

Investing in Natura 2000:

FOR NATURE AND PEOPLE



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Foreword by Commissioner Potočnik

Through a unique partnership with all 27 Member States, the EU now has the largest co-ordinated network of protected areas in the world. Natura 2000 comprises some 26,000 sites – almost 18% of the EU land mass – and substantial marine areas as well. But this remarkable achievement of European cooperation will not fulfil its intended role unless we can safeguard substantial financial support for its effective maintenance and management. The Member States estimate that a minimum of €5.8 billion per year will be needed to achieve this.

It's a significant sum, but a small price for all we get in return. Natura 2000 is a key element of the EU's strategy to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services by 2020. Protecting the diversity of species and habitats included in the network not only maintains the beauties of nature, it also makes good economic sense: if we allowed ecosystems to

fail, there is no guarantee that the services they provide could ever be replaced. Supporting the network is a social concern as well, affecting the livelihood of farmers, foresters, fishermen and others who live in or near these areas and look after our natural capital. And it is also a practical demonstration of the EU's commitment to fulfilling global biodiversity goals.

The Commission is now evaluating the effectiveness of the current approach to financing Natura 2000, which relies on a blend of funds from the Member States and sectoral EU funds like Rural and Regional Development Policy and LIFE.

Discussions on the future EU budget beyond 2014 are in their early stages, but it is already clear that a more strategic approach would greatly enhance the possibilities for Member States to tap into EU funding for Natura 2000 sites. There is also a need for Member States and regions to identify and target EU funds more effectively, and to consider more innovative sources of financing, to ensure the effective management and restoration of Natura 2000 sites.

Securing the investment required for Natura 2000 is a significant challenge in the current financial climate. But there is an urgent need to rise to the occasion: we need to safeguard this lifeline for present and future generations.



Natural forests are not only important for their nature value and recreational potential, they also store carbon, retain water, prevent erosion and provide valuable resources such as timber, game, mushrooms etc...

The Natura 2000 Network – a valuable European resource



Taking action to halt the loss of biodiversity in the EU

In March 2010, the EU Heads of State and Government set themselves the ambitious target of halting, and reversing, the loss of biodiversity in Europe by 2020. In May 2011, the European Commission adopted a new EU Biodiversity Strategy setting out concrete priority measures for achieving this target.

The European Natura 2000 Network is a central element of this Strategy. It enables all 27 EU countries to work together within a common framework to conserve Europe's finest nature areas, home also to our most threatened, rare and endemic plants, animals and habitats.

The ultimate objective is to ensure that these species and habitats – deemed of European importance - are restored to a favourable conservation status across their natural range within the EU. This is a major challenge. A recent health check revealed that currently only 17% are in a favourable state. Some could still face extinction if urgent measures are not taken to reverse their decline.

EU 2020 headline target

Halting the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystem services in the EU by 2020, and restoring them in so far as feasible, while stepping up the EU contribution to averting global biodiversity loss.

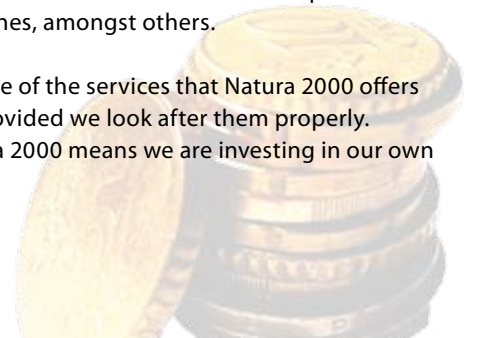
Natura 2000 – providing multiple services to society

After many years of intense efforts, the Natura 2000 Network is now almost complete. Over 26,000 terrestrial and marine sites have been included so far, making it the largest co-ordinated network of protected areas anywhere in the world.

In total, Natura 2000 covers around 18% of the EU land area as well as substantial parts of the surrounding seas. Thanks to this extensive coverage, Natura 2000 is more than just a refuge for rare and endangered species and habitats. It also preserves countless other species and valuable ecosystems as well.

Together these areas deliver a wide range of important goods and services to society. Healthy freshwater ecosystems, for instance, provide clean water and help remove pollutants from the surrounding countryside. Intact wetlands act as natural buffers against floods, soaking up excess rainwater. Peat bogs fix and store carbon dioxide, the number one cause of climate change whilst forests retain soils and prevent land slides and avalanches, amongst others.

These are just some of the services that Natura 2000 offers society for free provided we look after them properly. Investing in Natura 2000 means we are investing in our own future too.

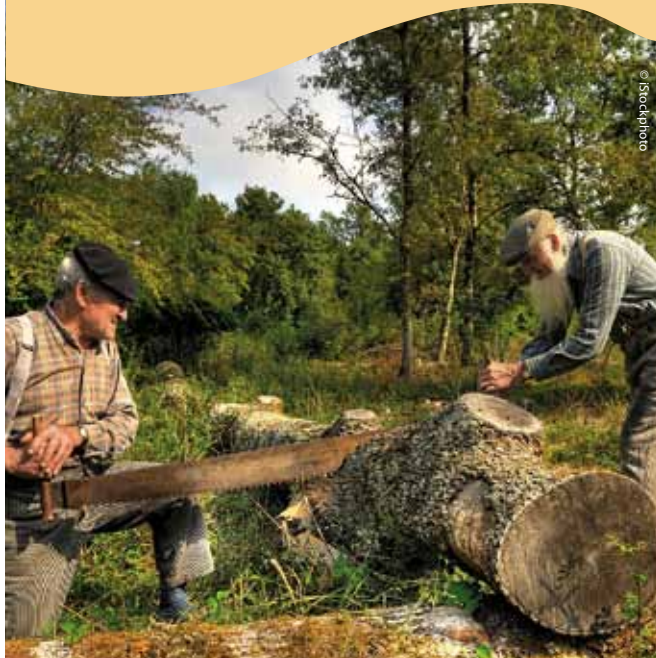


Working together through Natura 2000 management plans

Natura 2000 management plans are often used to develop a consensus view on how best to manage a Natura 2000 site in light of the differing landuse and socio-economic interests.

