



ENDANGERED LANDSCAPES PROGRAMME

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The Endangered Landscapes Programme offers an exciting and inspirational vision for the future in which European landscapes are enriched with biodiversity, establishing resilient, more self-sustaining ecosystems that benefit both nature and people.

The programme is funded by Arcadia, a charitable fund of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin, and is managed by the Cambridge Conservation Initiative.

**Cambridge
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PROJECT OVERVIEW

**WILDERNESS WITHOUT BORDERS:
PROTECTING ONE OF EUROPE'S LARGEST
NATURAL LANDSCAPES, POLESIA**



A vast region in the heart of Europe, Polesia is home to nationally and internationally-threatened wildlife including charismatic species like bison, bears, wolves and lynx. The area also provides critical ecosystem services, such as flood prevention in downstream cities, water for homes and industry and carbon storage. Polesia faces ongoing and increasing human threats including unsustainable hunting, mining and logging, unregulated harvest of berries and ill-advised infrastructure development. This project will secure official protection for key forest habitats, and restore degraded wetlands, thereby ensuring ecological connectivity between fragmented areas to create one of Europe's largest natural landscapes.

POLESIA

Bordering Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia and shaped significantly by the Prypiat River, Polesia is a massive lowland region covering more than 18 million ha. It is one of Europe's largest natural complexes, with habitats including transitional mires, fens, and marshes, raised bogs, wetlands, peatlands and ponds. Almany Mires, one of Europe's largest mires, can be found here, covering an area of 100,000 ha. The area also boasts one of the largest complexes of floodplain meadows and alluvial floodplain forests.

Polesia supports numerous species of nationally and internationally threatened flora and fauna. The yearly gathering of Eurasian wigeon and godwits on the floodplains of the Prypiat is the largest in Central and Eastern Europe, and the vast natural floodplain meadows and mires provide critical spawning grounds for many fish species.



PROJECT CONTEXT AND OPPORTUNITY

Anthropogenic pressures including logging, fires, drainage, unsustainable hunting and berry foraging, illegal amber mining, radioactive contamination (caused by the Chernobyl disaster of 1986) and construction of roads and pipelines are damaging the ecological integrity of Polesia. As a result, the connectivity between the area's nationally and internationally-threatened populations of mammals, including wolf, lynx and European bison, as well as several bird species, is at risk.

Regional and national policies are being developed, including a post-2025 regional strategy for protected area development in Belarus, providing timely entry points through which to halt this fragmentation and create an ecologically coherent network that restores, maintains and enhances the natural processes linking wetland and terrestrial habitats.



WHAT THE PROJECT WILL DO

This project will create a contiguous network of protected areas covering almost 1.4 million ha of ecologically functioning natural landscape in the heart of Europe. It will become one of Europe's largest protected natural wilderness areas, providing essential habitat to many threatened species.

To achieve its aims, the project will:

- Strengthen the protected area network within the core area of Central Polesia ("Prypiat Polesia") through ecosystem restoration and more sustainable use of key natural resources
- Protect 100,000 ha of currently unprotected wilderness through the establishment of new, or enlargement of existing, protected areas
- Submit a UNESCO World Heritage Nomination, to protect an area of at least 300,000 ha
- Improve connectivity across all of Central Polesia for large mammals such as wolf, lynx, bison, and brown bear
- Restore at least 6,000 ha of wetlands (mires, forests, oxbow lakes) affected by drainage, through rewetting and rehabilitation projects
- Introduce alternative, sustainable income options and develop a Polesia brand for local produce and handicrafts, to develop the economy, benefit local communities, and reduce the pressure on natural resources especially the harvesting of berries



PROJECT LEAD:

Frankfurt Zoological Society

PROJECT PARTNERS:

- APB-Birdlife Belarus
- Ukrainian Society of the Protection of Birds (USPB)
- Scientific and Practical Centre for Bioresources of the National Academy of Science of Belarus
- British Trust for Ornithology

...in collaboration with other key governmental and non-governmental organisations.

"The significance of Central Polesia for nature conservation in Europe is tremendous. It is a stronghold for large European carnivore and herbivore species and a key resting place for millions of migratory birds"

Viktar Fenchuk

FZS/APB Programme Coordinator for Belarus