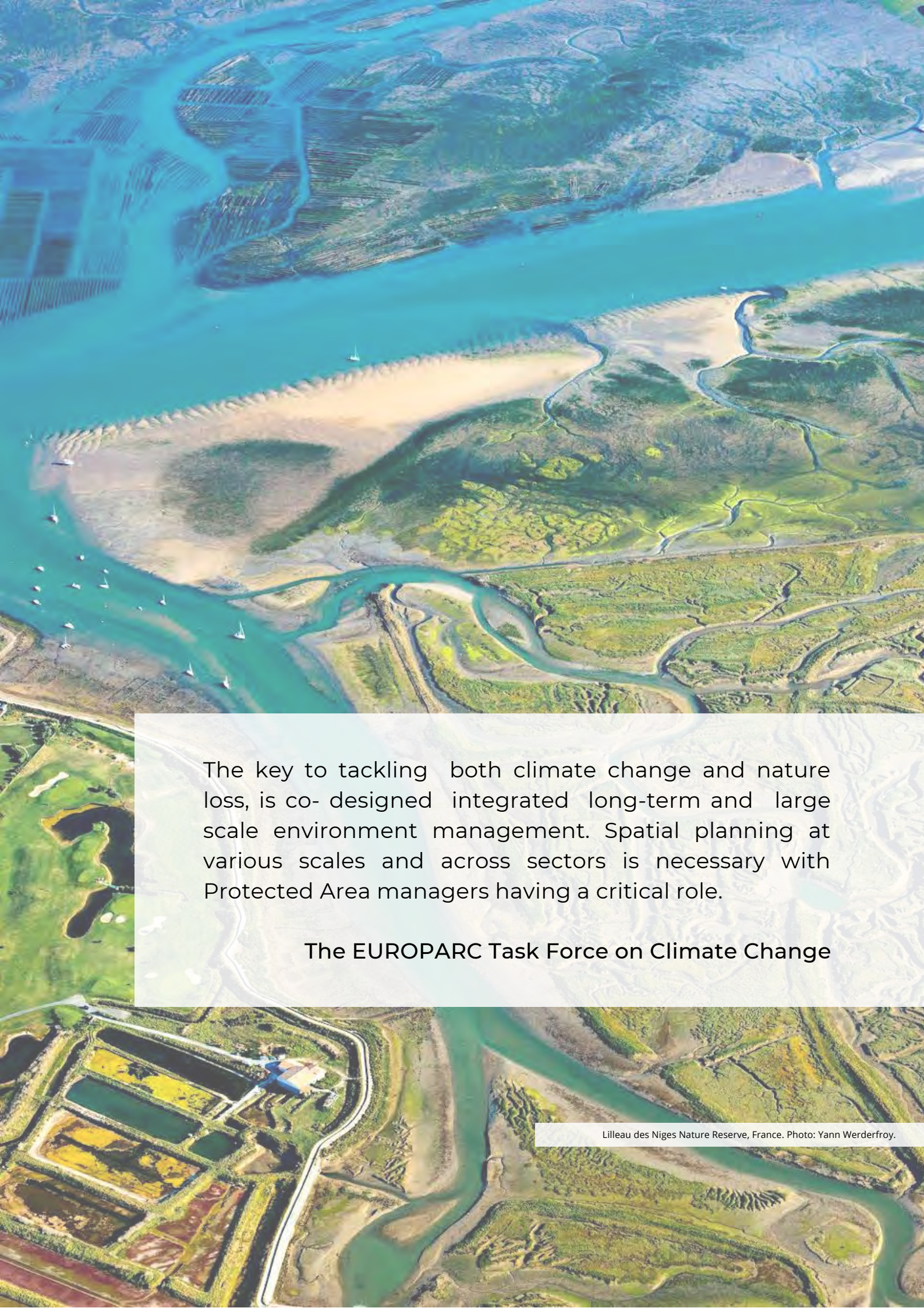
White Paper

Protected Areas & Climate Change

Recommendations for better integration of climate adaptation in policy and practice for Protected Areas in Europe.

EUROPARC FEDERATION

LIFE NATUR' ADAPT



The key to tackling both climate change and nature loss, is co- designed integrated long-term and large scale environment management. Spatial planning at various scales and across sectors is necessary with Protected Area managers having a critical role.

The EUROPARC Task Force on Climate Change

Lilleau des Niges Nature Reserve, France. Photo: Yann Werderfroy.

Working Together Towards Climate Resilience

Well-managed Protected Areas safeguard biodiversity, natural processes and ecosystem services that are essential to support the adaptive capacity of ecosystems and human communities. The European Green Deal, the Paris Agreement, the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) all identify that climate change, biodiversity loss and habitat degradation are currently affecting the very conditions upon which human communities and wildlife depend. There is therefore an urgency to act and a necessity to cooperate to address the biodiversity and climate change crises jointly. The EU has recognised this necessity in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change and the proposed Nature Restoration Regulation.

