



"LITTLE SYDNEY"  
PROTECTING NATURE IN EUROPE  
HAINBURG, AUSTRIA 28-31 MAY 2015

# Little Sydney

## Protecting Nature in Europe

Donau-Auen National Park

Hainburg · Austria

28-31 MAY 2015

## Summary of discussions





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# Protecting Nature in Europe conference

Building on the legacy of the IUCN World Parks Congress 2014 and its major outcome, the Promise of Sydney; the “Little Sydney: Protecting Nature in Europe” conference was organized in Hainburg, Austria, to showcase and discuss original approaches and priorities for protected areas and nature conservation in Europe. With more than 200 key experts from five continents, Little Sydney proved to be one of the milestone international events on protected areas in Europe.

The conference was organized by IUCN/ WCPA Europe under the auspices of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management and the Donau-Auen National Park authority. The conference was made possible through the generous support received from the Rural Development Fund of the European Union, the French Ministry of Environment, the MAVA Foundation, the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, UNEP’s World Conservation Monitoring Centre and the Donau-Auen National Park.

## MIT UNTERSTÜTZUNG VON BUND UND EUROPÄISCHER UNION



MINISTERIUM  
FÜR EIN  
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Europäischer  
Landwirtschaftsfonds für  
die Entwicklung des  
ländlichen Raums:  
Hier investiert Europa in  
die ländlichen Gebiete



The IUCN World Parks Congress held in November 2014 in Sydney, Australia, identified and communicated inspiring solutions involving protected areas for some of the world's most pressing global challenges. Building on the theme “Parks, People, Planet: inspiring solutions”, the Congress articulated the vital role of protected areas in finding better and more equitable ways to conserve natural and cultural diversity, inspire people to reconnect with nature and demonstrate the value of natural solutions to our planet's challenges.

The outcomes of the IUCN World Parks Congress 2014 are captured in the Promise of Sydney, rather than the more usual declaration and action plan familiar from such major events. The Promise of Sydney is founded on four pillars, which include the vision for the future, innovative approaches, inspiring solutions and commitments from all sectors aimed to promote protected areas as important resources contributing to human welfare as well as biodiversity conservation.

Little Sydney was organized around four key themes: Reaching Conservation Goals, Supporting Human Life, Influencing Policy and Institutional Responses, and Partnerships, Governance, Capacity

Development and Resources; discussed through 20 working sessions. The Conference highlighted key findings from the IUCN World Parks Congress and discussed how to realize, bring out and implement those elements of the Promise of Sydney most relevant to Europe.

With more than 120,000 sites designated in 52 countries, Europe accounts for more protected areas than any other region. The positive impact of these networks is reflected in their value for the conservation status of species and habitats, yet pressures are increasing in particular from economic activities such as agriculture, transport and urban sprawl. The Natura 2000 network already covers 18% of the European Union territory; but further expansion and more effective implementation and management is needed to ensure that Natura 2000 sites meet their conservation objectives. Further efforts invested in the coverage, management effectiveness, and governance of protected areas and other conservation initiatives are essential, if we are to safeguard nature in Europe.

# Summary of key messages from Little Sydney...

## ...for PARKS in Europe

Strengthen systematic conservation planning and ambition for protected areas across Europe to ensure ecological representation and effective management, with a particular focus on Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA), geoheritage and marine areas,

Enrich diversity and resilience of protected area networks like Natura 2000 and Emerald sites emphasising connectivity opportunities through transboundary and wilderness areas and other corridors including restoration efforts as appropriate,

Improve protected area management performance through the application of IUCN Green List standards to protected areas and Natura 2000 sites, and promote the use of other quality and data management measures, including the standards within the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA)/Protected Planet.



## A snapshot of recommendations

Take full consideration of the IUCN protected area definition and primary management objectives for protected areas when considering other activities, including tourism and use of natural resources in these areas, focusing on habitat quality and ecosystem functions and processes which might include establishment of no-go areas

Align and integrate the IUCN Green List of Protected Areas with Natura 2000 and the European Diploma, and support it by a communication strategy to provide targeted improvements and capacity building

Promote the contribution of European data to the database of Connectivity Conservation Initiatives, including Transboundary Conservation Areas, Flyways and Waterways

In light of the upcoming UNFCCC meeting develop a global communication strategy around the Paris workshop recommendations for marine protected areas supported by a European Blue Society

Increase the effectiveness of Transboundary Protected Areas by going beyond “understanding” and reaching “cooperation” to promote joint management plans and joint planning, management and monitoring activities



## ...for PEOPLE in Europe

Enhance governance and management approaches that place protected areas at the heart of multifunctional landscapes,

Value and take into account protection of ecosystem services while managing natural landscapes with the involvement of different sectors, including agriculture, business and industry,

Strengthen cross-sectoral linkages between protected areas and other sectors, in particular health, tourism and natural resource uses and urban planning,

Reconnect people with nature: using protected areas as a powerful tool to create inspiring experiences which will trigger positive emotions with visitors and help to build a constituency for conservation,

Promote activities in protected areas to connect people with nature through experience and local action, including the involvement of youth groups and urban populations as part of “inspiring a new generation”.

A black and white photograph of a woman with a backpack hiking through a forest. She is wearing a dark t-shirt, a light-colored vest, and dark pants. She has a joyful expression and is looking towards the camera. The background shows dense trees and foliage.

