Discussion paper

PROTECTED AREAS

AND THE EUROPEAN STRATEGIES FOR CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION AND BIODIVERSITY

June 2021

EUROPARC FEDERATION

LIFE NATUR' ADAPT

"Climate change and biodiversity loss are the two sides of the same coin. Albeit complex, solutions exist and Protected Areas have an important role to play to tackle global challenges and build a sustainable society."

Ignace Schops,
President of the EUROPARC Federation

Lilleau des Niges Nature Reserve, France
Photo : Yann Werderfroy

WORKING TOGETHER TOWARDS CLIMATE RESILIENCE

The EUROPARC Federation represents thousands of Protected Areas in Europe. **Together, we seek to accelerate the transition towards a nature-inclusive and climate-resilient society** in order to safeguard a sustainable living environment in the future.

As recognised in the Green Deal, the Paris Agreement, the United Nations' Convention on Biological Diversity, and the United Nations' Convention to Combat Desertification amongst others, climate change and global nature loss and degradation are currently affecting the very conditions upon which human communities and wildlife depend.

As the best remnants of natural ecosystems, Protected Areas play an important and ongoing part in climate regulation and mitigation. Well-managed Protected Areas safeguard biodiversity, natural processes and ecosystems' services that are essential to support the adaptive capacity of ecosystems and communities. They offer natural solutions[1] to tackle these twin global challenges and actively contribute to the implementation of the *EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030* and the *EU strategy on climate change adaptation*.

Citizens' climate march, Nürnberg, DE / Photo : Marius Spisk

To address the twin challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss, two underlying needs must be considered:

1. Involve Protected Areas in spatial planning and climate change adaptation strategies at multiple levels of governance to :

- **Ensure and promote integrated, long-term and large-scale environment management**. It will support climate change adaptation in the field for the benefit of nature and dependent societies. Protected Areas network, including Natura 2000 sites, should be identified as keystones of this process.
- **Assess risks, costs and benefits of climate change impacts on socio-ecosystems at multiple geopolitical levels:** European, national, subnational, ecosystem, species. Understanding those risks will help balance priorities for action and support integration at different levels and across sectors.

2. Ensure concrete and coherent integration of biodiversity and climate change priorities in EU policies. As recent research[2] and experience in various sites show, the lack of integration may lead to conflicting objectives and inefficient or harmful actions.

[1] In this paper, we use the term 'natural solutions' rather than 'nature-based solutions' for climate adaptation and mitigation. It reinforces the idea that adaptation and mitigation are more likely to be achieved by protecting and restoring functioning natural systems. They can be described as complex, diverse and rich ecosystems where species, habitats and major cycles are allowed to regenerate freely without or with limited human intervention. It is critical to stress that restoring all types of ecosystems such as wetlands, grasslands, seas or oceans is as promising as restoring forests in terms of adaptation and carbon sequestration.

[2] CHANARD C. *et al.*, 2020. Place du changement climatique et de la biodiversité dans les documents de planification territoriale et les politiques intersectorielles LIFE Natur'Adapt - Rapport ACTeon environment. 64 p.

DISCUSSION

With this paper, EUROPARC would like to open the discussion across the "sectors" of biodiversity conservation and climate change adaptation and spatial planning among others. As a starting point, we propose two concrete recommendations to accelerate the collaborative development and implementation of natural solutions to address global changes and build a sustainable future.

1. Work together with Protected Areas on climate change adaptation and spatial planning to:

a. Ensure and promote integrated, long-term and large-scale environment management and spatial planning

There is an opportunity for spatial planners and policy makers to work together with Protected Area managers and local communities across all landscapes along the anthropogenic gradient[3] as solutions to both climate change and the biodiversity crisis overlap.

By protecting healthy ecosystems, Protected Areas have a fundamental role to play in building resistant and resilient territories, lands and seas, across Europe. Their managers will be central to designing and implementing efficient climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies at various geopolitical scales. They provide scientific knowledge, expertise and experience on how natural systems work and what they need to function properly. They also work daily with local stakeholders, propose innovative citizen-based land and sea management approaches and have the capacity to communicate widely. Nature conservation professionals can contribute to environmental management change that leads to integrated, long-term, large-scale spatial planning that secures benefits for nature and people.