Although not obligatory Natura 2000 management plans are an excellent way to:

- identify the conservation objectives of the site so that it is clear to all what is being conserved and why;
- analyse the socio-economic and cultural context of the area and the interactions between different land-uses and the EU protected species and habitats present;
- provide an open forum for debate amongst all interest groups on how best to manage the site in light of the local socio-economic context and regional characteristics;
- help find practical management solutions that are well integrated into other landuse practices;
- identify specific measures to be taken in order to secure the conservation objectives of the site, as well as determine who will be responsible for implementing and financing them.



Conserving Natura 2000 – adopting an inclusive approach

With the Natura 2000 Network nearing completion, attention is turning towards managing this valuable common resource in a way that benefits both nature and people. This calls for a modern, efficient and inclusive approach to site conservation.

Unlike protected areas of the past, the management and sustainable use of Natura 2000 sites is largely centred on people working *with* nature, rather than against it. After all, most Natura 2000 sites are already under some form of active land use and many sites are valuable precisely because they have been sensitively managed until now.

Clearly, in such cases, success is best assured when people and nature work in partnership with one another. There is however no ‘one size fits all’ model for management. Much will depend on the species and habitats for which the site is designated, their threats and conservation status as well as the different land uses and stakeholders operating in the area.

In practice a range of different measures may be required to effectively manage a Natura 2000 site. This could, for instance involve one-off investments such as habitat restoration works, land purchase or compensation for income foregone, installations for public access, preparation of management plans and communication with stakeholders etc...

It also often involves recurrent management activities as well as regular monitoring work or surveillance.

Managing Natura 2000 sites in France

In order to ensure the effective management of more than 1700 Natura 2000 sites in France, the government is working closely with local landowners and users to put in place an agreed management plan for each site. These plans are developed through a local steering committee which is made up of local authorities, landowners and users, representatives from rural agencies, sectoral organisations, nature NGOs and ecology experts and anyone else who has an interest in the Natura 2000 site.

The committee meetings provide an opportunity for all parties to discuss how to implement the conservation objectives of the site in a way that fits best with the local socio-economic activities and interests in the area. Once a consensus has been reached, the management plan is officially approved by the State.

Local landowners or users are then encouraged to enter into different types of management contracts with the local authority to help implement the management plan. These specify the type of activities to be undertaken, the nature of the funding (eg whether investment subsidies or annual payments per hectare) and the payment conditions.

Different types of management contracts are used, depending on whether the activities

are related to productive or non-productive measures. The most important contracts are:

- 'Sustainable Agricultural Contracts' (CAD) managed by the Ministry of Agriculture, using funding from the EU Rural Development Regulation.
- 'Natura2000 contracts' for non-agricultural and non-forestry sites, managed by the Ministry of Environment.

A farmer or forester wishing to enter into a Sustainable Agricultural Contract will receive a complete diagnosis of his farm before deciding on the relevant measures to be included in the contract. Some measures will be compulsory (e.g. limitation of herbicides), others are optional (e.g. mechanical weeding). For each measure the contract outlines what must be done for the next five years in order to receive the payment. Subsidies are granted annually, per hectare under cultivation.

This whole process, which is founded on nurturing an integrated approach to Natura 2000 and which is set within a wider frame of rural development, has proven to be very successful and has won the support of many landowners and users. Over 1100 Natura 2000 contracts have been signed to date and by 2008 more than 1300 km² of land within Natura 2000 was being managed with the help of EU funded agri-environmental schemes.

Farmers and foresters are central to ensuring the long term management of many Natura 2000 sites



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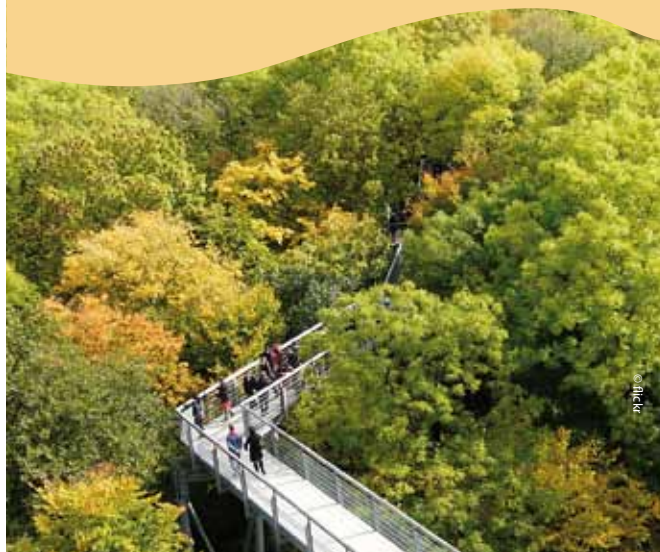


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Managing Natura 2000 forests in Germany

Covering 150 km², the Hainich beech forest is one of the largest beech forests in Central Europe. After German reunification, the regional government declared significant parts a Natura 2000 site in view of its exceptional biodiversity value. The Association of private landowners who own much of the communing land was initially strongly opposed to this designation, fearing that it would prevent them using the forest for economic purposes. But the conservation authorities soon allayed their fears: the Association practises a form of selective forestry 'Plenterwälder', involving the removal of mature trees through a rotation system, which is entirely compatible with the conservation of the forests' biodiversity.

