



Which areas in the EU can count as Strictly Protected Areas?

Main outcomes of the EU-wide networking event on Strictly Protected areas in the EU Biodiversity Strategy (12-13 November 2024)

History

- Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 : Definition of Strictly Protected areas mainly focussing on non-intervention/ conservation of natural processes („*undisturbed natural processes*“)
- Commission Staff Working document (2022):

*In addition, strictly protected areas may also be areas in which **active management** sustains or enhances natural processes, **such as semi-natural grasslands** or some peatlands. In these cases, **management activities should be limited to those necessary for the restoration and/or conservation of the habitats and species for whose protection the area has been designated.** For example, mowing/grazing of grasslands would be considered compatible with strict protection if it is limited to the intensity needed for optimising the conservation value of the grasslands in question.*
- Workshop on defining Strictly Protected areas (Nov. 2024)

Strict area protection

- The Strategy requires that, until 2030, all remaining Primary and Old-Growth Forests should become „Strictly Protected Areas“.
- In addition, other ecosystems of high value for biodiversity, such as lakes, rivers and their floodplains, semi-open grazing landscapes, peat bogs, species-rich grasslands, etc.... can also become strictly protected by 2030.
- All Strictly Protected Areas should be of high biodiversity value, or at least they should be managed with the view to allow them to evolve into areas of high biodiversity value.

Strict area protection

- It is not the type of management that determines whether an area can count as strictly protected (ex. non-intervention, *rewilding* with large herbivores, prescribed burning, controlled grazing, conservation-oriented mowing or thinning, etc.), but the fact that it is fully dedicated to biodiversity conservation/restoration and exclusively managed for that purpose, i.e. without compromising with other objectives (as opposed to other protected areas where there is generally an integration with other objectives (30% target)).
- While extractive uses (minerals, wood extraction) are generally considered not to be compatible with strict protection, a clear majority of participants agreed that a limited harvesting of berries, mushrooms, angling or even hunting may be allowed provided it remains strictly regulated (e.g. licensed or limited to local communities) and provided these uses clearly remain limited to an extent where they do not harm the natural values and conservation objectives of the area.

Strict area protection

- The provisions in the Biodiversity Strategy for setting conservation objectives for all Strictly Protected Areas may have to be interpreted more flexibly in the case of „open outcome“ non-intervention or *rewilding* areas
- Areas with a limit in time for their strict protection cannot count for the 10%-target.
- No minimum threshold can be set for the area extent of a Strictly Protected Area. Areas can already be notified as Strictly Protected Areas even if further area enlargements are needed in the future to optimise their biodiversity outcome.
- While strictly protected areas may either be stand-alone areas or part of larger protected areas, those areas report as Strictly Protected Areas must always benefit from strict protection on 100% of their area.
- Only national authorities can report Strictly Protected Areas. Such areas must always be reported as geographical features (shapefile or GML format). The EEA will publish location and extent of all Strictly Protected Areas in an online viewer.

Thank you for your attention!



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