

Record-breaking number of European citizens call to protect nature

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Eurasian Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), Suomussalmi, Finland. Credit: Wild Wonders of Europe /Staffan Widstrand / WWF

Almost half a million people are calling on the European Commission to save Europe's nature laws – by far the highest number of responses to a

public consultation ever reached in the history of the European Union.

In May, environmental organizations including WWF launched the 'Nature Alert' campaign in response to the EU Commission's suggestion to evaluate whether existing EU nature laws should be changed. The campaign makes a compelling case for improved implementation and enforcement of existing rules set out by the laws – known as the Birds and Habitats Directives.

Alongside almost half a million citizens, over 120 environmental NGOs have sent a clear message to European decision-makers that EU nature laws should not be changed.

The laws protect over 1,000 key species and over 27,000 natural sites in Europe. They have been credited with saving a number of iconic species native to Europe such as the grey wolf, the white-tailed eagle and the common seal. As a result, the EU also now hosts the world's largest network of protected areas, Natura 2000, which covers almost a fifth of the EU's land area.

Research shows that the laws effectively protect key endangered species and threatened habitats, and contribute to the socio-economic development of local communities and regions.

In parallel to the public consultation, the EU Commission has consulted with a wide range of stakeholders including national authorities, land users, the business community and environmental NGOs. The vast majority of evidence submitted supports the Directives and points at the need for better implementation and enforcement and for increased funding for conservation. Very few stakeholders have called into question the Directives in their current form or requested a revision of the laws, except for a minority of farming sector players, the association of private forest owners and industrial fishing lobby.

At the other end of the spectrum, strong support for the Directives has been expressed by other businesses, notably the cement industry, electricity grid operators, organic farming and tourism among others.

"At a time when the EU is severely tested, this overwhelming support from all corners of the continent for Europe's nature laws demonstrates that people can get together and defend what really matters to them. Europeans care about their nature and the EU's laws that protect it. It is time for the Commission to listen to the evidence and draw up a plan for nature protection based on more funding and stronger law enforcement," said Geneviève Pons-Deladrière, Director of WWF European Policy Office.

WWF is a member of the Nature Alert NGO coalition alongside BirdLife, the European Environmental Bureau and Friends of the Earth Europe.

The official analysis of the public consultation, which closes at midnight on Sunday 26 July, is likely to be published in autumn 2015 and a final decision on the future of the laws is expected by June 2016.

Provided by WWF

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