

Wilderness in Europe

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The European Parliament adopted by 538 votes to 19, with 12 abstentions, a resolution on wilderness in Europe.

Stressing that the effective protection and, where necessary, restoration of Europe's last wilderness areas are vital to halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010, the resolution makes a certain number of recommendations to the Commission and to the Member States.

Definition and mapping: the Parliament calls on the Commission to: (i) define wilderness, addressing aspects such as ecosystem services, conservation value, climate change and sustainable use; (ii) mandate the European Environment Agency (EEA) and other relevant European bodies to map Europe's last wilderness areas; (iii) undertake a study on the value and benefits of wilderness protection.

Developing wilderness areas: the Commission is called upon to develop an EU wilderness strategy, coherent with the Birds and Habitats Directives, using an ecosystem approach, identifying threatened species and biotopes, and setting priorities.

In order to develop wilderness areas, MEPs stress the need for the provision of special funding for reducing fragmentation, careful management of re-wilding areas, development of compensation mechanisms and programmes, raising awareness, building understanding and introducing wilderness-related concepts.

Promotion: MEPs call on the Commission and Member States to: (i) co-operate with local non-governmental organisations, stakeholders and the local population to promote the value of wilderness; (ii) ensure that tourism is handled with extreme care, in view of the well-documented damage which tourism has inflicted, and continues to inflict, on a great deal of Europe's most precious natural heritage.

Moreover, Member States are called upon to: (i) launch and support information campaigns to raise awareness among the general public about wilderness; (ii) exchange their experiences of best practices and lessons learned about wilderness areas by bringing together key European experts to examine the concept of wilderness in the European Union; (iii) place wilderness on the European agenda.

Better protection: the Commission and the Member States are called upon to: (i) devote special attention to the effective protection of wilderness areas; (ii) protect wilderness areas by implementing the Birds and Habitats Directives, the Water Framework Directive and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

Moreover, the Commission should: (i) detect immediate threats linked to wilderness areas; (ii) develop appropriate recommendations that provide guidance to the Member States on the best approaches for ensuring the protection of natural habitats; (iii) accept the Wild Europe Initiative, a partnership of several nature conservation organisations (including IUCN, IUCN-WCPA, WWF, Birdlife International and PAN Parks), with a strong interest in wild lands or nearly wild areas.

Wilderness and Natura 2000: the Commission is called upon to: (i) develop, in cooperation with stakeholders, guidelines on how to protect, manage, use sustainably, monitor and finance wilderness areas under the Natura 2000 network; (ii) give a special status to and stricter protection for wilderness zones in the Natura 2000 network; (iii) ensure that the Natura 2000 network will be strengthened further to become a coherent and functioning ecological network in which wilderness areas have a central place.

Moreover, MEPs call on the Commission and the Member States to work together to develop a robust legislative framework on invasive alien species that tackles both ecological and economic impacts arising from such species and the particular vulnerability of wilderness areas to this threat.

Climate change: the Parliament calls on the Commission to: (i) monitor and assess the impact of climate change on wilderness; (ii) set wilderness conservation as a priority in its strategy to address climate change; (iii) undertake research and provide guidance as to when and how human intervention can manage wilderness in order to preserve it.