School field trip - RNR des Tourbières du Morvan, France / Photo: C. Dodelin

How to help protected areas in a changing climate?

To maximize the contribution of Protected Area management teams in climate change adaptation, the legal framework ought to meet the needs of nature conservation professionals as expressed in an extensive survey conducted through the LIFE Natur'Adapt project[4]. Protected Areas should have access to financing dedicated to climate change adaptation as well as means to further involve local communities and their political representatives. There is also a pressing demand for capacity building and the development of knowledge on climate change adaptation and mitigation from a nature management perspective.

[3] Anthropogenic gradient must be understood as the continuum of human land-uses characterised by their level of wildness, namely urban areas, periurban areas, rural areas that include agricultural lands and forestry, nature protected areas and wilderness.

[4] DE SADELEER O., COUDURIER C., 2019. Intégration du changement climatique dans la gestion des espaces naturels protégés - Initiatives existantes et attentes des gestionnaires européens. LIFE Natur'Adapt - Rapport d'EUROPARC et de RNF. 24p.

b. Assess climate change vulnerability at different geopolitical scales and governance levels

In order to ensure beneficial strategic spatial planning and management of the environment, climate change vulnerability of socio-ecosystems has to be assessed at different geopolitical scales and governance levels, such as:

- European Union;
- Biogeographic regions;
- Member States;
- Regions or subnational;
- Municipalities and their associations;
- Protected Areas, landscape, catchment area and habitats, species.

Such assessments should take into account the network of Protected Areas including Natura 2000 sites. In the face of climate change, it is crucial to identify how ecosystems and communities will be affected, as well as how current policies are impacting landscapes, their adaptive capacity and their management.

The design, implementation and communication of adaptation and mitigation measures require regularly updated assessments.

Results of these climate change vulnerability assessments for both nature and human societies will enable to co-design balanced and integrated environment management plans across all sectors. The subsequent spatial planning will better support nature and Protected Areas' sustainability while well-preserved Protected Areas will, in return, better support ecosystems functioning beyond their boundaries to benefit human communities and economies.

Peatland,
RNR des Tourbières du Morvan, France
Photo: S. Blaysat

2. Work towards concrete integration and implementation of policies

Building upon the Green Deal, nature protection and restoration as well as climate change mitigation and adaptation are today included in EU relevant policies and strategies, structural funds and recovery plans. However, a better integration of those elements within national and regional policies and across sectors, is still required. Such integration would improve the often weak implementation in the field, which is currently contributing to the degradation of nature[5] Europe wide. In light of the effects of climate change on nature and communities, we strongly advocate that the European Commission consider the following:

The implementation process of the **EU Biodiversity Strategy**[6] **for 2030** should integrate plans that promote resilience to climate change, ecological continuity and complementarity[7] as key principles for the designation of new Protected Areas to reach the objective of protecting 30% of land and seas in Europe by 2030. Criteria for the implementation of the 10% strict protection target should in particular take those principles into account (§2.1).

The upcoming EU legislation - as foreseen in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 - to strengthen nature restoration (§2.2.1), should ensure the assessment and monitoring of climate change vulnerability at multiple geopolitical scales. In this context, it is crucial to raise the capacity and value the expertise of Protected Area managing authorities to ensure effective contribution - at local and subnational levels - to the assessment and monitoring of climate change vulnerability.

Protected Areas are ideally placed to contribute to meeting the goals of:

- restoring and bringing nature back to agricultural land (§2.2.2);
- managing land take and restoring soil ecosystems (§2.2.3);
- increasing the quantity of forests and improving their health and resilience (§2.2.4);
- restoring the good environmental status of marine ecosystems (§2.2.6) and freshwater ecosystems (§2.2.7);
- the greening of urban and peri urban areas (§2.2.8).

