



# Our Natural Heritage: the Key to Europe's Future

Protected Areas to boost Sustainable Economy, support Biodiversity and address Climate Change.



**Policy Paper**

EUROPARC Federation  
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Protected Areas cover about 25 % of EU landscape, concern more than a quarter of the EU population, and are destinations for millions of visitors every year.

Photo: Hilary Fenten - Yorkshire Dales kaarst, UK

To realise a Sustainable Future for our Economy and our Environment, the EUROPARC Federation, on behalf of its members, calls to action European Political Groups, National Parties and individual candidates to the European Parliament, in order to:

- 1** Recognize the role of **Protected Areas as laboratories for sustainable economic development** in all European Structural Funds, i.e. European regional development fund, European social fund, Cohesion fund, European agricultural fund for rural development, and European maritime and fisheries fund.
- 2** Include **biodiversity conservation and restoration** in all major European policies - Land use, agriculture, rural development, urban planning, trade, research - increase devoted programs and funds e.g Life, CAP, Horizon, and recognize the role of Protected Areas as key actors to implement these policies on the field.
- 3** Put **Climate Policies high on the priority list**, ensuring the integration of Nature Conservation in general, and valuing the role of Protected Areas in particular, in the EU Climate strategies and targets.
- 4** Recognize the role of **Protected Areas in rural development**, and to support and reward farmers working in partnership with Protected Areas by means of appropriate measures and funds in the Common Agricultural Policy.
- 5** **Promote and support**, in the framework of the EU Youth Strategy, **the involvement of young people** in rural and Protected Areas, integrating Youth priorities within major EU policies and creating real opportunities for youngsters to keep living, learning and working in their rural environment and communities.
- 6** Develop the European **Green Infrastructure Strategy** based on Protected Areas' network, including Natura 2000 sites, peri-urban protected areas, transboundary parks.

# WHY?

## Because:

### Economy

**Europe needs sustainable economic development.** Protected Areas are not only essential for the conservation of biodiversity and landscape, but they are also significant laboratories to promote a more socially inclusive, environmentally healthier and economically viable model for society.

They prevent current rural abandonment, promote communities involvement and support green jobs. They create sustainable tourism destinations, and encourage sustainable agricultural practices and partnership between farmers and protected areas management. They value nature as an essential asset for human health and wellbeing. EUROPARC, through international cooperation, capacity building and project management, promotes sustainable development in protected areas, with a specific attention to tourism, agriculture and health sector.

### Ecosystems

**Europe needs healthy ecosystems.** Resilient ecosystems provide habitats for animals and plants, and play a major role in regulating climate, providing fertility, water and soil protection. Protected Areas' mission is to maintain healthy ecosystems fighting against habitats loss, species extinctions, erosion and desertification. They offer multiple benefits to human society by delivering environmental services including food, water and air, as well as benefits for human health, recreation and tourism. Functional ecosystems guarantee the possibility of life on Earth.

In order to sustainably and effectively manage these natural resources, EUROPARC works to bring knowledge and innovation in policy and practice of Protected Area management, providing a forum for learning exchange, networking and cooperation.

### Youth

**Europe needs Youth leadership.** Young people are the decision-makers of tomorrow. They are capable to help leading the way to a sustainable future our communities and protected areas already today – if they get the chance to have their say. It is vital that young people get involved in the governance of rural and Protected Areas, so they can share their perspectives on the issues that will impact their future development and that of our natural and cultural heritage. And it is now that they can develop thoroughly the skills it will take to manage resilient parks and build sustainable communities. EUROPARC is calling to action managing authorities and decision makers, and is promoting international programs to make sure young people respect and care for their protected areas, and have a role in their communities.

### Climate

**Europe needs action for climate.** Protected Areas are key element to tackling climate change, because by protecting ecosystems they provide natural solutions for mitigation and adaption. Ecosystems perform important services for society, such as climate regulation, carbon sequestration and storage, flood protection, water purification, water provision and soil erosion prevention. To safeguard these kinds of services for society, resilient ecosystems are needed to cope with impacts of climate change. To address climate challenges faced by European landscapes and biodiversity, EUROPARC is promoting habitats conservation and restoration, ensuring better resilience of ecosystems, and is raising capacity among managers to improve adaptation measures and planning in protected areas.

Photo: EUROPARC Federtaion - Hainaut cross-border Nature Park



The future European Parliament and Commission will be asked to address those challenges, promoting European policies for sustainable economy, biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation.

Photo: Muranska Planina National Park, Slovakia

The European Union has made fundamental steps to address these challenges and has good legislation, which would require further development and more effective implementation in the coming years. EU Parliament will need to answer to the high expectation from European citizens, who consider environment is a top priority (Eurobarometer 2018).

#### References:

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- The EUROPARC Charter for Sustainable tourism in Protected Areas: good for Parks, good for People <https://www.europarc.org/sustainable-tourism/>
- EUROPARC Position Paper “European Protected Areas & Sustainable Agriculture: Working in Partnership for Biodiversity and Rural Development” [http://www.europarc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Protected-Areas-and-Sustainable-Agriculture\\_Position-Paper\\_EUROPARC.pdf](http://www.europarc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Protected-Areas-and-Sustainable-Agriculture_Position-Paper_EUROPARC.pdf)
- EUROPARC Toolkit “Health & Well-being benefits from Parks & Protected Areas” <https://www.europarc.org/toolkit-health-benefits-from-parks/>
- IUCN, Natural solutions : protected areas helping people cope with climate change.
- EU, Guidelines on Climate Change and Natura 2000: Dealing with the impact of climate change.