



timeless, priceless, wilderness

PAN PARKS: PROTECTING EUROPE'S WILDERNESS







Ladislav Miko
Minister of Environment,
Czech Republic,
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DG Environment,
European Commission

“Wilderness is part of our European identity. Losing it means losing a part of our home, part of ourselves.”

“PAN Parks works to protect Europe’s wilderness, the continent’s most undisturbed areas of nature.”



Zoltan Kun
PAN Parks Foundation

revealing Europe's wilderness

We need to ensure that future generations can enjoy and benefit from Europe's wilderness areas that contain an irreplaceable European natural heritage.

Wilderness in Europe is a concept many do not recognise - yet, **there is still wilderness throughout Europe**. It survives in virgin forests, along rivers, marshlands, in high mountains or caves, and under the sea.

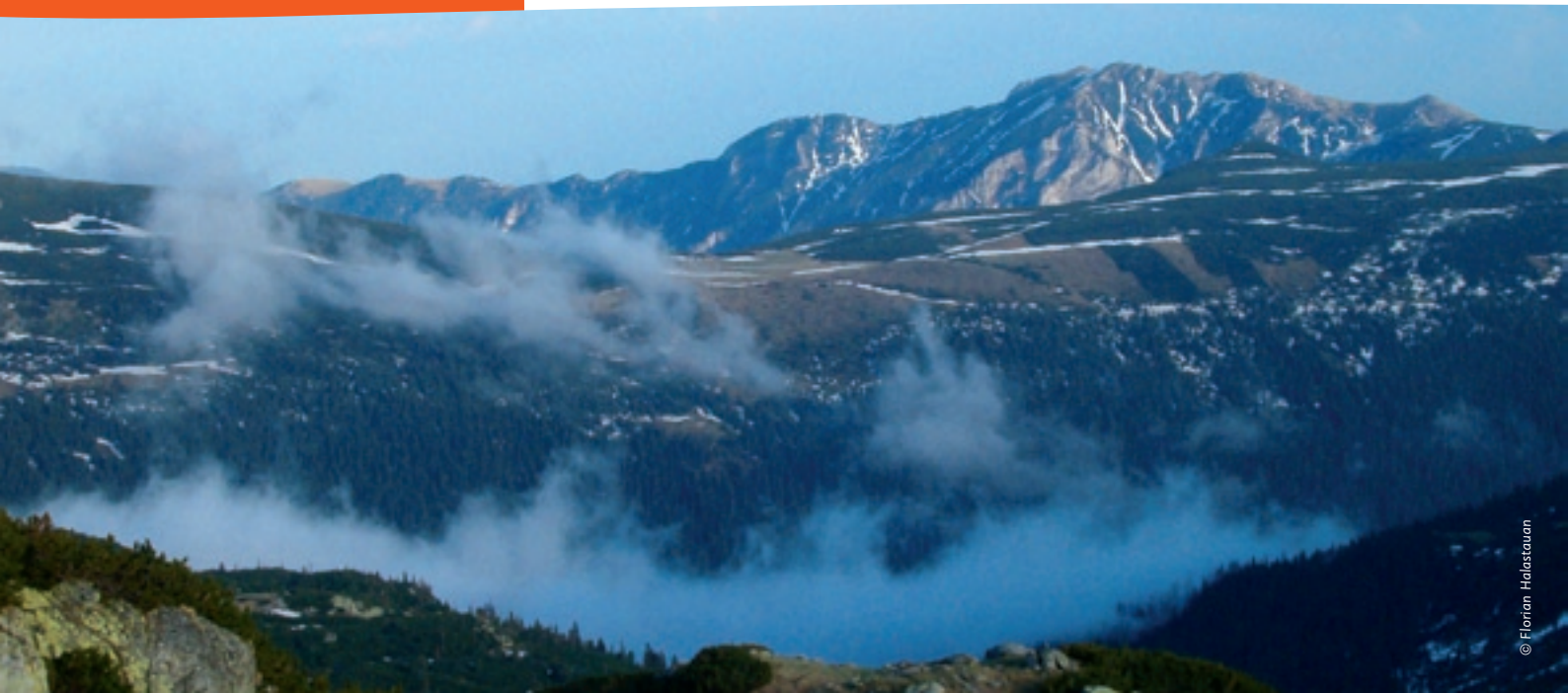
However, **compact, unfragmented and well-managed, wilderness areas are very scarce in Europe**. Wilderness protection is not considered a priority by the public, politicians and even some conservationists. We are losing daily the last fragments of European Wilderness Heritage. The remaining natural forest is penetrated by sanitary logging operations, remote mountains echo with the roar of tractors and bulldozers, and new roads crisscross the last undisturbed mountain valleys in Europe.