To ensure there were no misunderstandings, a management agreement was drawn up between the two parties to agree on how to exploit the forest's resources whilst safeguarding the valuable habitats and species present. Thanks to this agreement, private foresters continue to earn a living from their forest without the competition of large-scale clear cutting operations. At the same time the area, which is also a National Park, developed a series of eco-friendly recreational facilities to encourage sustainable tourism to this remote region. In 2005, it constructed one of Germany's first forest canopy walks. The walk proved so popular that over 260,000 people came to Hainich in the first year alone. This in turn led to a whole range of other economic spin-offs for the region.



Estimating the cost of managing the Natura 2000 Network

The effective management and restoration of sites in the Natura 2000 Network will only be possible if adequate finances are made available for this purpose. In 2010 the Commission carried out a comprehensive survey of the financial needs of Natura 2000 across the EU in order to estimate the global costs of managing the network.

It concluded that a minimum of €5.8 billion a year is required. This is regarded as an absolute minimum since many Member States based their estimates on existing resources rather than on the true cost of completing, managing and restoring the network.

The study further revealed that around a third of the costs relate to one-off investments whereas two thirds are for recurrent annual costs (eg habitat management). This will however vary from one region to another and from site to site depending on their conservation requirements.

Type of Costs	€m per year
One off costs (annualised)	
Management	256
Land purchase	417
Infrastructure	817
Unallocated	183
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>1,673</i>
Recurrent costs (annual)	
Management planning	703
Habitat management and monitoring	2,707
Unallocated	18
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>3,428</i>
Total (25 EU Member States)	5,101
Extrapolated to EU-27	5,800

Estimated Annual Costs of Natura 2000 Network (€ million)

The socio-economic benefits of Natura 2000

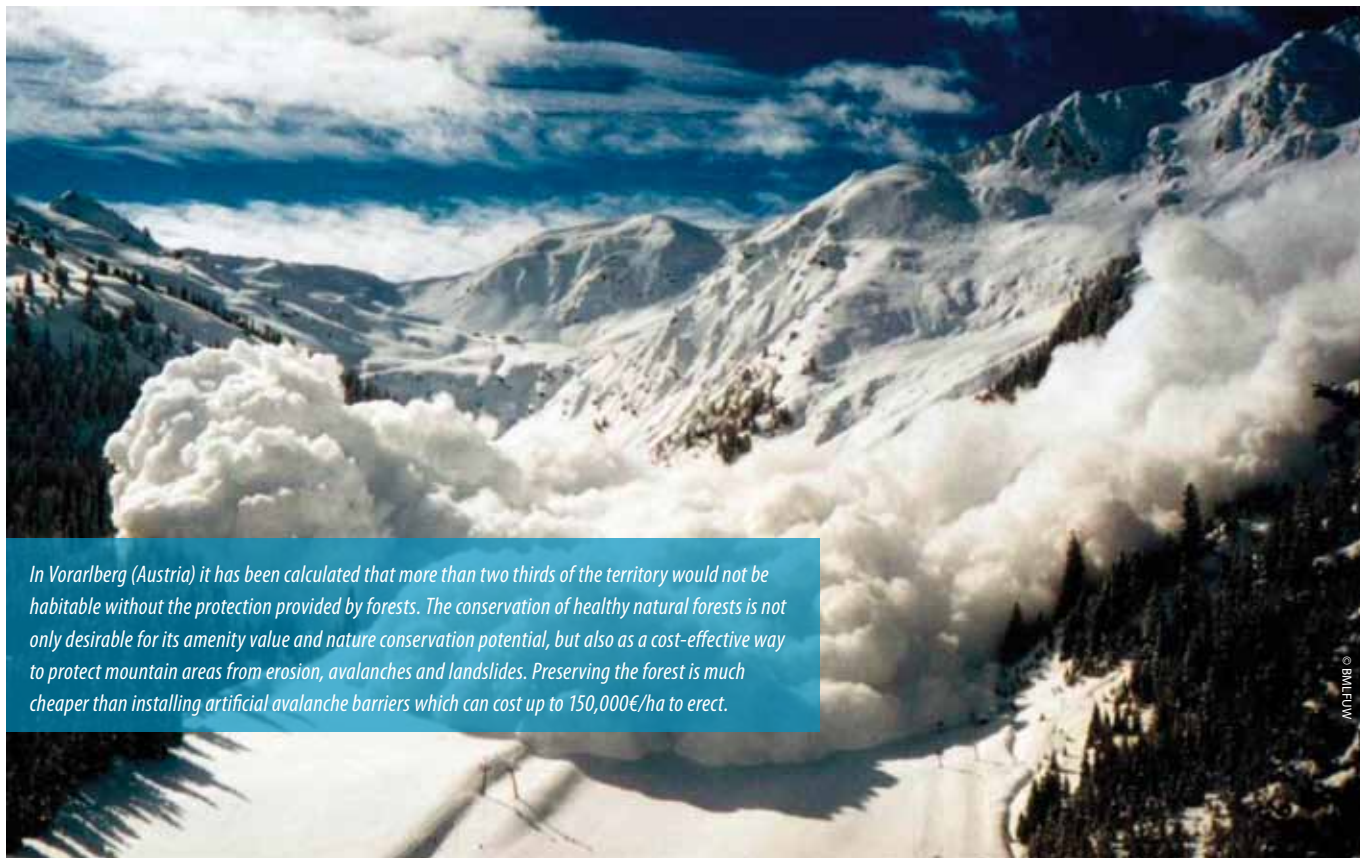
The cost of managing the Natura 2000 Network is significant but this should not be viewed in isolation. It is important also to consider the benefits that Natura 2000 brings to society. Although an overall estimate of benefits is not available, different economic valuations conclude that the socio-economic benefits derived from the Natura 2000 Network far outweigh the estimated costs.

