

EUROPARC SEMINAR DIALOGUE 2024 REPORT

Partnerships for Biodiversity
European policies and the role of
Protected Areas

14 November 2024
Brussels, Belgium & online





EUROPARC Federation and the European Commission have organised **six previous Seminar Dialogues**. On the 14th of November 2024, the seventh Seminar Dialogue was organised for the first time in a hybrid form, with 22 participants attending in person in Brussels and 18 online. The participants included EUROPARC members and stakeholders as well as people from the European Commission Directorate-General Environment (DG ENV).

SEMINAR DIALOGUE: Bridging policy with practice

The aim of the Seminar Dialogue is to bridge policy with practice. It acts as a space where European Union policymakers and EUROPARC members as Protected Area practitioners can **come together and exchange information and experiences**. The event highlights the importance of Protected Areas in achieving EU policy goals, whilst giving the European Commission an insight into the work done and the challenges faced by professionals in Protected Areas.

The Seminar Dialogue 2024 focused on three topics:

1. Protected Area Management Effectiveness
2. Protected Area designations
3. Biodiversity financing and funding.



The event was opened by **Mr. Andrea Vettori, the Head of Unit of the Nature Conservation Unit D3, DG ENV**. **Mr. Michael Hošek, the President of the EUROPARC Federation**, introduced the event and reminded the participants of the global and European Union biodiversity targets and thanked DG ENV for this opportunity of a dialogue.

Overview of EU Strategic Priorities related to Protected Areas and Nature Conservation

Focus on implementation of current EU policies and legislation

Andrea Vettori gave an **overview of EU strategic priorities related to Protected Areas and nature conservation**. The next five years are crucial for achieving the EU and global biodiversity targets. As such, it is important to put measures in place to succeed in this. The focus of the new European Commission starting on the 1st of December 2024 is on **implementing the current EU policies and legislation**.

Strategic priorities

1. Achievement of the biodiversity targets

- To achieve the international and EU protected area targets, including the global protected area target (the so called 30x30 target) and the EU Protected A target in the EU Biodiversity Strategy.
- In the European Union, about 26% of the area is already protected. However, it is important not to achieve only the numerical targets but also make sure that the PAs are **effectively managed and well connected**.
- Mainstreaming of biodiversity: integrating biodiversity funding into broader policies and practices—often referred to as mainstreaming—is essential. **Stakeholders from other sectors need to be engaged** to work together for biodiversity, e.g. the agricultural sector, businesses, the banking sector and the renewable energy companies.

2. Biodiversity funding and financing

- To make sure that funding is available for nature conservation also in the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) from the year 2027 onwards. The ministries of finance in the EU Member States (MS) will lead the MFF

discussions.



3. Implementation of the Birds and Habitat Directives (BHD) and the Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR)

- To keep in mind that one of the strongest elements of the BDH and NRR is the **requirement of no deterioration**.
- The Commission is ready to support the Member States (MS) in the development of their National Restoration Plans (NRPs) which need to be submitted by August of 2026.
- **Good governance and engagement of stakeholders** for NRR implementation will be the key but will also be challenging.
- For NRR implementation in marine areas, there needs to be **good coordination** of MS, e.g. MS around the Baltic Sea.



New Commissioner Jessika Roswall

The Commissioner for Environment, Water Resilience and a Competitive Circular Economy for 2024–29 is **Jessika Roswall from Sweden**. Her strategic priorities were presented in her mission letter. There is a clear mandate to ensure that the EU achieves its international biodiversity targets. The overall priorities of the new European Commission are in the political guidelines of the Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

