

Natura 2000 in forests – how to tackle implementation challenges?

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Natura 2000 is the core of the EU's biodiversity conservation policy, with the network of protected areas covering ca. 18% of the EU's land territory. Forests play an essential role for the network and Europe's biodiversity, with ca. 50% of the overall protected area under Natura 2000 being forests. Yet, comparatively little is known about the implementation of the policy in forests.

In a recent article, an international team of researchers led by Dr. Georg Winkel from the University of Freiburg, Germany, has analyzed the implementation of Natura 2000 in forests. Building on a rich set of social and natural science data, and an inter- and transdisciplinary discussion process involving scientists from different disciplines as well as EU, national and local stakeholders, they have identified five important challenges related to the implementation of Natura 2000 in forests: (1) the balancing of [biodiversity conservation](#) and timber production, (2) the integration of conservation (science) and local stakeholders' demands, (3) climate change, (4) lacking and less effective funding, and (5) conflicts related to other sectoral policies.

The analysis of these challenges builds the basis for considering possible pathways to tackle them. The paper proposes five such pathways: (1) a learning approach through better communication and transparency, (2) a pathway emphasizing the role of conservation science in developing management strategies and responding to climate change, (3) an approach of better integrating Europe's citizens in the design and implementation of the policy, (4) an approach highlighting the necessity

of an effective funding strategy, and (5) the vision to work towards an integrated European land use and [conservation](#) policy.

While these pathways are only compatible to a certain degree, the authors of the article nevertheless emphasize that probably all of them need to play a role in order to make the implementation of Natura 2000 in Europe's forests a success story. Altogether, the paper's systematic analysis of implementation challenges and future chances may be valuable to inform the current policy debates about the world's largest [network](#) of protected [areas](#).

"The implementation of Natura 2000 in forests: A trans- and interdisciplinary assessment of challenges and choices " by Georg Winkel, Marieke Blondet, Lars Borrass, Theresa Frei, Maria Geitzenauer, Axel Gruppe, Alistair Jump, Jessica de Koning, Metodi Sotirov, Gerhard Weiss, Susanne Winter and Esther Turnhout has been published in *Environmental Science and Policy*.

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