There are many reasons for this. Natura 2000 sites are an important refuge for economically valuable species such as pollinators, game animals, fish and wild crops. The economic value of insect pollination alone within the EU has been estimated to be worth €15 billion a year. Without Natura 2000,

the continued decline in bees and other pollinators could have serious consequences for Europe's farmers and agri-business sector.

The Natura 2000 Network also delivers many vital ecosystem services, such as the provision and regulation of fresh water, protection against floods and erosion as well as carbon sequestration. Many of these services are directly relevant to climate change mitigation and adaptation and will play an increasingly important role in the future.

Unfortunately, this value is often overlooked and it is only when healthy ecosystems are damaged or lost that their true economic worth is recognised. Having to find man-made solutions to replace the services nature once provided us for free is not only technically challenging but also far more costly than preserving these healthy ecosystems in the first place.



In Vorarlberg (Austria) it has been calculated that more than two thirds of the territory would not be habitable without the protection provided by forests. The conservation of healthy natural forests is not only desirable for its amenity value and nature conservation potential, but also as a cost-effective way to protect mountain areas from erosion, avalanches and landslides. Preserving the forest is much cheaper than installing artificial avalanche barriers which can cost up to 150,000€/ha to erect.

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Valuing the benefits of Natura 2000

- Benefits provided by Natura 2000 in the Netherlands were estimated to be around €4000/ha/year, calculated as an average of EUR/ha/year benefits from different key Natura 2000 ecosystems. Recreation and tourism as well as wider ecosystem functions were important components of this value as were non-use benefits. The authors extrapolated the gross welfare benefits of all Natura 2000 areas in the Netherlands (1.1 million ha), deriving an estimate of around €4.5 billion/year.
- The protection of all 300 Natura 2000 sites in Scotland was estimated to have an overall benefit cost ratio of around 7 over a 25-year period. This means that overall national welfare benefits are seven times greater than the national costs and represent good value for money.
- As part of a wider economic and institutional assessment of Natura 2000 in France, several studies were carried out to determine the benefits arising from Natura 2000 across a range of sites. The objective of the assessment was to estimate the net benefits related to the management of Natura 2000. At the Natura 2000 site 'Plaine de la Crau' the net benefits were calculated to be around €142ha/year, i.e. around seven times higher than the costs associated with the Natura 2000 site.
- Under the Lower Danube Green Corridor (LDGC) Agreement, it has been agreed to restore 2,236 km² of floodplain, side channels and associated habitats along the Danube to help control floods in the region. The total cost of this restoration work is estimated at €50 million and would result in 2,100 million m³ of flood retention capacity. This compares favourably to the cost already incurred in Romania alone as a result of floods in 2010 which amounted to €59 million. In addition, it is estimated the restoration would provide €112 million a year in additional ecosystem services for fisheries, forestry, nutrient retention and recreation etc...
- In 2009 the Finnish Natural Heritage Services (Metsähallitus) and the Finnish Forest Institute (Metla) carried out a national assessment of the economic impacts of nature tourism and nature-related recreational activities on local economies. The study consisted of the key government owned nature areas, including 35 national parks (many of which are in Natura 2000) and 10 other recreation areas. The total annual revenue linked to visitor spending in national parks amounted to €70.1 million and supported local employment by creating 893 person-years. In general, it was estimated that €1 of public investment to protected areas provided €20 in return.

An important source of income and employment

Natura 2000 safeguards many of Europe's best areas for nature and biodiversity which makes it an important resource for recreation and tourism. By offering attractive breathing spaces to explore or simply relax in, Natura 2000 provides ample opportunities to develop new economic activities based on these valuable natural assets. This can in turn contribute further to sustaining and diversifying the region's economy.

One recent European Commission study estimated that, if properly resourced and managed the Natura 2000 Network could provide a Gross Value Added (GVA) of €3.05 billion in the regions in which it is located. In Europe generally around 4.4 million jobs, and €405 billion in annual turnover, are directly dependent on the maintenance of healthy ecosystems.