The EUROPARC Federation, representing thousands of Protected Areas and managing authorities across Europe is deeply working to improve policy and practice for biodiversity conservation and climate adaptation. In particular, in the framework of the LIFE Natur'Adapt project and with the support of the EUROPARC Task Force on Climate Change, new tools, methodologies and recommendations have been developed to ensure better integration of climate priorities within nature conservation planning and management.

With this white paper, which is the result of collective work, EUROPARC calls on European decision-makers and national authorities to facilitate the co-design of integrated, long-term and large-scale environment management and spatial planning, at various scales and across sectors. Protected Areas should be considered essential components of those processes as they play an important role in the successful implementation of EU policies for nature and biodiversity. EUROPARC, therefore, recommends that:

1. Protected Areas should be adequately involved in climate action planning.

2. All Protected Areas across Europe, including Natura 2000 sites, should integrate Climate Adaptation planning.

3. Climate change adaptation and nature restoration planning should integrate rigorous participatory processes, engaging communities, public and private sectors.

4. Protected Areas designation process should aim at nurturing future-proof ecosystems.

These recommendations are elaborated further below.

Recommendations

1. Protected Areas should be adequately involved in climate action planning.

We recommend that the European Commission recognise and promote a new model of shared governance space, to better integrate nature conservation and climate action planning. Climate change vulnerability assessments, applied at various scales, have proved to be great tools to start with.

LIFE Natur'Adapt working experience showed how Protected Area managers, who actually integrated climate change into their planning and practice, would have benefited from a shared governance space, to better consolidate nature conservation and climate action plans. Furthermore, other experiences such as that from the Portofino Marine Protected Area in Italy, or the Chastreix-Sancy National Nature Reserve in France, showed that climate change vulnerability assessments are a powerful tool to change local dynamics. Understanding the concrete climate change threats to the community and the ecosystems was central to conceiving and implementing shared climate change adaptation plans. The work done by the Basque Country Regional Government in Spain achieved similar results, leading to better integration across sectors and policies.

Basque Country. Climate Talks video still.

A 2019 report commissioned in the framework of the LIFE Natur'Adapt project analysed the integration of biodiversity and climate change policies in France and at the European level. This analysis showed a lack of integration between climate change and biodiversity conservation policies.

CHANARD C. et al., 2020. Place du changement climatique et de la biodiversité dans les documents de planification territoriale et less politiques intersectorielles. LIFE Natur'Adapt – Rapport ACTeon environment. 64p

Chastreix-Sancy NNR, France. Photo: Thierry Leroy.

We recommend that the European Commission recognises and mentions specifically the central role that European Protected Areas should play in the implementation of the EU Climate Change Adaptation Strategy:

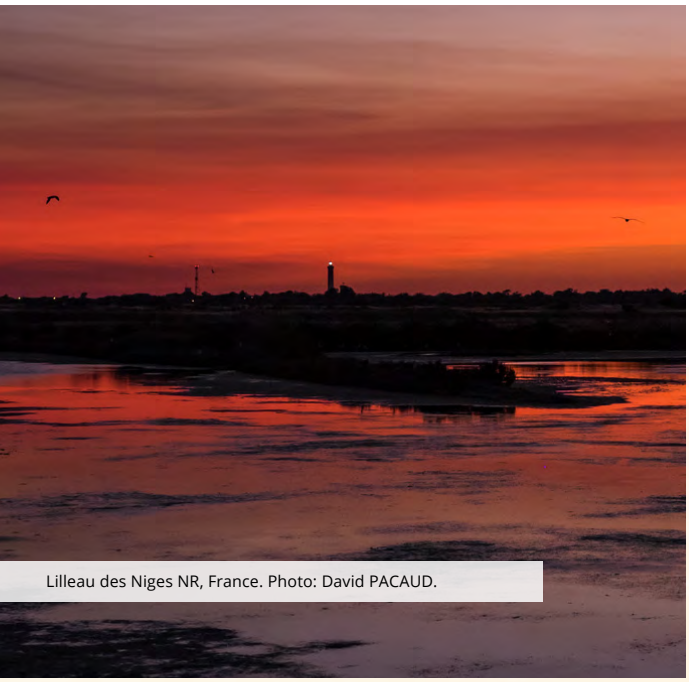
- Protected Areas are crucial natural solutions to preserve and restore local and regional socio-ecosystems. Being a keystone of the European green and blue infrastructure, they contribute to preserving rich and complex ecosystems on a large scale. Healthy ecosystems have greater adaptive capacity and provide services to tackle climate change and mitigate its impacts. They support the sequestration and storage of greenhouse gases in the long term, which contributes to reaching the Paris Agreement targets. Protected Areas managers can also support governing authorities and the European Commission in advancing natural solutions to mitigate climate risks.
- Protected Areas are unique places with lower or more controlled human activities. They can provide baselines for the assessment of ecosystem services and measure the impacts of climate change on natural systems. They are observatories able to identify and warn about the effects of climate change.
- Protected Areas are socio-ecological laboratories that can create, develop and test local solutions and best practices for climate change adaptation and mitigation.