## A snapshot of recommendations

Understand the role and economic value of protected areas contributing to health services and communicate this to decision makers

Establish an active online forum for “Healthy Parks, Healthy People” concept at the European level

Promote and design incentives for payment for ecosystem services and implement them in a way to avoid risks of the commodification of nature

Involve local communities in planning for tourism and conservation and ensure the appropriate allocation of costs and benefits

Communicate the values of nature to human welfare and livelihoods at local, national and regional levels

Engage and empower a new generation in conservation, including different social groups (migrants, refugees, low-income and disadvantaged communities...) following examples like:

- the establishment of conservation youth groups in schools, youth advisory board in protected areas, etc.
- internship/mentoring platforms to connect young people with protected areas and share lessons on youth empowerment
- targeted protected area activities for disadvantaged groups



## ...for PLANET in Europe

Strengthen policy advocacy and better integrate protected areas in spatial planning with other sectors for sustainable development, at local, national and EU level, in particular through the policies and incentives for economic growth,

Consider connectivity conservation and investments in green infrastructure as key tools in using natural solutions to support sustainable development,

Increase attention on economic valuation as a tool to emphasise the value of protected areas and natural habitats, and to make the argument for appropriate financial flows and investments in conservation,

Design and manage protected areas for change, including climate change. Use policy platforms to discuss climate change and other environmental issues as a forum to communicate and demonstrate the value of protected areas to address such challenges.

## A snapshot of recommendations

Protected areas and protected area agencies need to play a strong role in communicating the value of protected areas as nature based solutions helping people cope with climate change and other global challenges



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## ...cross-cutting issues through European policies and PA agenda

Mobilize support for strong advocacy for professional development standards and investment in protected area professionals through existing European frameworks and protected area agencies.

# A snapshot of recommendations

Develop and promote protected area and professional standards, as well as investment in people through existing European frameworks by:

- adopting minimum standards for management of protected areas in Europe to define what constitutes adequate and effective management, including Capacity Development standards, IUCN Green List of Protected Areas, IUCN WCPA Best Practice Guidelines, etc.
- maximizing the accessibility to professional programmes and/or promote practical training opportunities at the European and country levels

Establish EU/European occupational standards for protected area work (specialist and ranger levels) by setting quality standards for protected area professionals and register these standards at the country level in EU and non-EU countries, e.g. through the WCPA network

Improve the competencies and performance of protected area professionals, using existing European frameworks, such as Natura 2000/Emerald, LIFE, World Heritage, IUCN, EUROPARC Federation

Support and encourage protected area authorities to prioritize and institutionalize capacity development by developing performance review and professional assessment guidelines for Europe adapted to the country level

Help “bridge the generation gap” to benefit both young professionals and protected areas by preparing pilot projects on training and engagement protected area Young Professionals in management decisions

IUCN  
WORLD PARKS CONGRESS  
SYDNEY 2014



## A snapshot of recommendations

Maintain the non-regression principle in the ongoing process of EU Nature Directives “fitness-check” as the one prerequisite for effectiveness of all sustainable development policies, laws and regulations

Establish a Working Group on Natura 2000 under the coordination of WCPA Europe to stimulate and coordinate public consultation process on Natura REFIT

Strengthen implementation of the Nature Directives in order for Natura 2000 to meet targets

Upgrade the definition of conservation status of habitats with account to natural dynamics, succession and taking natural processes into account

Safeguard Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) and wilderness areas beyond Natura 2000 sites to enhance conservation of threatened species and ecological representation



Promote EU conservation directives and Natura 2000 regionally and globally as a useful framework for conservation of species and habitats



## A snapshot of recommendations

Investigate the potential of marginal and abandoned agricultural land as possible wilderness areas and promote policies to promote such use

Highlight the role of communal tenure systems in delivering conservation goals

Evaluate and promote the contribution of protected areas to health, wellbeing and livelihoods as an important contribution to the CAP reform



Ensure better coordination between EU networks of protected and conserved areas and international designations, such as World Heritage, MAB, Ramsar, European Diploma (Council of Europe), and Geoparks



## A snapshot of recommendations

Avoid duplication and promote synergies across conservation initiatives to deliver conservation objectives and ensure that funding is used effectively and efficiently

Assess and communicate the contribution of internationally designated sites to EU biodiversity policy to both European Commission and national governments by:

- setting up communication structures between the programmes and instruments at the European level
- exploring the potential for harmonization in reporting systems and formats to various international agreements
- mobilizing support to include national and site level experience into IUCN projects on multiple international designations
- developing guidance for harmonization of management in multiple designated sites ensuring communication between national bodies, responsible for different international agreements and instruments

# In conclusion



Protected areas can be regarded as one of the best investments that society, at large, can make to the future sustainability of the planet. This is only true if they are effective in meeting their conservation goals and maintaining the integrity of natural ecosystems, and when they are governed and managed justly and equitably to maintain their vitality in the face of threat and change.

In Europe, protected areas are, and must remain, at the heart of all nature conservation efforts if regional biodiversity targets are to be met, and development planning must be built on this foundation. What we invest in protected areas in Europe today will determine the success of our sustainable development pathway in the future.



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