"As rural entrepreneurs, landowners are the best placed to enhance biodiversity in a cost effective manner. Therefore, it is crucial that the EU and Member States, notably via an adequate implementation of the Natura 2000 network and proper financial tools, support their actions in the field to secure a higher delivery of ecosystem services while producing food, fibre and energy for all of society, at least until these public goods are integrated in the market price of products." Thierry de l'Escaille, CEO, European Landowners' Organization

Nature friendly beef gets premium prices in Austria

The NATURA 2000 site "Wienerwald" is situated close to the big city of Vienna. It is characterised by a mosaic patchwork of valuable meadows and pastures which provide an important habitat for many butterflies and birds like the corncrake. At the same time they are also an important recreational area for Vienna's inhabitants.

However, traditional cattle breeding has been decreasing in this region over the last decades, resulting in the abandonment of the grasslands and consequent loss of wildlife. To stop this negative trend and help maintain the high nature value of the Natura 2000 area, farmers and nature conservationists created together a new brand "Wienerwald – Weiderind" for their meat products. Strict guidelines have been developed on how to produce this meat. Farmers can use the brand in exchange for putting their cattle out to pasture for at least 200 days and for carrying out specific conservation measures.

Now in its third year the brand has proved successful on all fronts: not only are the valuable meadows grazed once again for the benefit of wildlife but experts estimate that the market price for meat carrying the brand has increased by 25% already and demand remains strong.





EU Funds can be used to support nature friendly management activities

Using EU Funds to help finance Natura 2000



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Investing in Natura 2000 for the benefit of people and nature

Investing properly in Natura 2000 will not only help the EU to meet its target of halting biodiversity loss by 2020 but will also ensure it contributes to the broader sustainable development objectives as laid out in the Europe 2020 Strategy.

A fully operational Natura 2000 Network will encourage a more efficient use of our valuable natural resources and foster a more inclusive growth economy. It can also promote a more coherent spatial planning approach in which different, yet complementary, land uses that help support healthy ecosystems are encouraged to join forces for the mutual benefit of all.

Such an approach would help embed Natura 2000 into the wider rural and regional policies and ensure that it plays its part in sustaining the socio-economic fabric and regional characteristics of different parts of Europe. This can be especially important in remote and marginal areas of Europe which still have a wealth of healthy ecosystems and other valuable natural assets but where traditional economic activities are often difficult to establish and sustain.

A well managed Natura 2000 Network will also play a key role in meeting other EU environmental objectives and targets set by the Water Framework Directive and the Marine Framework Strategy Directive and in establishing a Green Infrastructure for Europe.

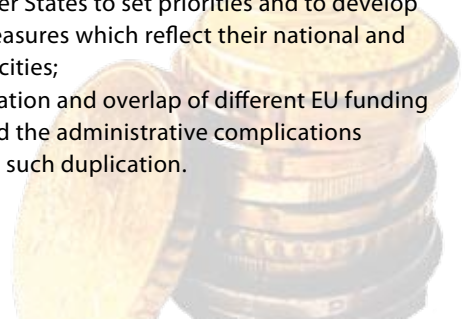
Using EU Funds to help manage Natura 2000

As an EU-wide network, Natura 2000 is based on the principle of solidarity between Member States. It represents an important shared resource capable of providing multiple benefits to society and to Europe's economy. But it is also a shared responsibility which requires sufficient financial investments to become fully operational.

While the main responsibility for financing Natura 2000 lies with Member States, Article 8 of the Habitats Directive recognises the need for EU-level support for the management of Natura 2000 and explicitly links the delivery of the necessary conservation measures to the provision of EU co-financing. Because of this, management requirements of Natura 2000 have been integrated into different EU funding streams since the start for the current EU budgetary period (2007–2013)

This integration approach was chosen for several reasons:

- it ensures that the management of Natura 2000 sites is part of the wider land management policies of the EU;
- it allows Member States to set priorities and to develop policies and measures which reflect their national and regional specificities;
- it avoids duplication and overlap of different EU funding instruments and the administrative complications associated with such duplication.



Integrating Natura 2000 into Rural Development Programmes

In view of the long tradition of farming and forestry in Europe and the importance of semi-natural habitats for biodiversity, it is no surprise that a significant proportion of the land included in Natura 2000 relates to agricultural or forestry land. It has been estimated that altogether around 25% of the land in Natura 2000 is farmland, 10% is grassland and 50% is forest.

In many sites, existing farming or forestry practices will require little or no adjustments as they are already largely compatible with the conservation requirements of Natura 2000. Rather, the objective here will be to find ways to continue to support such activities well into the future as well.

There will however be occasions where more substantial changes may be required, for instance to restore a habitat or to enable a particular species to recover. This might involve additional management efforts that go beyond the basic requirements of good farming or forestry practice. Or it might involve certain restrictions which could have economic repercussions for the land owner or user. Either way it will be important to make sure such activities are adequately resourced.

The current Rural Development Regulation (2007-2013) aims to do just that. It outlines a series of measures which Member States and regions can use for the management of Natura 2000 sites within their territory. All except the agri- and forest-environmental measures are optional and it is up to each Member State or region to decide whether they want to include such measures in their Rural Development programmes.

The relevant measures include:

- Natura 2000 payments to compensate for costs incurred and income foregone resulting from legal or administrative restrictions on farming or forestry within Natura 2000 areas;

- agri- or forest-environment schemes which can support voluntary commitments and wildlife friendly management activities that go beyond the relevant mandatory standards;
- support for non productive investments linked for instance to agri-environment schemes or which enhance the public amenity value of a Natura 2000 area;
- support for the conservation of rural heritage.

