

The finalists for the 2018 European Natura 2000 Award are out! Vote now for your favourite!

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The European Commission's [Natura 2000 Award](#) recognises the time, dedication and efforts Europeans invested in nature protection within the Natura 2000 network of protected areas.

The Award aims to raise awareness about Natura 2000 and the role it plays for safeguarding our natural heritage and in promoting social and economic wellbeing.

Twenty-five finalists have been selected out of seventy-five eligible applications from across the EU. The selected finalists are from Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Luxemburg, Poland, Portugal, Spain and United Kingdom. They include several cross-border projects, involving also Turkey, and an EU-wide project.

Reacting to the announcement, Karmenu Vella, EU Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries said: *"I am delighted to see so many excellent achievements in protecting our European natural heritage. They clearly demonstrate the value that nature provides to Europe's economy and how our nature is at the heart of our culture. Vote now and give these remarkable achievements the recognition they deserve!"*

The finalists in five categories – Conservation, Socio-Economic Benefits, Communication, Reconciling Interests/Perceptions, and Cross-Border Cooperation and Networking – will now be assessed by an independent jury. Everyone is [invited to vote](#) for his or her favourite finalist to win the European Citizens' Award. Online voting closes on 22 April 2018.

The winners will be announced at a ceremony hosted by Commissioner Vella in Brussels on Thursday 17 May 2018. The event is open to the press and the public. Please [register online](#) if you wish to attend.

The ceremony can also be watched online on the [Natura 2000 website](#).

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Background:

Natura 2000 is the centrepiece of the EU's nature and biodiversity policy. Established under the EU's [Birds Directive](#) and [Habitats Directive](#), it is an EU-wide network of over 27 000 terrestrial and marine sites, covering more than 18 % of land area and 7% of the surrounding seas.

The aim of the network is to assure the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats. Well-functioning ecosystems provide benefits for human health, society and the economy. Natura 2000 provides an array of environmental advantages, while also serving a number of vital social and economic functions. In the EU, around 4.4 million jobs are directly dependent on healthy ecosystems, and a significant proportion of these

are situated within Natura 2000 sites. In addition, the financial benefits that flow from the network itself are estimated to be in the range of [EUR 200 to EUR 300 billion per year](#).

The European Commission's [Action Plan for Nature, People and the Economy](#) aims to improve the implementation of Natura 2000 and boost its contribution towards reaching the EU's biodiversity targets for 2020.

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This year, for the fourth time, the European Commission is recognizing outstanding achievements in the management and conservation in Natura 2000, the EU's network of protected areas. 25 finalists out of 75 eligible applications have been shortlisted. They include activities across all EU countries. Karmenu Vella, EU Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries said:

"I am delighted to see so many excellent achievements in protecting our European natural heritage. They clearly demonstrate the value that nature provides to Europe's economy and how our nature is at the heart of our culture. Vote now and give these remarkable achievements the recognition they deserve!"

The awards are given in five categories: Conservation, Socio-Economic Benefits, Communication, Reconciling Interests/Perceptions, and Cross-Border Cooperation and Networking. A Special Award – European Citizens' Award – will be given to the finalist who receives the highest number of votes from the citizens. Everyone is invited to vote on the [website](#) for his or her favourite finalist until 22 April 2018. The winners will be announced at a ceremony hosted by Commissioner Vella in Brussels on Thursday 17 May. The event is open to the press and the public, please register [here](#).