

Europe's natural habitats under threat

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Credit: NP Neusiedler

Climate change, intensive farming and urban sprawl - are putting Europe's parkland and biological diversity under increasing pressure. The natural environment can only take so much pressure, before it becomes spoiled, and already, loss of habitat is threatening many species with extinction.

Natural parks play a crucial role in preserving Europe's biodiversity, which in turn provides economic, environmental, health and cultural benefits. Climate change and industrial activities are challenging European habitats,, which means that specially protected areas are also increasingly confronted with [environmental pressures](#). These areas urgently need to monitor changes, adapt management strategies and consider flexible responses to future developments.

Core zones and controlled natural zones in national parks or Sites of Community Importance (SCI) within the Natura 2000 network have been established to halt the [loss of biodiversity](#) by providing and conserving habitat space for a critical mix of species. Climate change will become an additional important driver influencing habitats and their quality in the next decades. New tools for nature conservation agencies will therefore be necessary, in order to monitor changes and offer flexible new responses to ongoing developments.

The Habit Change project, headed by the Leibniz Institute of Ecological Urban and Regional Development (IOER) in Dresden, Germany, will focus on adaptive management measures for habitats in protected areas of Central and Eastern Europe that may be affected by climate change. The main aims of the project are to evaluate, enhance and adapt existing management and [conservation strategies](#) in protected areas so they can pro-actively respond on likely impacts of climate change which threaten habitat integrity and diversity.

The protected sites covered by the project are managed as National Parks, Biosphere Reserves or Natural Parks with a focus on wetlands, forests, [grasslands](#) or alpine areas. The habitat-types of these reserves and their composition appear to be very vulnerable to climate change, and thus present an ideal opportunity for the project. Habitat Change will be monitoring impacts of climate and land use change with earth observation systems (EOS). It will be then able to model the [impacts of climate change](#) and provide an analysis of scenarios and assessment of risks involved. From these, the project will provide guidelines and tools such as the Adapted Management Plans (CAPMs).

In the last phase of the project, Habitat Change will provide information, guidelines and tools to preserve and strengthen [biological diversity](#) on the level of species and habitats. It will provide recommendations and guidelines for the managing of the natural parks and develop a web

based decision support tool with it.

Neither habitats nor climate impacts obey national boundaries. The need to conduct international comparative research in the field of [nature conservation](#) has been stressed repeatedly by many people who deal with this issue - scientists, state administration, protected areas' authorities and NGOs. Only a strategy reflecting transnational understanding may successfully face the challenges imposed by climate on habitat integrity. Transnational cooperation will allow for the transfer of knowledge and mutual exchange of experiences with specific types of threats to habitats. This is why international co-operation in all aspects of protected area management to further and improve and conserve Europe's shared natural inheritance is of utmost importance.

More information: HABIT-CHANGE Project www.habit-change.eu/

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