Experience so far indicates that, whilst some countries and regions have taken up one or more of these measures to help manage their Natura 2000 sites, this is by no means systematic. Natura 2000 payment measures for instance comprise between zero and 2% of the total expenditure under European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) so far. Agri- and forest-environment schemes on the other hand are more widespread but are often not designed with specific species or habitat conservation needs in mind.

The European Fisheries Fund (EFF)

The EFF is designed to assist in the implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) which aims to ensure the sustainable use of marine resources. Several possibilities exist under the EFF to fund projects that protect and conserve marine biodiversity, also within the context of marine Natura 2000 sites that are affected by fishing activities.

However, the uptake so far for biodiversity and Natura 2000 related activities has been very modest. This may be due to the fact that the establishment of Natura 2000 has been slower for the marine environment and that management planning for marine Natura 2000 areas is less developed.

The newly emerging EU maritime policy and the implementation of the new Marine Framework Strategy Directive which aims to ensure that all EU marine seas reach a good environmental status by 2020 should provide further impetus for implementing Natura 2000 requirements as part of this wider EU objective.

Reducing the impact of brown shrimp fisheries

The brown shrimp fishery is an important economic activity in coastal areas of the North Sea. The fishery itself is carried out by a fleet of ca 600 vessels, operating mainly off the coasts of Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and southeast England. Around 35.000 tonnes is landed every year. However the activity is not without its problems. The small meshed nets used for shrimp fishing are very unselective and produce large quantities of unwanted by-catch. The heavy bobbin rope used to startle the shrimp can also cause serious damage to the sea bottom and the organisms that live there. This can be especially problematic in sensitive areas like coastal zones and estuaries which may be protected under Natura 2000 and which act as nurseries for other commercially important fish.

In light of this, a project was launched by the Flemish Institute for Agricultural and Fisheries Research (ILVO) using funds under the EU's predecessor fund to EFF to investigate the potential of electric pulses as a means of developing a species-selective electro-shrimp trawl. The idea is to replace the heavy bobbin rope with electrodes which can emit a special electrical frequency that causes the shrimp to jump off the sea floor, but leaves the substrate and other organisms relatively unaffected. The results are very encouraging as it has shown to reduce by-catch by 35% and seabed contact by 75%. The concept is now being taken forward through the development of a full scale prototype which is being tested out in the North Sea and which aims to reduce the level of by catch even further.

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Farming with great bustard conservation in mind in Spain

The Natura 2000 site of Villafáfila Lagoons in Castilla y León (389 km²) harbours the largest single great bustard population in Spain and in the EU. Arable land is dominant in the area. One third of the arable land is under cereals and an equivalent amount is fallowed. Sheep production is also important and is traditionally based on the forage resource provided by cereal stubbles, fallow land and cultivated forage crops, such as alfalfa.

In order to find ways to reconcile farming with the conservation of the great bustard, a specific EU agri-environment scheme was devised to provide incentive payments for various management activities:

- Type 1 and 2 contracts for increasing the area of fallow and pastures on the holding, and improving their condition for great bustards, reducing fertiliser use, creating small woods or hedgerows;
- Type 3 contracts for establishing long-term set-aside of land (20 years);
- Type 4 contracts for re-introducing or maintaining alfalfa cultivation or maintaining threatened crop varieties.

By 2004 some 64.6% of cultivated land in the Lagoons Reserve area was participating in agri-environment measures. The schemes have contributed to maintaining an extensive farming system that is of very limited economic viability, while improving the quality of the farmland habitat and increasing the area of alfalfa. Although many farmers were sceptical at the start of the programme, they are now convinced that the presence of great bustards on their land is not a barrier to their activity, but instead can be an important source of additional economic support in this otherwise disadvantaged area.

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Investing in Natura 2000 through the EU Structural Funds

The Structural Funds, which are composed of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Cohesion Fund, aim to strengthen economic and social cohesion across the EU.

They have three different objectives:

- the convergence objective aims to stimulate growth and employment in the least developed regions;
- the regional competitiveness and employment objective aims to reinforce a region's competitiveness, attractiveness and employment by anticipating economic and social changes;
- the European territorial cooperation objective aims to reinforce cooperation at cross-border transnational and interregional level.

Objectives	Funding instruments		
Convergence	ERDF	ESF	Cohesion fund
Regional Competitiveness and Employment	ERDF	ESF	
European Territorial Cooperation	ERDF		

In order to access the Structural Funds each region or group of regions must draw up an Operational Programme (OP) in close consultation with different authorities and economic, social and environmental partners. Each Programme sets out the detailed objectives and priorities for the region concerned and identifies the themes and measures that can be funded to achieve these objectives.

Amongst the range of EU funded themes available to regions, are a number that can be used to support the management of Natura 2000 sites or broader goals for biodiversity conservation.

The most pertinent budget categories relate to the:

- promotion of biodiversity and nature protection including Natura 2000 (Category 51);
- Risk prevention (Category 53);
- promotion of natural assets (Category 55) and
- protection and development of the natural heritage (Category 56);
- integrated projects for urban and rural regeneration (Category 61).

Typical measures that can be funded include: the elaboration of management plans, monitoring work and scientific studies, public relations and education, establishment of administrative structures, habitat restoration, tourism and recreational infrastructures etc...