The revised EU Climate Change Adaptation Strategy pinpoints the opportunity to develop nature-based solutions, as one of the main tools to tackle climate change. However, the role of natural ecosystems in climate change regulation are not sufficiently recognised, while the role of Protected Areas in the development of climate change action plans is not mentioned.

We recommend facilitating and formalising the involvement of Protected Areas and their managers in climate change adaptation planning at various or all governance levels. Protected Areas teams provide knowledge, expertise and experience on how natural systems work, and what they need to be resilient and robust in the face of climate change. If involved at different geopolitical levels, Protected Areas managers and nature conservation professionals can contribute to developing and implementing climate change adaptation strategies, using their knowledge of the interdependencies of climate change, ecosystems and communities.

Working with Protected Areas on adaptation strategies and sustainable land use will create opportunities for sustainable socio-economic development in sectors such as tourism, agriculture, forestry or fisheries that also benefit from the preservation or restoration of biodiversity and resilient socio-ecosystems.

2. All Protected Areas across Europe, including Natura 2000 sites, should integrate Climate Adaptation planning.



Lilleau des Niges NR, France. Photo: David PACAUD.

We recommend that the European Commission ensures that climate change adaptation planning, based on climate change vulnerability and risk assessments, is required and funded as part of the operational mandate of Natura 2000 management authorities. Reporting on Article 17 of the Habitats Directive should take into account detailed climate change vulnerability and risk assessments. In the process, the maladaptation risk should be evaluated. Defining short-term deadlines for member states to comply with that request is critical. Compliance should be incentivised.

Climate change is a systematic threat to existing habitats that may not have the necessary adaptive capacity or may need extra care. Integrating climate change into the management of Natura 2000 and Protected Areas, however, are not yet a priority.

In Target 3 of the Biodiversity Strategy 2030, ie. “Effectively manage all Protected Areas, defining clear conservation objectives and measures, and monitoring them appropriately”. The tracking of progress made by member states on the implementation of the actions should also integrate the monitoring of the effectiveness of objectives and measures set to tackle biodiversity loss and climate change negative effects.

La Massane NNR, France. Photo: Diane Sore.

We recommend adding or using new criteria in “Target 3” to evaluate the actual results achieved to tackle both biodiversity loss and climate change's negative effects. We propose the following criteria:

- Climate change adaptation: Is the management plan taking climate change into account and integrating the results of a climate change vulnerability assessment? Are the impacts of climate change taken into account with a multilevel landscape approach, considering conservation practices, different land use, nature restoration priorities, agro-ecological and regenerative agriculture, water management.
- Adaptive management: Does the management plan include scenarios for different potential evolutions and identifies subsequent adapted actions? Does the management plan use the results of monitoring to inform and adapt the conservation plan, including its objectives.

Cairngorms National Park, Scotland. Climate Talks video still.

Climate change is a driving factor in the creation of new conditions and pressures influencing the evolution of habitat composition. In this situation, of accelerated climate change, it is likely that by 2050 many habitats will no longer correspond to their description in the Nature Directives.

We recommend that the European Commission should provide practical guidance to Member States and Natura 2000 managers on how to concretely integrate expected climate related changes in Natura 2000 conservation planning and reporting, while maintaining the existing level of protection and respecting the Birds and Habitats Directives legal framework. Protected Area managers also need to know how to ensure the protection for new species combinations that will be important for biodiversity preservation and ecosystem resilience in the future.

Looking forward, and in light of the speed and gravity of climate changes and subsequent evolutions in habitats and ecosystems in Europe, it would also be important to introduce the use of concepts such as ecosystem structures, functionality or natural processes to enable a more dynamic nature conservation management planning. The experience from various sites involved in the LIFE Natur'Adapt project, such as Foret de la Massane NNR in France, the Sonian Forest in Belgium, the Zuid Kennemerland National Park in the Netherlands or the Cairngorms Connect project in Scotland call for a more holistic and dynamic nature management.

3. Climate change adaptation and nature restoration planning should integrate rigorous participatory processes, engaging communities, public and private sectors.

