

Vision

“Restoring landscapes for Life”

Context

Millennia of human occupation and land use have resulted in loss of the world's wild nature and degradation of natural ecosystems. Landscapes have been transformed through urbanisation, wholesale conversion of natural habitat to industrial farmland or mono-specific forestry, mineral extraction, drainage of wetlands, diversion and canalisation of rivers and overstocking of uplands.

Habitat loss and fragmentation are the principal threat to most species in the temperate zone¹. The mid-term review of the European Union biodiversity strategy found that 70 % of EU species are threatened by habitat loss and that the vital ecosystem services that nature provides, such as pollination, are decreasing², with massive costs to society³. The need to address the fragmentation of Europe's endangered landscapes is given added urgency and importance as a result of climate change.

There are many wild and wonderful areas worthy of conservation in Europe and it is vitally important that they are protected. However, the long-term future health of the region's biodiversity requires *reversing* human degradation through creation of landscapes that are extensive, connected and resilient. When exploitative activities end, barriers to recovery are removed, and nature is given time to heal itself, degraded landscapes can recover.

Pressures on land in Europe remain high, but there is growing awareness that our land and seas need to – and can – provide more than just food or timber: they are spaces for provision of essential ecosystem services (such as clean air, fresh water, carbon storage and ecotourism) and for the intrinsic value of nature to be appreciated. Throughout Europe, significant opportunities exist to restore biodiversity and ecosystem processes to large areas of degraded habitat.

The Endangered Landscapes Programme provides inspiration for a fundamental shift in the policy and practice of nature conservation. It introduces a positive agenda for action, and offers an exciting vision of hope for the future in which landscapes are enriched with biodiversity, establishing resilient, more self-sustaining ecosystems that benefit both nature and people.

What do we mean by 'endangered landscapes'?

Landscapes should (and can) be places where:

- Nature thrives, without the need for intensive and costly management, providing inspiration and enjoyment
- Ecosystem processes provide us with a sustainable supply of clean air, fresh water, food and fuel
- Natural habitats protect us from floods, storms and sea-level rise
- Wildlife can move freely as it adapts to climate change

Landscapes like this are endangered, as agricultural intensification, urbanisation, transport infrastructure, commercial forestry and other forms of 'development' have caused the areas we value for wildlife to become increasingly fragmented, and biodiversity has become confined to intensively managed islands of habitat.

¹ In Kettunen, M, Terry, A., Tucker, G. & Jones A. 2007. Guidance on the maintenance of landscape features of major importance for wild flora and fauna - Guidance on the implementation of Article 3 of the Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) and Article 10 of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP), Brussels, 114 pp. & Annexes.

² Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and The Council: The mid-term review of the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020. {SWD(2015) 187 final}

³ The opportunity cost of not reaching the 2020 EU biodiversity headline target has been estimated at up to EUR 50 billion a year (http://ec.europa.eu/environment/enveco/economics_policy/pdf/report_sept2011.pdf).

EU member states have recognised that restoration of degraded land must play a part in achieving the region’s long-term vision⁴ for biodiversity. Environmental targets in the EU biodiversity strategy to 2020 include the restoration of at least 15 % of degraded ecosystems⁵. Also, the Water Framework Directive has a requirement for ecological protection and the concept of ‘good ecological status’⁶. Member States “shall protect, enhance and restore all bodies of surface water” (Article 4, paragraph 1a (ii)). These policy commitments provide important reference points for the development of the agenda for action that the Endangered Landscapes Programme promotes.

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⁴ The 2050 EU Biodiversity Vision: By 2050, European Union biodiversity and the ecosystem services it provides — its natural capital — are protected, valued and appropriately restored for biodiversity’s intrinsic value and for their essential contribution to human wellbeing and economic prosperity, and so that catastrophic changes caused by the loss of biodiversity are avoided. <https://www.cbd.int/nbsap/about/targets/eu/>

⁵ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, The Council, The Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Our life insurance, our natural capital: an EU biodiversity strategy to 2020. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52011DC0244>

⁶ Good ecological status defined as being where “The values of the biological quality elements for the surface water body type show low levels of distortion resulting from human activity, but deviate only slightly from those normally associated with the surface water body type under undisturbed conditions”.