To do so, the new European biodiversity governance framework, as referred in the EU biodiversity strategy, should ensure a representation of Protected Areas managing authorities (§3.1) and that they are mandated to advise and contribute to the development, implementation and monitoring ((§3.2) of integrated land management and adaptation strategies beyond their boundaries.

The revised **EU Climate Change Adaptation Strategy**[8] pinpoints the opportunity to develop nature-based solutions to tackle climate change as one of its main objective. However, it should recognise the central role that the network of Protected Areas has to play in its implementation. Protected Areas are crucial nature-based solutions, or natural solutions, to preserve and restore local and regional socio-ecosystems. Being a keystone of the European green and blue infrastructure, they contribute to preserve rich and complex ecosystems on a large scale. Healthy ecosystems have greater adaptive capacity and provide us with services to tackle climate change impacts,

[5] State of nature in the EU. Results from reporting under the nature directives 2013-2018, European Environment Agency 2020
[6] "EU Biodiversity Strategy" refers to the Document 52020DC0380 released on May 20, 2020 by the European Commission and published on their website
[7] "Complementarity" is an important criterion that will help prioritisation at EU level and co-planning between member states. It helps identify which areas to protect to fill the biodiversity gaps that still exist at the European level. This approach will increase long term resilience of Protected Areas' networks including the Natura 2000 one
[8] "EU Climate Change Adaptation Strategy" refers to the Document 52021DC0082 released on 24 February 2021 by the European Commission and published on their website

such as through carbon sequestration (Action 2.2.4), water retention and storage or coastal defence for example.

Protected Area managers can also support governing authorities and the European Commission in advancing natural solutions to mitigate climate risks. (Action 3.3).

There is a need to mainstream climate change vulnerability assessments at multiple geopolitical scales or governance levels. Protected Areas teams provide knowledge, expertise and experience on how natural systems work and what they need to be resilient and robust in the face of climate change. Protected Areas can provide knowledge on climate-related risks and losses. They are able to contribute to the Risk Data Hub and Climate-ADAPT platforms (Actions 2.1.2 and 2.1.3).

Protected Areas, being unique places with lower human activities, they can provide baselines for the assessment of ecosystem services and measure impacts of climate change on natural systems (Actions 2.1.2, 2.1.3 and 2.4).

If involved at different geopolitical levels, Protected Area managers and nature conservation professionals can support the development and implementation of climate change adaptation strategies using their knowledge on the interdependencies of climate change, ecosystems and communities (Action 2.1.1).

Working with Protected Areas on adaptation strategies and sustainable land use will create opportunities for sustainable socio-economic development in sectors such as tourism, agriculture or fisheries that also benefit the preservation or restoration of biodiversity and resilient socio-ecosystems (Action 2.2).

We have highlighted how involving Protected Areas to achieve the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy as well as the biodiversity strategy. That alone will not be enough. Integration is key. The **Common Agricultural Policy, the Common Fisheries policy, the EU Forest Strategy, the 2030 climate & energy framework, the Farm to Fork strategy, the EU Health Strategy** must urgently and ambitiously support the development of healthy ecosystems at a European scale in line with the strategies on Biodiversity and Climate Change Adaptation.

A better integration of **project-based EU funding s**uch as the LIFE Programme, Horizon Europe or Interreg could beneficially provide opportunities to work on cross-sectoral projects and ensure a full integration with climate change and biodiversity policies.

Recovery (Covid-19) funds, EU structural funds and projects funding programs are crucial tools to incentivise the implementation of necessary changes. Contributing positively to tackling both climate change and the degradation of nature and biodiversity must be a precondition to accessing those subsidies.

The **Green Deal** mainly refers to nature and biodiversity in the context of climate change mitigation. In its implementation through specific strategies and action plans, adaptation must also be considered a priority as natural ecosystems and Protected Areas are directly threatened by climate change.