We recommend that the European Commission ensures that the necessary community engagement work is recognised and funded as part of the operational mandate of Natura 2000 site management authorities. Protected Areas need support to develop the capacity of their staff or engage people with the required skills and competencies that are necessary to manage change and actively engage stakeholders. Experience from Maribo Lakes Nature Park in Denmark shows that nature conservation and restoration, in and around Protected Areas, require an important investment in time, over long periods (3 years), with stakeholders. It is a necessary effort to develop trust and foster genuine collaboration. Working with stakeholders to develop conservation and restoration projects will in turn enable the buy-in from the community, ensure projects respond to community needs and aspirations while benefiting nature.

Recent experiences in climate change vulnerability assessments and adaptation planning in Protected Areas show that a lot of work should be done to conserve and restore biodiversity outside and around Protected Areas. These actions require community engagement, skills and competencies that are quite different from what is usually expected from Protected Area Managers.

Passy Nature Reserve, France. Photo: Julien Heuret.

Chastreix-Sancy NNR, France. Photo: Thierry Leroy.

4. Protected Areas restoration and designation process should aim at nurturing future-proof ecosystems.

We recommend that the designation processes integrate assessments that promote resilience to climate change as well as ecological continuity and complementarity*. Those are key principles for the designation of new Protected Areas to reach the objective of protecting 30% of land and seas and the 10% strict protection target in Europe by 2030. In this sense, the development work done on conservation prioritisation in Finland by Metsähallitus Parks and Wildlife is particularly relevant**.

** "Complementarity" is an important criterion that will help prioritisation at the EU level and co-planning between member states. It helps identify which areas to protect to fill the biodiversity gaps that still exist at the European level. This approach will increase the long-term resilience of Protected Areas' networks including the Natura 2000 one.*

*** Atte Moilanen, Marja Hokkanen, Santtu Kareksela and Ninni Mikkonen (editors), Ecological decision analysis in support of societal decision making. Final report of the MetZo-II project. Publications of The Finnish Ministry Of The Environment, 2019.*

While the EU Biodiversity Strategy and the proposed Restoration Law call for new areas of land and sea to be either protected, strictly protected or restored, the designation process of new areas remains unclear, which we fear could impede planning quality and management effectiveness.

Bridging the Gap Between Climate Change Adaptation & Nature Conservation

In conclusion, we call upon policymakers and governing authorities at **all levels** to involve and work together with Protected Areas managers and local communities. It will enable them to better address both the climate and nature crises with the urgency, focus and the means necessary.

By working together, we develop powerful synergies that reduce conflicts and inconsistencies and potentially harmful measures. Involving Protected Areas and Nature Conservation managing authorities in climate action planning, at multiple geopolitical governance levels, will improve climate change adaptation modelling, ensure integrated risk assessments and support the collaborative development of innovative spatial planning and land management strategies.

By protecting the intact nature that remains, restoring what is degraded and connecting what is fragmented, Protected Areas actively contribute to improving the health of ecosystems, ensure the provision of services in the long term and bring back the adaptive capacity of communities and territories to respond to the negative effects of climate change. Together, we can prevent our life-support systems from spiralling into collapse and build nature-inclusive and climate-resilient societies now.

La Massane NNR, France. Photo: Diane Sore.

Passy Nature Reserve, France. Photo: Julien Heuret.

About this White Paper

This white paper is the result of the work of the EUROPARC Federation's Climate Change Task Force, which was created early in 2019 in the framework of the LIFE Natur'Adapt project and as part of the EUROPARC Federation strategy. The objective is to translate technical nature conservation experience and needs in the face of climate change into a recommendation for European Institutions, national and local authorities.

Contributors

We would like to thank the Task Force members who have actively contributed with expertise and rigour as well as endless enthusiasm.

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We would also like to acknowledge the very rich and insightful contribution of José Atauri Mezquida of FUNGOBE/EUROPARC-Spain who is the co-author of "Manual 13: adapting to climate change in planning and management of Protected Areas".

Citation

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About LIFE Natur'Adapt

LIFE Natur'Adapt is a collective learning process on adaptation to climate change in Protected Areas. In Europe, Reserves Naturelles de France, EUROPARC and eight partners have come together in this LIFE Climate Action project to support the integration of climate change into protected area management practices. Natur'Adapt aims to transform this challenge into an opportunity for innovation. www.naturadapt.com

About EUROPARC Federation

The EUROPARC Federation is the largest European network of Protected Areas with more than 400 members from 40 countries. Our members are directly or indirectly managing thousands of National and Regional Parks, Marine Protected Areas, Natura 2000 sites. We are working on different levels to improve the management of Protected Areas in Europe to the benefit of nature and people. www.europarc.org

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