Restoring landscapes for life

- **Landscapes can be understood in terms of their position on a continuum of naturalness and human modification**, from urban and industrial areas (towns and cities), intensive agriculture and commercial single-species forestry at one end of the spectrum, to wild and relatively untouched landscapes in remote and sparsely populated areas at the other end.
- **The Endangered Landscapes Programme aims to move landscapes along this continuum in the direction of less human modification** – giving space back to nature so that ecological processes recover, ecosystem services increase, and species populations grow - and in so-doing making places – whether cities, forests or fens – more natural, richer in biodiversity and more dynamic, for the benefit of nature and people. The programme is not about recreating the past and taking things back to a time before human influence, but aims to restore processes, populations and habitats for a better and more sustainable future. It signals a shift away from ‘slowing declines’ and ‘no net loss’ to a more positive and creative agenda in which the *potential* of our land and seas is recognised.
- **There are many ways to move systems along this pathway** – from those that are more active (tree planting, species reintroductions, removal of dams and weirs) to more passive approaches (fencing to exclude domestic grazing, natural regeneration).
- **Sustainable conservation needs large areas.** If ecological processes are to create natural patterns and distributions of species, and if valued components are to survive without the need for intensive human management, then they need space. Many species at the top of the food chain, whether terrestrial, aquatic, marine or winged, need large areas to roam and forage. And ‘future-proofing’ our environment – building resilience to environmental trends and stresses like climate change – needs large areas and ecological gradients that allow species to move and adapt. In short, creating areas where nature can exist and thrive needs a large-scale, ‘landscape’ approach.
- **An ambition to work at landscape scale, rather than at individual sites, must recognise that there exists a mosaic of interdependent land uses**, and that the interests of diverse land users and landowners must be balanced – through connected and coordinated actions – in order to meet a variety of human needs and to avoid negative socio-ecological impacts. This is especially true in Europe’s varied and complex cultural settings.

Objectives and strategy of the Endangered Landscapes Programme

The Endangered Landscapes Programme is working to demonstrate and deliver an ambitious, hope filled, forward looking vision for the future in which landscapes:

- **Support viable populations of native species⁷ with capacity for landscape-scale movement;**
- **Provide space for the natural functioning of ecological processes, so reducing or even eliminating the need for intensive management;**
- **Are resilient to short and longer-term change (such as climate fluctuations);**
- **Provide sustainable cultural, social and economic benefits to people.**

The programme does this by:

- **Funding implementation of a suite of large-scale restoration initiatives** that will bring back nature and be sources of inspiration, models of good practice, and foci for lesson-learning;
- **Supporting participatory planning and development** of new and innovative landscape restoration⁸ initiatives;
- **Building capacity** nationally and locally, by facilitating the transfer of skills and know-how between individuals and institutions;
- **Sharing knowledge, lessons and experience** to help deliver strategies, policies and technical information required for creating sustainable landscapes;
- **Demonstrating** to decision-makers, through the initiatives that it supports, the environmental, social and economic benefits that are possible from the recovery of nature and ecosystem processes in Europe's degraded landscapes.

Biodiversity conservation through landscape restoration delivers significant benefits to people through the enhancement of ecosystem services. The programme's outcomes will contribute to:

- **Target 2 of the EU Biodiversity Strategy:** *By 2020, ecosystems and their services are maintained and enhanced by establishing green infrastructure and restoring at least 15% of degraded ecosystems.*
- **Target 14 of the Convention on Biological Diversity** (the Aichi targets): *By 2020, ecosystems that provide essential services, including services related to water, and contribute to health, livelihoods and well-being, are restored and safeguarded, taking into account the needs of women, indigenous and local communities, and the poor and vulnerable.*

⁷ Including, where appropriate, following reintroduction.

⁸ *Restoration:* In the context of the Endangered Landscapes Programme restoration refers to the process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged, or destroyed so that it functions effectively and can support characteristic assemblages of associated species. It does not imply a return to a previous historical situation.

Features of the Endangered Landscapes Programme

The Endangered Landscapes Programme works towards a vision for large-scale conservation, within Europe's varied and complex cultural settings, which restores and creates functional landscapes that are more resilient, connected and wilder.

Key features of the programme include:

1. **BIODIVERSITY PRIORITIES.** It focuses on addressing declines in Europe's native wildlife, at the same time promoting the significant environmental, social and economic benefits (including intrinsic values of wild nature) that healthy landscapes can deliver.
2. **COLLABORATION.** The programme encourages strategic collaborations, feeding experience, knowledge and information from on-the-ground project implementation into policy; building capacity based on shared experience of what works; and underpinning initiatives with a solid foundation of political, natural and social science and the evidence of what works.
3. **DEDICATED FUNDING.** A grant-making mechanism provides funding for projects that restore, create or improve landscapes, making them richer in nature, more resilient, and more self-sustaining. Grants especially target initiatives which move systems towards and beyond a 'tipping point' so that environmental outcomes are sustained by natural ecosystem processes.
4. **ENABLING ACTION.** It supports a programme of work that creates the conditions for landscape recovery including through capacity development, institutional strengthening, learning and knowledge-exchange, network development, impact assessment, good governance and engagement of stakeholders and decision-makers.

