



**EUROPARC**  
F E D E R A T I O N

## Public Hearing: "Investing in nature and biodiversity: challenges and opportunities" - European Parliament, October 12, 2015

### *The socio-economic opportunities of investing in nature & biodiversity*

**Ignace Schops, President, EUROPARC Federation**

The **EU assessment** of progress towards the targets and actions of the EU biodiversity strategy 2020 - Mid-term review 2015 - is clear: no significant progress towards the 2020 headline target<sup>1</sup>, insufficient progress for 5 targets and just 1 target out of 6 (combat invasive species) is currently on track<sup>2</sup>. The Mid-term review shows us we need to increase our efforts in reaching all targets by 2020.

The EU, the member states, all the organisations and stakeholders of the various sectors need to join forces for a sustainable future.

With approximately 400 members in 36 countries, the [EUROPARC Federation](#) is the biggest network on the natural heritage in Europe. Over 30 million hectares (38%) of Natura 2000 areas are managed by our members. As an organisation, we focus on **highlighting site-management of protected areas, exchange knowledge, and built capacity** on various topics like ecosystem services, Natura 2000 management, health, EU policy, climate change, etc.

### **BIODIVERSITY IS BIG BUSINESS**

Research of WWF in 2012 concluded that the benefits from Natura 2000 are estimated at 200-300 billion euro a year (1,7-2,5% of the EU GDP) and that 7% of the EU jobs are dependent on ecosystem

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<sup>1</sup> Halt the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystem services in the EU by 2020, and restore them in so far as feasible, while stepping up the EU contribution to averting global biodiversity loss.

<sup>2</sup> (1) Fully implement the Birds- and Habitats Directives – progress but at insufficient rate – (2) Maintain and restore ecosystems and their services - progress but at insufficient rate – (3a) Increase the contribution of agriculture to maintaining and enhancing biodiversity – no significant progress towards the target – (3b) Increase the contribution of forestry to maintaining and enhancing biodiversity – no significant progress towards the target – (4) Ensure the sustainable use of fisheries resources and achieve good environmental status – progress but at insufficient rate – (5) Help combat invasive alien species – currently on track with implementation – (6) Help avert global biodiversity loss – progress but at insufficient rate.

services<sup>3</sup>. The value of biodiversity, nature and healthy ecosystems and the relation to global warming and Climate Change are highlighted multiple times by IUCN, UN, CBD, IPCC and World Bank (...).

Various new research (...) underlines the **value of biodiversity & nature related to public health**.

**Jonathan Patz, professor & director of the Global Health Institute** - University of Wisconsin (US) stated recently: "It is my opinion that conservation and park management can save more lives, promote more health, and deal with more ill health than the public health sector can achieve". As a medical treatment it is probably better to spend more time in nature instead of taking an extra pill.

And **research of ISCA** (International Sports and Culture association) pointed out that inactivity of people costs annually 80 billion euro. No need to explain the (economic) value and the huge opportunity of nature in this health issue<sup>4</sup>.

**EUROPARC Federation** champions transboundary work in 10 transboundary parks with over 1000 staff involved, covering 1/3 of the Natura 2000 sites across the European borders. We are the leading European **network on sustainable tourism** of protected areas<sup>5</sup> with 131 sustainable destinations certified in 16 countries. 3700 organizations are involved and 441 million euro was invested in these destinations. Annually 72 million people visit these natural wonders of Europe. The estimated spending of the visitors is approximately 10 euro for a daytrip and 76 euro per overnight stay. A simple calculation results in an (underestimated) economic benefit of at least 1 billion euro every year!

**EUROPARC Federation** translates biodiversity into a language other stakeholders can understand. Most obvious is the economic value. As an example we can highlight the **Hoge Kempen National Park in Belgium** where recently research on the economic value of ecosystems (TEEB-methodology) was organized with astonishing results. The annual turnover for the 6000 ha national park is 191 million euro with over 5000 connected jobs. Investing in nature, investing in biodiversity results in a multi-level-win. Besides the protection of the intrinsic values, the investment in nature is an asset for sustainable economic development and community engagement.

**EUROPARC Federation** gives voice to all the people and organizations working on the natural heritage throughout Europe. We are willing to take full responsibility for the protection of biodiversity: small and big, far away and nearby, together with society. We are prepared to help tackle the socio-

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<sup>3</sup> WWF research Our Natural Capital - a profitable investment in times of crisis (2012) - [http://www.wwf.be/media/our\\_natural\\_capital\\_march\\_2012\\_454490.pdf](http://www.wwf.be/media/our_natural_capital_march_2012_454490.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <http://inactivity-time-bomb.nowwemove.com/>

<sup>5</sup> ECST – European Charter of Sustainable Tourism – <http://www.european-charter.org/home/> - © EUROPARC Federation

economic problems Europe is facing currently. We would welcome an invitation to discuss with various partners and stakeholders in the EU on finding solutions for the future.

Europe's natural heritage is a myriad of habitats, landscapes and ecosystems, sculpted by nature, shaped by man. Let's give space to nature to give space to ourselves and the future generations. Together! Think globally, act locally and change personally!