BRIDGING NATURE CONSERVATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

In conclusion, we call upon policy makers and governing authorities at all levels to involve and work together with Protected Area managers and local communities. It will enable them to address on the ground and in policies, both the climate and nature crises with the urgency, the focus and the means necessary.

By working together, we can reduce conflicts, inconsistencies and potentially harmful measures and develop powerful synergies. Involving Protected Areas and managing authorities for Nature Conservation at multiple geopolitical governance levels will improve climate change adaptation modelling, ensure integrated risk assessments and support the collaborative development of innovative spatial planning and land management strategies.

By protecting the intact nature that remains, restoring what is degraded and connecting what is fragmented, Protected Areas actively contribute to improve the health of ecosystems, ensure the provision of services in the long term and bring back the adaptive capacity of communities and territories to respond to the negative effects of climate change. Together, we can prevent our life-support systems from spiralling into collapse and build nature-inclusive and climate-resilient societies now.

Photo : NASA

About **this paper**

This policy brief is the result of the work of the EUROPARC Federation Climate Change Task Force, which was created early in 2019 in the framework of the LIFE Natur'Adapt project and as part of the EUROPARC Federation strategy. The objective is to translate technical nature conservation needs in the face of climate change into a strategic vision for Member States and European and governing authorities.

Members of the EUROPARC task force on climate change

We would like to thank the members of the Task Force who have actively contributed with expertise and rigour as well as endless enthusiasm.

- **Ainhize Butrón Mota,** Head of Climate Action Department, Ihobe: Environmental Corporation of the Basque Country Regional Government, Spain
- **Gerald Plattner**, Head of the Ecosystem unit, Austrian Federal Forests, Austria
- **Lorenzo Merotto**, Scientific technician, Area Marina Protetta Portofino, Italy
- **Myrthe Fonck**, Sr. Advisor Nature and Recreation, Puur Water en Natuur, The Netherlands
- **Santtu Kareksela**, Prioritization specialist, Metsähallitus (Parks & Wildlife Finland), Finland
- **Stewart Pritchard**, Nature Reserves Senior Adviser, NatureScot, Scotland, UK
- **Viorica Bisca**, Executive Director, Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority, Romania

We would also like to acknowledge the very rich and insightful contribution of **José Atauri Mezquida** of FUNGOBE/EUROPARC-Spain who is the co-author of "*Manual 13: adapting to climate change in planning and management of Protected Areas*".

Coordination: **Olivier de Sadeleer**, Project Manager, EUROPARC Federation and **Anne-Cerise TISSOT,** LIFE Natur'Adapt Lead Coordinator, Réserves Naturelles de France.

La Petite Camargue Alsacienne

About **LIFE Natur'Adapt**

LIFE Natur'Adapt is a collective learning process on adaptation to climate change in protected areas. In Europe, Reserves Naturelles de France, EUROPARC and eight partners have come together in this LIFE Climate Action project to support the integration of climate change into protected area management practices. Natur'Adapt aims to transform this challenge into an opportunity for innovation. www.naturadapt.com

About the **EUROPARC Federation**

The EUROPARC Federation is the largest European network of Nature 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, Natura 2000 sites, ... We are working on different levels to improve the management of nature parks in Europe to the benefit of nature and people. www.europarc.org

EUROPARC Federation, Waffnergasse 6, 93047 Regensburg, DE — Policy Office, Bvd L. Schmidt 64, 1040 Brussels, BE

Olivier de Sadeleer
Project Manager Climate Change
LIFE Natur'Adapt
EUROPARC Federation
Olivier.deSadeleer@europarc.org

Anne-Cerise Tissot
Lead coordinator
LIFE Natur'Adapt
Réserves Naturelles de France
AnneCerise.Tissot-rnf@espaces-naturels.fr

LIFE NATUR' ADAPT

LIFE Natur'Adapt is a 5-year project developed with the enthusiastic financial support of:

Life

OFB OFFICE FRANÇAIS DE LA BIODIVERSITÉ

MINISTÈRE DE LA TRANSITION ÉCOLOGIQUE
Liberté
Égalité
Fraternité