Grant-making by the Endangered Landscapes Programme

The Endangered Landscapes Programme awards two kinds of grants:

Project Implementation Grants

These grants fund teams implementing projects in Europe where the aim is to create areas that are rich in biodiversity and resilient to environmental change. Grants mainly support projects where teams are already established, plans developed and agreements have been reached among stakeholders, but where an injection of funding is needed to allow the project to proceed. Grants are typically in the range of \$1- \$5M and have a maximum duration of five years. Application is by invitation only.

Project Planning Grants

The Endangered Landscapes Programme recognises that the consultation, participatory planning, research, analysis and team-building required for landscape-scale projects takes time and money, and may present a barrier to the development of new and innovative projects. *With no commitment to fund the initiative after the planning phase*, these grants support the work needed to build alliances and prepare plans (and funding proposals) for exciting and innovative new landscape initiatives. The maximum that will be awarded for any one project is \$100,000 and grants last up to 2 years. Awards are made through an open call for proposals.

Characteristics of funded projects

Projects funded by the Endangered Landscapes Programme typically have the following characteristics:

Projects address biodiversity conservation priorities

The Endangered Landscapes Programme aims to help achieve a reversal in Europe's diminishing populations of many species caused by fragmentation of habitats and declining area of natural ecosystems. With limited resources allocated for conservation in Europe, projects are focused on addressing biodiversity conservation priorities.

Projects establish large scale, dynamic systems of continuous or ecologically-connected habitat

Larger sites contain more species than small sites; have proportionately less edge; have greater topographic, geological and hydrological diversity - facilitating species' adaptation to climate change (making them more resilient); and make it easier to restore and promote more natural geological, ecological and hydrological processes and the ecosystem services on which society depends. Larger sites also need less management per unit area.

Projects give natural processes increased freedom to create natural patterns and distributions of species

Landscapes can be arranged along a continuum of human modification from those that are highly urbanised to 'true' wilderness - largely untouched landscapes with intact ecosystems unmodified by human land use (usually only in remote and unpopulated areas). People and nature benefit where intervention creates functional spaces that give nature more freedom to exist and change in landscapes situated anywhere along this continuum (including in cities).

Projects help overcome one or more barriers to recovery, allowing ecological processes to reach a 'tipping point' beyond which they cascade and are more self-sustaining

Restoring ecosystems at large-scale may be prevented by one or more obstacles, be they ecological, financial or institutional (governance) related. Projects help remove these obstacles, creating conditions for ecological processes to then work with more freedom to shape the future landscape.

Projects incorporate innovative elements and provide opportunities to learn

Impacts will be maximised by making sure that projects are monitored effectively, designed in ways which optimise learning, and where new knowledge is made available and accessible so that experiences and successful innovations can be widely replicated.

Other project characteristics are described in the *Guidelines for Applicants*.

Enabling work on the ground

The efficiency and effectiveness of individual projects is enhanced where experience, knowledge, information and evidence is collated and disseminated; capacity is built based on shared experience of what works; tools and guidelines are provided that support best practice, including in monitoring and evaluation; and where project teams are connected with one another – delivering outcomes that are ‘more than the sum of the parts’.

The Endangered Landscapes Programme draws on the expertise, experience, networks and data of partners in the Cambridge Conservation Initiative, project teams and wider institutional collaborators, to support organisations working on the ground and to add value to individual projects. The programme facilitates an iterative process, in which knowledge, information and experience from projects helps build capacity and drive improvements in the practice of landscape conservation.

Enabling activities integrated into the Endangered Landscapes Programme include:

Advancing understanding, learning lessons: Projects funded through the programme provide a valuable opportunity to learn how to improve the process of restoration and share experience. The programme creates mechanisms to maximise this potential, including through provision of guidelines and building capacity for adoption of best-practice in monitoring and impact assessment of landscape restoration (environmental, social & economic dimensions).

Exchanging knowledge and making information accessible: Lessons and best practice for creating sustainable landscapes are exchanged amongst practitioners by establishing a ‘community of practice’ and through convening and facilitating outcome-focused workshops and symposia. Available evidence about restoration interventions is summarised, and made readily available through an open-access web platform, to support decisions about how to maintain and restore global biodiversity.

Building capacity: Capacity is built locally and nationally through publication of tools and guidelines, and through an innovative and interactive programme of peer-to-peer exchange and learning activities, including workshops, training courses and webinars for project teams (and others).

Stimulating change: The programme builds coalitions and convenes events with a broad-base of stakeholders to make the case for the enrichment and recovery of functioning landscapes. Projects are used as flagships to build support regionally and nationally. Cross-programme activities on culture and landscapes help connect people to places and build support for restoration at the local level.