Protecting the remaining European wilderness requires a change in people's mindsets: broadening their views about approaches applied in wilderness protection and learning about the many benefits of wilderness areas.

European wilderness provides:

- a refuge for endangered species and a home to undiscovered species;
 - habitats with highly adapted fauna and flora, which would be lost forever if these areas disappeared;
 - reference laboratories where the natural process of evolution still continues.
- Wilderness also offers strong, sustainable **economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits**;
- addressing climate change through carbon sequestration and flood mitigation;
 - nature-based tourism opportunities supporting local rural development;
 - potential to help tackle important urban issues such as youth development and healthcare.

Moreover, wilderness areas provide **spiritual benefits** as places of inspiration, renewal or recreation far from the bustle and pressures of modern life.



PAN Parks set out to protect Europe's wilderness by creating a network of the large well-managed wilderness protected areas which provide a unique experience for visitors and benefits for local communities. These certified areas all include a significant wilderness area at their core.

PAN Parks Wilderness areas are places where natural processes and wildlife thrive and people are only occasional and respectful visitors. **PAN Parks defines wilderness as an area of at least 10 000 hectares of land or sea, which together with its native plant and animal communities and their associated ecosystems, is in an essentially natural state.** These wilderness areas are those lands that have been least modified by man, they represent the most intact and undisturbed expanses of Europe's remaining natural landscapes.

There is **no extractive use allowed** within these areas, which means that activities such as hunting, fishing, mining, logging, grazing, grass cutting, road and building construction are not accepted inside of the wilderness area. However, **visitors have opportunities to enjoy PAN Parks Wilderness** without needing experience or special equipment, and many locations on the edges of PAN Parks Wilderness area offer stunning views, short walks, and visitor facilities.

The network of certified PAN Parks represents unique examples of Europe's wilderness. In Peneda Geres NP, Portugal the PAN Parks Wilderness area includes the last remnants of native forest in the country, PAN Parks Wilderness in Borjomi-Kharagauli NP, Georgia, Fulufjället NP, Sweden, Rila NP, Bulgaria or Majella NP, Italy all provide unique unfragmented examples of wilderness complexes, PAN Parks Wilderness in Archipelago, Finland provides an exceptional example of no fishing zone in the Baltic Sea.

what is PAN Parks Wilderness?

In PAN Parks Wilderness natural processes and wildlife thrive and people are only occasional and respectful visitors.



nature of PAN Parks Wilderness

“The PAN Parks process encouraged us to create a large unfragmented wilderness area that provides benefits for both nature and local communities.”

(Nicola Cimini, Director,
Majella NP, Italy)

PAN Parks Wilderness requires a minimum of 10 000 ha of an **ecologically unfragmented** area of land where no extractive uses are permitted, and the only management interventions are those aimed at maintaining or restoring natural ecological processes and the ecological integrity. This is regarded as the minimum needed for the maintenance of many of the key wilderness species. It provides the space and freedom for **iconic species** such as the brown bear of Central Balkan NP, the wolf of Majella NP or the lynx of Fulufjället NP to roam.

Certified PAN Parks cover together 226 498 ha of wilderness area. The largest PAN Parks Wilderness areas include those of Borjomi Kharagauli NP, Georgia (50 325 ha), Paanajärvi NP, Russia (30 000 ha) and Majella NP, Italy (25 500 ha).