Discussion highlights

- EUROPARC Federation is keen to **support DG ENV** in the achievement of the strategic priorities. EUROPARC can mobilise its network to provide inputs at different levels when needed.
- **Evaluating management effectiveness** is very important for Protected Area managers in order for them to know how they are doing in their areas. EU funding instruments would be needed to fund management effectiveness evaluations.
- DG ENV said that **current funding is not enough** to fund all good biodiversity projects. LIFE integrated and strategic nature projects should be developed and through them funds could be mobilised from e.g. EU regional funds and the funding of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).
- It would be helpful to have **more information** on the elements that could be decisive in negotiating the future Multiannual Financial Framework in order to guarantee resources for biodiversity.
- **A dedicated fund for biodiversity is needed** as well as resources from mainstreaming of biodiversity. However, the funding should not depend on the mainstreaming resources.
- There is a need for a **nature restoration funding instrument**.
- Implementation of the NRR is an opportunity to **exchange information and practices** between MS and between Protected Areas and Natura 2000 sites.
- According to DG ENV, **the biogeographical process will continue** although with another name and with more events at the EU level, providing possibilities for further exchanges.
- It is important to **ensure the coherence of EU policies with the objectives of the EU Biodiversity Strategy**, giving priority to the CAP but also to plans for adaptation to climate change and ecological transition. It might be possible to achieve a win-win situation with e.g. renewables acceleration areas and the targets of the NRR.



Protected Area Management Effectiveness

Outcomes of EUROPARC e-Forum on management effectiveness and LIFE PAME Europe project

Federico Minozzi, Head of Policy and Projects, EUROPARC Federation

Federico Minozzi presented outcomes from the EUROPARC e-Forum “Effective Management, Better Parks” that was held the previous week. The e-Forum looked at Protected Area Management Effectiveness. It covered topics from planning, governance, and capacity building to communications.



He also presented a new project called **LIFE PAME Europe** of which EUROPARC Federation is a lead partner. The project aims to develop a methodology for Protected Area Management Effectiveness evaluation in the European Union. This answers to the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 call for effectively managed Protected Areas.

Capacity building for management effectiveness

Neil McIntosh, Head of Communications and Capacity Building, EUROPARC Federation

Neil McIntosh gave a presentation on capacity building for management effectiveness. There is a need to **improve quality of management effectiveness and for that capacity building is needed** for Protected Area practitioners and management authorities. The need for capacity building is very relevant at the moment as EU and its Member States work towards achieving the Protected Area target of 30% protection of land and of sea. More and capable people are needed to manage these areas. It is important to equip the Protected Area practitioners with the relevant skills and tools.

Neil pointed out that **only 13% of LIFE Nature projects give attention to capacity building**. He called for a capacity building component into all LIFE and other EU-funded projects and wished that DG ENV could take that idea forward.

PAME-Europe (LIFE23-PRE-DE-PAME Europe)

- Capacity building to engage & support MS and PA Managers
- Operationalise the ME methodology & tools
- Guidelines & training materials
- 1st Training Seminar (by 12/25)
- 10 training sessions in different regions (pilot sites) across Europe (04/27 to 06/28)
- Online training sessions
- A data collection framework & Knowledge Hub

Neil also underlined, that capacity building is important in the new LIFE PAME Europe project in order to **engage and support MS and Protected Area managers** with the PAME methodology being developed in the project. The training will happen through the European Nature Academy.

Discussion highlights

- The LIFE PAME Europe project will **build on the results** of the project “Management effectiveness of marine Natura 2000 sites and other EU marine protected areas”.
- LIFE PAME Europe project will **work closely with DG ENV** and also with the European Environment Agency (EEA) that will develop an IT tool for PAME.
- The methodology developed in the project will be tested on pilot sites. The focus is on Natura 2000 sites, but it could also work in nationally designated Protected Areas.
- Management issues in Protected Areas need to be addressed not just at the individual site level but also **across the entire Protected Area network**. This is because activities and developments outside Protected Areas can have significant impacts on the ecosystems within them. In many cases, effective action needs to take place beyond the boundaries of the Protected Area itself.
- That is why mainstreaming is essential. It ensures that **efforts to protect and enhance biodiversity are supported both inside and outside Protected Areas**, contributing to healthier, more resilient ecosystems.



Protected Area Designations

Outcomes from the event “Strictly Protected Areas in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030”

Frank Vassen, Policy officer, the Nature Conservation Unit D3, European Commission Directorate-General for Environment

Frank Vassen gave a brief presentation on the event “Strictly Protected Areas in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030” that took place on the 12th and 13th of November 2024. The EU Biodiversity Strategy provided that at least one third of Protected Areas, representing 10% of EU land and 10% of EU sea, should become strictly protected.