In theory therefore the Structural Funds offer considerable potential for funding conservation projects related to Natura 2000. But in practice only a proportion of the Operational Programmes have identified nature and biodiversity conservation as one of their eligible themes for their region. Even when nature and biodiversity is included as a theme in an Operational Programme, evidence to date indicates that the number of actual projects being proposed and implemented is exceptionally low.

Project: Preparation of Natura 2000 Management Plans in Poland
OP: Sectoral Operational Programme Infrastructure and Environment
Budget: ca €6.5 million (80% from ERDF, 20% own funding)

This ERDF project has been funded to prepare management plans for 406 Natura 2000 sites in Poland. Each plan will set out the conservation objectives and measures required to maintain and restore the site in a good conservation condition. It will also aim to propose management solutions for the threats and perceived conflicts between conservation and economic development. The plans will be developed in close collaboration with local stakeholders and Local Cooperation Groups will be set up for this purpose.

Project: KRAJINA – Traditional use of Habitats in Natura 2000 on either side of the Hungarian-Slovenian border
OP: Cross-border Programme Slovenia- Hungary
Budget: ca €1.3 million (84% from ERDF, 16% own funding)

The Natura 2000 sites of Őrség, Goričko and Mura form a continuous ecological landscape of high biodiversity value extending over 420 km² across the border between Hungary and Slovenia. Recognising the need for a common management approach, this ERDF project was launched to manage the Natura 2000 sites and develop a sustainable landuse model for the whole area based on the natural, economic and social potentials of the area.

This will be achieved through a range of activities. The EU habitats and species will be mapped and machinery will be bought to help restore degraded grasslands (some of which will also be purchased via the project). Criteria for nature-friendly agriculture will be developed in discussion with local farmers and new agricultural and touristic products will be developed, accompanied by a local trademark to help promote local products. A range of awareness raising material and tourism brochures will also be produced to raise the profile of the region as a top nature friendly destination.

Project: Ecological restoration of Comana Wetland
OP: Sectoral Operational Programme Infrastructure and Environment
Budget: ca €1.8 million (67% from ERDF, 33% own funding)

The Natura 2000 site Comana Wetland is situated in Giurgiu County, Romania. Located along a major bird migration route, this complex system of reeds, meadows, lakes and forests provides excellent conditions for many endangered species such as the squacco heron or ferruginous duck. However, water management measures taken before 1990 have caused the area to become overgrown and desiccated, leading to a serious drop in wildlife numbers. The aim of this ERDF project is to restore the wetland to its former glory by improving the flow of water and ensuring the effective management of the different habitats. At the heart of the project lies the construction of a dam with a sluice which will allow large parts to be re-flooded. The project will be accompanied by an awareness raising programme and long term monitoring programme.



The EU LIFE+ Programme

The EU LIFE+ Programme (2007–2013) continues to play a strategically important role in supporting the management and restoration of Natura 2000 sites. It is the only financial EU instrument dedicated entirely to supporting environmental and nature conservation projects.

With approximately half of the money earmarked to nature and biodiversity, it aims to fund:

- best practice and/or demonstration projects which improve the conservation status of endangered species and habitats and which contribute to the implementation of the objectives of the Birds and Habitats Directives, and the Natura 2000 Network in particular;
- demonstration and/or innovation projects which improve biodiversity in the EU and which contribute to the implementation of the objectives of the EU's Biodiversity Policy to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity in the EU by 2020.

Since its launch in 1992, LIFE Nature has co-financed over 1100 projects across the EU at a cost of almost €1.5 billion. Although a relatively small fund compared to other EU funding instruments (currently ca €120 million a year), LIFE Nature's contribution to establishing and managing the Natura 2000 Network has been considerable and has clearly demonstrated that investing properly in individual sites leads to very positive results for both nature and the people living in the area.

In addition to improving the conservation status of a number of Natura 2000 sites, LIFE Nature has played a crucial role in engaging local stakeholders and communities in finding sustainable management solutions at a local site level and for raising the profile and acceptance of Natura 2000 where it is most needed.

It has also enabled innovative management techniques to be tested out and pump-primed larger and longer term

management commitments, for instance through the development of pilot initiatives that have subsequently turned into new agri-environmental schemes under the Rural Development Regulation.

"At the start we felt that N2000 sites would really limit what we could do with our land, but over time and with the support of many individuals and organisations, we began to see that N2000 also offered opportunities such as being paid to produce species-rich grasslands, farmer led tourist walks and food marketing. We're also starting to appreciate that N2000 is about protecting our farms, heritage and landscape for future generations" **Michael Davoren - Burren farmer and community activist.**



Farming for Conservation in the Burren

The Burren region (c.720km²) is a glaciated karst landscape located in the mid-west of Ireland. It boasts extensive areas of Natura 2000 priority habitats including limestone pavements, orchid rich grasslands and lakes known as turloughs.

The Burren's limestone grasslands were always in demand by farmers whose unique pastoral activities – including the reverse transhumance tradition of winter grazing – have been proven to be central to the presence of such a rich biodiversity. However, a distortion of the 'balance' between farming and the Burren in recent decades has resulted in serious conservation concerns: agricultural intensification has impacted on water quality, while a reduction in farming on rough limestone grasslands has resulted in extensive scrub encroachment. Livelihoods in the farming and the tourism sector were also threatened as a result.

Through an EU LIFE Nature funded project farmers, scientists, conservationists and agriculturalists worked proactively together to help resolve these problems and formulate a blueprint for sustainable farming in the Burren. Innovative ideas such as the development of new grazing and feeding systems were launched to improve habitat health without further compromising the financial viability of the farming system.