Fragmentation is one of the most serious threats for European wilderness. This results from the pressure of human activities and development in Europe. The PAN Parks criteria allow for the wilderness area to be divided as long as it is not ecologically fragmented. If the wilderness is in one area but is ecologically fragmented by a fence, road or other infrastructure, the area will not meet the standards of PAN Parks Wilderness.

There are several PAN Parks with completely unfragmented wilderness. Other parks meet this criterion with certain level of fragmentation. The shared knowledge of the network finds solutions to reduce and avoid fragmentation. For instance in Fulufjället NP, Sweden, a snow-mobile trail was re-directed to avoid fragmentation of newly designated PAN Parks Wilderness.

The most characteristic feature of PAN Parks Wilderness is **natural dynamics without interference**. Removing broken trees after snowfall can create a feeling of ‘a tidy forest’ but the missing dead wood deprives forest ecosystems of nutrition, species and important ecological processes. In all forested PAN Parks such as Retezat NP, Romania, Rila NP, Bulgaria or Fulufjället, Sweden no sanitary or selecting logging is used in PAN Parks Wilderness and trees uprooted by wind or broken by snow are left to their own devices.



managing PAN Parks Wilderness

PAN Parks looks to the opportunities triggered by natural succession and ecosystem dynamics to protect global biodiversity. In PAN Parks Wilderness areas, the priority is protecting ecosystem dynamics and supporting the protection of **biodiversity** - ecosystem dynamics link. In Peneda Geres NP, Portugal and Rila NP, Bulgaria following the PAN Parks principles is helping protect the natural dynamics of the forest ecosystems.

The PAN Parks Wilderness concept provides an exceptional opportunity to protect the most **charismatic species** in Europe. Many species depend directly or indirectly on wilderness. Large unfragmented wilderness is essential to protect these species in the long-term and guarantee stable and healthy populations. Important wilderness indicator species can be found in all PAN Parks, they include brown bear, wolf, lynx or eagle.

Sanitary logging or removing dead or dying trees is often an excuse to carry out logging operations even in the core zone of protected areas. PAN Parks believes that it is extremely important to protect **forest ecosystem dynamics**, therefore forestry, sanitary logging or removing dead trees is not allowed in the wilderness area of any certified PAN Park.

In the PAN Parks concept hunting and fishing is considered as an extractive use incompatible with PAN Parks Wilderness. This includes game management for the benefit of a single or preferred group of species. Hunting was restricted in the core area of the newly created Fulufjället NP, Sweden and a fishing free wilderness area was a condition in creating the first marine PAN Park - Archipelago NP, Finland.

Roads are one of the most destroying factors for wilderness as they provide easy access to otherwise inaccessible territory and fragment habitats. Roads and access create temptation for further investment or development. Road construction is not allowed in the wilderness area of any certified PAN Park.



“Effective wilderness management following a clear set of principles is essential to ensure a future for protecting the last of European wilderness.”

(Vlado Vancura,
PAN Parks
Conservation Manager)

integrated approach

PAN Parks, the only European-wide organisation focusing on the protection of wilderness areas, occupies a unique position from a conservation perspective in its attempt to redefine and develop a concept of wilderness conservation in Europe, one of the most highly developed areas in the world. PAN Parks applies a truly integrated approach combining wilderness protection and sustainable tourism development.

At the heart of every certified PAN Park is the PAN Parks Wilderness area. But this is only a part of a much bigger region. Many activities which are unacceptable in PAN Parks Wilderness are fully in line with the management plan in other zones of the park, especially if they help to achieve the primary conservation objective of the protected area. For example, traditional grazing as an essential ecological management tool is actively supported in certain zones of Central Balkan NP, Bulgaria.

PAN Parks applies an integrated approach combining wilderness protection and sustainable tourism development.

high standards of management

PAN Parks provides effective third-party certification system under WCPA (World Commission on Protected Areas) Framework for Management Effectiveness. PAN Parks sets an important benchmark for high standards in protected area management.