DG ENV had given guidance on this in 2022, but subsequently there appeared to be a need for further clarification regarding strict protection, e.g. on the type of activities that are allowed in strictly Protected Areas, and what strictly Protected Areas actually are. Are these only non-intervention areas or can there also be areas with active management? Also, Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) were discussed regarding strict protection: could some OECMs potentially be considered as strictly protected?

Based on the discussion during the event, **DG ENV will compile a report that will clarify these issues.** It was later said that the report would be ready in January 2025.



Process of designation of new national parks in Wallonia

Johanna Breyne, Director, Entre-Sambre-et-Meuse National Park, Belgium

Johanna Breyne presented the case of **designation of two new National Parks in Wallonia in Belgium**. This was done through a call by the Walloon ministry to present projects of National Parks. The projects had two main goals:

- Contribute efficiently to nature protection (with high ecological and biological value)
- Build a global socio-economic project around nature protection and valuation (strong stakeholder participation and governance, signed agreements).

Four projects were selected as candidates by an international expert jury. Two projects were then selected to become National Parks and funding was provided, although the projects needed to have a 20% co-financing.

The Entre-Sambre-et-Meuse National Park was one of the two selected. In their project, governance was of great importance as there were many organisations participating. The project is still evolving. The **bottom-up process** that resulted in the National Park was deemed good. Now the challenge is to maintain the momentum.

Conclusions

➤ The self-fixed level of ambition is higher than expected, and even higher than what public authorities could have imposed...

➤ A challenge will be to maintain the level of ambition and engagement and to capitalize on the human and financial investments

Voluntary dynamic : a call for projects > ambition level set by the partners on a voluntary basis

Collaborative and Inclusive dynamic : all actors need to be part of it

Important financial support : an opportunity of the RRF

A very large freedom of choice and initiative range for local projects

A master plan approved by the Government to set and keep the long-time vision

Nature Regional Parks in France: Biodiversity and sustainable local development

Eric Brua, Director of the Federation of Regional Nature Parks of France

Eric Brua presented the Regional Nature Parks in France. In France, the first Regional Nature Park was established in 1973. At the moment, there are 59 Regional Nature Parks in France, with a wide variety amongst them. Regional Nature Parks are defined by the local stakeholders and are contractual. It takes about 10 years to establish a Regional Nature Park. Planning of the areas need to be compatible with the charter of the Regional Nature Park. They are officially recognised as Protected Areas.



In Europe, there are more than 900 Nature, Regional, and Landscape Parks. Regional Nature Parks are government-recognised or government-designated Protected Areas that have the objective of protecting nature and landscapes, especially those landscapes that are characterised by long-term human use (cultural landscapes), with their diverse species and habitats.

Discussion highlights

- **Partnerships and local stakeholders were key** to Protected Area establishment in the cases presented.
 - **A good business case for Protected Areas** is needed in order to convince the decision-makers of their importance. For example, it has been calculated in Finland that one Euro invested in Protected Area management generates 10 Euros to the local economy through visitor spending in the area and its vicinity.
 - In addition to a bottom-up process, a top-down process is needed to guarantee that the Protected Areas are **established in the right places** regarding biodiversity. A system-level understanding of Protected Area designations would be required.
 - Different kinds of Protected Areas are needed to find the best solutions for each case and for different purposes, using also different degrees of protection.
- Working with the sectors of agriculture and forestry** is important to guarantee the best outcomes for biodiversity and development activities.



Biodiversity Financing and Funding

Multiannual Financing Framework and biodiversity financing, including LIFE funding and funding for Nature Restoration Law

Frank Vassen, Policy officer, the Nature Conservation Unit D3, European Commission Directorate-General for Environment

Frank Vassen said that most likely there will be **less EU funding for biodiversity** in the future as there are the impacts of COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine among others affecting EU and MS finances. There are suggestions that the EU budget in the future would be simpler and a bigger part of it would be given for MS to distribute.

The current Multiannual Financing Framework is still valid, as is the current LIFE programme. There is no information on the future of LIFE funding yet. **As the future of LIFE funding is uncertain, it is better to apply for projects now if you have any project ideas.** There is also a need of funding for the NRR.