The success of this project led to a pioneering 'Burren Farming for Conservation Programme (BFCP)' funded through the Irish Rural Development Programme. BFCP is a targeted, farmer-led, output based programme which contains some real innovations such as a 1-page farm plan and a payment for the production of species-rich grasslands. Massively oversubscribed, the BFCP now works with 120 Burren farmers managing 12,887ha within Natura 2000.




LIFE+ Nature helps the recovery of the Atlantic Salmon in Scotland

The Conservation of Atlantic Salmon in Scotland (CASS) LIFE Nature project set out to significantly improve the natural freshwater habitat for Atlantic salmon on key salmon Natura 2000 rivers in Scotland. In a remarkable partnership eight Salmon Fisheries Boards, who are collectively responsible for 40% of the wild salmon resource in Scotland, joined forces with conservation agencies, hydroelectric companies and public authorities to tackle a series of threats on several major salmon rivers in Scotland. Eight rivers were chosen to demonstrate how a range of problems could be resolved through consensus with all parties concerned. The project also provided a major vehicle for raising awareness of the needs of the species both to managers and a wider audience.

Over 200 practical actions were undertaken at a total cost of around €4.5 million. They included amongst others the removal of 25 obstacles which resulted in 150 km of salmon habitat being opened up. Over 70,000 m² of juvenile spawning habitat was also improved and two of the rivers were gradually restocked over the lifetime of the project. Some 76 km of fencing was erected to control grazing by cattle and associated degradation of the river banks. This was accompanied by a programme of riparian management, including the removal of coniferous trees to reduce acidity, coppicing to increase light and planting of native tree species. The project also produced a guidance document on gravel extraction, which can lead to the removal of valuable spawning habitat in salmon rivers.





Natura 2000 sites provide a valuable source of income and employment through tourism and recreation

Looking to the future



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Lessons from the current integration approach

Experience so far with the current integration approach indicates that the available opportunities under EU Structural and Rural Development Funds are not exploited to their full potential. This appears to be due to a variety of reasons, including:

- **Competition between different policy goals:** Member State administrations responsible for identifying priorities for accessing EU Structural and Rural Development Funds often fail to include investments for Natura 2000, probably due to a lack of understanding of how this can contribute to the overall regional development objectives.
- **Insufficient consultation:** Responsible authorities for Natura 2000 are often not sufficiently consulted or implicated when it comes to drawing up operational programmes and deciding on the allocation of money under different sectoral funds.
- **Slow development of Natura 2000 management plans:** Slow progress in site designation has significantly delayed the establishment and adoption of management plans for Natura 2000. Without these plans or equivalent instruments, the authorities are often missing the necessary information to know how to invest in Natura 2000.

- **Lack of capacity and know-how to access EU funds:** Although knowledge about the European funds is growing, conservation organisations and authorities are still finding it difficult to get the necessary support for developing stand alone conservation projects.
- **High administrative burden:** The administrative capacity needed to develop projects and obtain funds can be significant, particularly where no pre-financing arrangements exist.

In light of these concerns, the Council of Ministers invited the Commission, in collaboration with Member States, to assess whether the current integration approach for financing of Natura 2000 has been adequate for the effective implementation of the network and to explore ways of enhancing the uptake of EU funds for Natura 2000 in the next financial perspective.



Operational Programme for Natura 2000, Slovenia

Natura 2000 sites in Slovenia cover over 35.5% of the country. Most of the land in Natura 2000 is forest (70.6%) or agricultural land (22.1%). The government decided that the most effective way of securing the conservation of these sites was to distribute the responsibility for their management amongst the relevant national authorities responsible for different sectors (including forests, agriculture and water).

It therefore adopted a national operational programme for the management of Natura 2000 for the period 2007–2013, which lays down the conservation objectives of each site, the detailed measures needed to reach these objectives and the sectors responsible for their implementation. By making horizontal links to other governmental programmes, the management of Natura 2000 sites has become an integral part of the country's rural and regional development policies.

This in turn enables it to access various EU funding sources. Half of the money needed to implement the Natura 2000 management programme (total cost €146.9 million) will come from ERDF (€57.3 million), Rural Development (€21 million) and LIFE+ (€16.1 million).

Adopting a more strategic approach to Natura 2000 funding

The effective management and restoration of Natura 2000 has a central role to play in attaining the EU 2020 headline target of halting and reversing the decline of biodiversity in the EU. In addition to securing the intrinsic values of nature this will also provide multiple ecosystem service benefits to society and help support rural economies throughout the EU. Adequate financing for Natura 2000 sites therefore needs to be ensured.

While discussions on the future EU budget beyond 2014 are still in their early stages, it is clear that a more strategic approach to funding Natura 2000 is needed. This would greatly enhance the possibilities for Member States to tap into EU funding, and would also be in line with Article 8 of the Habitats Directive, which foresees the development of a *"prioritized action framework"* by the Commission when sites are designated as Special Areas of Conservation.

It will be important in each region or Member State to identify and better use the potential role different EU funds can make in supporting the measures needed to achieve the effective management and restoration of Natura 2000 sites.

Partnerships will need to be fostered and stronger synergies encouraged with other sectors so they better integrate the relevant management requirements into their own policy documents and operational funding programmes. The use of innovative financing instruments currently under consideration could also be enhanced in this context.