The certification is based on verification carried out by independent experts, in accord with PAN Parks quality standards. There are five PAN Parks principles; covering relevant wilderness protection, social, economic and cultural aspects. These ensure high standards of management for both conservation and sustainable development. Principles allow for objective verification and transparency. The verification procedure can be divided into three phases: verification of the protected area, its Sustainable Tourism Strategy and the local business partners.

tourism as a tool for conservation

PAN Parks aims to change tourism from a threat to an opportunity in certified PAN Parks. The sustainable tourism development process helps to ensure that tourism provides real benefits for the rural communities in and around the protected areas, and in the same time reduces the pressure caused by tourism on the park. However, without the genuine support of local communities, the task of nature conservation is pointless.

The sustainable tourism development strategy of PAN Parks is developed through a collaborative process between park managers and all relevant local stakeholders. The sustainable tourism development strategy is a cornerstone, ensuring that tourism supports nature conservation, and guaranteeing that tourism is not introduced in sensitive areas.

Local tourism related businesses can also undergo a certification process ensuring that the business is working in harmony with the park management, this helps those involved make real improvements and gives them a business advantage. This also helps to involve local communities and businesses, raising awareness of the real value wilderness has.

This integrated approach is the key to effective management of protected areas and is becoming rapidly recognised as being the model of best practice. In Romania as a result of the success of verification process in Retezat NP, the national management authority has adopted the PAN Parks Sustainable Tourism Development model as the standard for all national parks.

International tour operators and travel organisations are increasingly under pressure to offer more sustainable products and this opens up excellent opportunities for certified protected areas and their surrounding regions using this approach to be able to market themselves as branded sustainable destinations. The PAN Park brand enables tourists to be assured of that they are really visiting the best of Europe's wilderness.

The PAN Parks approach ensures that tourism supports nature conservation, also by involving local stakeholders, raising awareness of the real value wilderness has.



benefiting both nature and people

“Co-operation with PAN Parks brought about improved communication with the local people and strengthened stakeholder participation in the decision-making process.”

(Kari Lahti,
Oulanka NP, Finland)

What does PAN Parks bring for member protected areas?

- **Improved management effectiveness** - Through both the independent audit and the exchange of experience within the network, PAN Parks certification provides tools to improve nature and visitor management standards for wilderness protection.
- **Independent audit** - Certification demonstrates that the protected area is managed with high standards of quality management and practice.
- **Easier access to funding** - PAN Parks can assist parks to acquire funding and can also provide direct support for projects ensuring verification.
- **Expertise exchange in a living network** - Being part of a network brings access to collective knowledge and support mechanisms.
- **Co-operation with rural communities** - PAN Parks facilitates real dialogue between local stakeholders to help alleviate unnecessary conflict.
- **Tools to control and monitor tourism** - PAN Parks provides professional support and tools to help develop effective sustainable tourism and visitor management.
- **Support in lobbying at decision makers** - PAN Parks supports protected areas in their efforts to influence key decision makers for more park friendly policies.
- **International recognition** - PAN Parks provides support and promotional activities for certified protected areas.

How does PAN Parks benefit local people?

- **Increased collaboration in park management** - Local communities have the possibility to become directly engaged. Improved communication and collaboration develops mutual understanding and conflict resolution.
- **Developing a destination** - This brings international recognition as a part of the best of Europe's wilderness.
- **Small business promotion** - The PAN Parks brand and promotion activities open up access to new markets. Eco-certification brings an assurance of quality.
- **New jobs and economic benefits** - Implementing the Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy opens up opportunities for new product development resulting also in increased visitor numbers.



interested in wilderness protection?

If you would like to know more about PAN Parks, visit **www.panparks.org** - You can learn about certified PAN Parks, download verification documents and our useful lessons learned series, and browse lots of case studies.

If your protected area would like to apply for verification or you need information on verification, contact Vlado Vancura, PAN Parks Conservation Manager at **vvancura@panparks.org**



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PAN Parks works to protect Europe's wilderness, the continent's most undisturbed areas of nature. In these areas our knowledge and understanding is enhanced for the benefit of nature and humanity alike; people appreciate the pleasures offered by wilderness with the respect it deserves.

www.panparks.org

