

European Parliament resolution of 3 February 2009 on Wilderness in Europe

Texts adopted, 3 February 2009 - Strasbourg

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds(1) (Birds Directive),
 - having regard to Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora(2) (Habitats Directive),
 - having regard to the European Union's ecological network of special areas of conservation established by the two above-mentioned Directives, called the "Natura 2000" network,
 - having regard to the outcome of the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 9) to the Convention on Biological Diversity,
 - having regard to the report No 3/2008 of the European Environment Agency (EEA) "European forests - ecosystem conditions and sustainable use",
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety,
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- Whereas the effective protection and, where necessary, restoration of Europe's last wilderness areas are vital to halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010,
 - Whereas the target to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010 will not be achieved and the negative social and economic impact of biodiversity loss and declining ecosystem services are already being felt,
 - Whereas the European Union should build on current achievements such as Natura 2000 and develop a significantly strengthened and ambitious new policy framework for biodiversity after 2010,
 - Whereas the Birds and Habitats Directives provide a strong and workable framework for the protection of nature, including wilderness areas, from harmful developments,
 - Whereas the objectives of the European Union's biodiversity policy and of the Birds and Habitats Directives are still far from being properly integrated in sectoral policies, such as agriculture, regional development, energy or transport,
 - Whereas many wilderness areas provide important carbon stocks, whose protection is important both for biodiversity and for climate protection,
 - Whereas the impacts of invasive alien species on biodiversity constitute a particularly serious threat to wilderness areas, where early detection of invasive species may not be possible, and where significant ecological and economic damage may occur before action can be taken,

Definition and mapping

1. Calls on the Commission to define wilderness; the definition should address aspects such as ecosystem services, conservation value, climate change and sustainable use;
2. Calls on the Commission to mandate the EEA and other relevant European bodies to map Europe's last wilderness areas, in order to ascertain the current distribution, level of biodiversity and cover of still-untouched areas as well as areas where human activities are minimal (divided into major habitats types: forest, freshwater and marine wilderness areas);

3. Calls on the Commission to undertake a study on the value and benefits of wilderness protection; the study should particularly address the issues of ecosystem services, the level of biodiversity of wilderness areas, climate change adaptation and sustainable nature tourism;

Developing wilderness areas

4. Calls on the Commission 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;
 5. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to develop wilderness areas; stresses 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 such as the role of free natural processes and structural elements resulting from such processes into the monitoring and measurement of favourable conservation status; considers that this work should be carried out in cooperation with the local population and other stakeholders;
- Promotion
6. Calls on the Commission and Member States to co-operate with local non-governmental organisations, stakeholders and the local population to promote the value of wilderness;
 7. Calls on the Member States to launch and support information campaigns to raise awareness among the general public about wilderness and its significance and to cultivate the perception that biodiversity protection can be compatible with economic growth and jobs;
 8. Calls on the Member States to 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 and place wilderness on the European agenda;
 9. 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, calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure that tourism, even if focused on introducing visitors to the habitats and wildlife of a wilderness area, is handled with extreme care, making full use of experience gained inside and outside Europe on how to minimise its impact, and with reference, where appropriate, to Article 6 of the Habitats Directive; models where wilderness areas are for the most part closed to access (outside of permitted scientific research), but where a limited part is opened to sustainable high-quality tourism based on the wilderness experience and economically benefiting local communities, should be considered;

Better protection

10. Calls on the Commission and Member States to devote special attention to the effective protection of wilderness areas;
11. Calls on the Commission to detect immediate threats linked to wilderness
12. Calls on the Commission to develop appropriate recommendations that provide guidance to the Member States on the best approaches for ensuring the protection of natural

13. Calls on the Commission and Member States to protect wilderness areas by implementing the Birds and Habitats Directives, the Water Framework Directive(3) and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive(4) in a more effective and more consistent way, with better financing, in order to avoid the destruction of these areas by harmful, non-sustainable
14. Welcomes the review of the Birds and Habitats Directives with a view, where necessary, to amending them to provide better protection for threatened species and
15. Calls on the Commission to 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

16. Calls on the Commission, in cooperation with stakeholders, to develop guidelines on how to protect, manage, use sustainably, monitor and finance wilderness areas under the Natura 2000 network, especially with regard to upcoming challenges such as climate change, illegal logging and increasing demand for
17. Expresses deep concerns for European biodiversity policy due to lack of funding for management of the Natura 2000 network; in this context, calls on the Commission to prepare, as provided for in the Habitats Directive, Community co-funding for the management of sites in Member
18. Calls on the Commission to give a special status to and stricter protection for wilderness zones in the Natura 2000
19. Considers that rural development policy and the integration of environmental protection into the EU agricultural sector must be reinforced; judges, however, the Rural Development Fund insufficient to finance biodiversity and wilderness conservation in terms of resources and its programming and
20. Calls on the Commission to 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; stresses the need for coherent policies, in particular in the common agricultural policy, transport, energy and the budget in order not to undermine the conservation objectives of Natura 2000;

Invasive alien species

21. Calls on the Commission and 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;
Wilderness and climate
22. Calls on the Commission to monitor and assess the impact of climate change on
23. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to set wilderness conservation as a priority in their strategy to address climate
24. Calls on the Commission, in the context of climate change, to undertake research and provide guidance as to when and how human intervention can manage wilderness in order to preserve
25. Expresses its strong support for the strengthening of wilderness-related policies and
26. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and Commission, and to the governments and parliaments of the Member States.