It is important to look for alternative finances. Nature credits are mentioned as priorities for the new Commissioner for Environment, Water Resilience and a Competitive Circular Economy. It remains to be seen what will come out of that. CAP funding can be used for managing or restoring Protected Areas, but the decision on that is at the national level.




EUROPARC's perspective

Federico Minozzi, Head of Policy and Projects, EUROPARC Federation

Federico Minozzi pointed out in his [presentation](#) that **there is a gap between what resources are needed for Protected Areas and nature conservation and what is available**. Although there is private funding available, there is no easy way to use it. Usually, the investors want to move fast and they also expect a return on their investment. Nevertheless, private investors are concerned about biodiversity loss and the climate crisis, so there is growing interest.

It is important to **create the conditions for the use of private funding**. Protected Areas need to become “investment-ready”. An analysis of external and internal barriers for private funding of Protected Areas needs to be done.

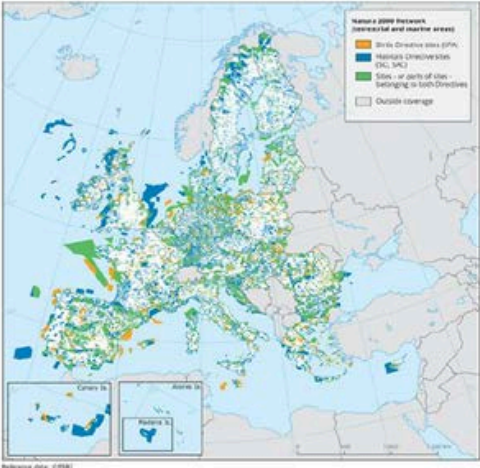
EUROPARC 's proposal on this is to **develop a feasibility study and test a model on how private funding could be used in Protected Areas**. Additionally, there is a need to develop Protected Area staff capacity. Resources are needed to conduct the study and pilot the model.



Bridge the gap

There is a need for the Protected Area community to become “investment ready”.

EUROPARC proposal / ambition:
Develop a **feasibility study** and **tested model**, to indicate how private financing can be identified and utilised,
what conditions are required to be in place, by Natura 2000 and PA networks, to attract successful investments to drive restoration and conservation actions.



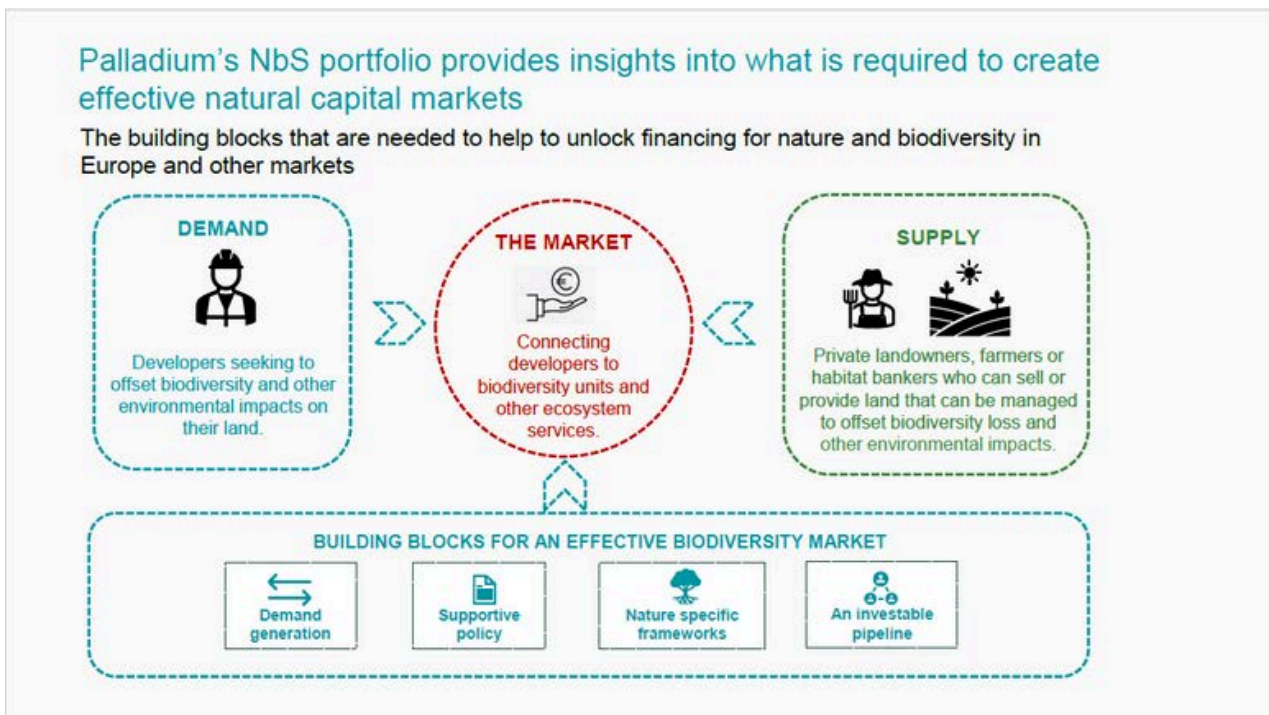
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How to unlock finance for biodiversity: Palladium's experience from the UK and beyond

Emma Davies, Senior Partnerships Manager and Antonio Espinosa, Senior Associate, Palladium Group

In the [presentation](#), Emma showcased that based on their work there are four building blocks that can help to create a market and unlock financing for nature and biodiversity. These are:

- Demand generation
- Supportive policy and legislation
- Nature specific frameworks and tools
- An investable pipeline.



Demand for investment in nature and Protected Areas can be generated through 1) policy and legislation, 2) value creation for businesses, and 3) risk mitigation to avoid financial risk. It is also important to **have a supportive policy environment**: if there is policy in place, it is easier for investors to invest.

In order to create a market, it is important that there is **a measurable outcome that has value**. For carbon market, there is the carbon unit. However, for nature it is more complicated as there is not one unit for nature's value that could be used. In the UK, there is Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). It is now mandatory for developers in the UK who must deliver a BNG of 10%.

Biodiversity credit and offset markets are emerging around the world. These can create foundations for markets that attract private investment. It is important to develop large-scale investable projects, as these can be investment opportunities. For this, potential Protected Areas should be mapped. For example, in the UK, National Parks worked on **mapping the potential for carbon sequestration** in the Parks that could then be turned into investable projects.

Palladium has created an investment vehicle REVERE with National Parks in the United Kingdom to provide **funding for restoration projects in the Parks**. Some of the funding is achieved through carbon markets where investors are looking to offset their carbon. There is a need to have **mission-aligned green investors on board** to help cover the upfront costs of the nature restoration projects. These investors recognise that they can make a long-term profit from the carbon credits and at the same time deliver climate action that is driving more and more investment decisions.

Discussion highlights

- There has been a **fear of greenwashing** due to problems in the carbon credit market. However, e.g. the codes used including the UK Woodland and Peatland Carbon Codes were good as they were independently evaluated by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and endorsed by the UK government.
- There are not yet enough projects where companies can get high integrity carbon credits to meet ambitious net-zero strategies. These projects should **benefit both biodiversity and climate change mitigation**.
- Tax shelters could be used for biodiversity conservation. This would mean that companies could get a **tax reduction** when investing in biodiversity conservation or restoration. This could be of interest in the EU.
- The **availability of land** is increasingly becoming a limiting factor for restoration projects as there are many competing needs for land, e.g. for renewable energy production.
- **Restoration of Natura 2000 sites** should be eligible for carbon credits.

THE DIALOGUE CONTINUES

The event was concluded by Michael Hošek and Frank Vassen.

The exchange of information and experiences was of high interest. Biodiversity funding and financing is an important topic. There is a definite interest for further opportunities for discussion on this topics, as well as the other subjects of the 2024 Seminar Dialogue.

Thank you for all the presenters and participants! There will be another Seminar Dialogue in 2025 to which all EUROPARC members are invited.

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 and Natura 2000 sites. Our organisation is 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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