

Ecological Networks and Designated Areas

What was expected from the ETC/BD?

The EEA's terms of reference on ecological networks and designated areas for the ETC/BD included:

- To contribute to the achievement of the 2010 target of halting biodiversity loss through assessments of trends in biodiversity with respect to physical planning (...)
- To provide information for EU policies, and for related conventions and international processes (e.g. the Bern Convention, the Ramsar Convention, the 'Environment for Europe' process, the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, etc.).

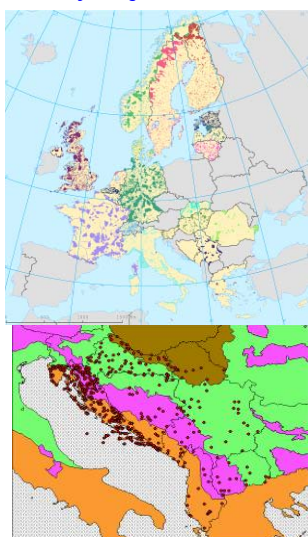
What is the wider context of the work?

- Europe accounts for the largest number of protected areas in the world, although many of them are small. This reflects namely the high degree of pressure on land-use by agriculture, transport and urban development
- Protected areas are recognised by the Convention on Biological Diversity as '*a vital contribution to the conservation of the world's natural and cultural resources. Their values range from the protection of natural habitats and associated flora and fauna, to the maintenance of environmental stability of surrounding regions. Protected areas can provide opportunities for rural development and rational use of marginal lands, generating income and creating jobs, for research and monitoring, for conservation education, and for recreation and tourism*'
- The EU considers protected areas fundamental in safeguarding biodiversity and integrating nature conservation into other EU policies (agriculture, transport and regional development). The NATURA 2000 network is the EU ecological network of protected areas; it covers over 17% of the EU's land territory and significant marine areas
- The importance of protected areas and ecological networks to achieving the 2010 target and the three objectives of the CBD was emphasised during the Third "Biodiversity in Europe" Pan-European Conference of Ministers (Madrid 2004)
- With the broad range of ecosystems and biogeographic and socio-economic contexts they cover, ecological and biological data from protected areas provide an important dataset for integrated spatial assessments in a context of rapid land use and climate change.

What has been achieved?

Compiling and harmonising data on protected areas in Europe:

[Nationally designated areas - CDDA](#)



[Natura 2000 network](#)

[Emerald sites \(W Balkans\)](#)

- As part of the EIONET priority data flow, data on nationally protected areas is collated: 85 000 sites from 37 countries are now recorded, including site boundaries for 25 countries. This is a major contribution to the [World Database on Protected Areas](#)
- In support to the European Commission' Natura 2000 database data has been collated on more than 25 000 sites, with information on species and habitats. This is one of the most comprehensive harmonised dataset for biodiversity across Europe
- As part of a CARDS programme and in collaboration with the Council of Europe, assistance has been provided in the compilation of information on Emerald sites in the West Balkan countries. This is a major achievement for these countries in the framework of the Bern Convention

Reviewing experiences on ecological networks

- In collaboration with Council of Europe, the ETC/BD has undertaken an extensive review of initiatives at national, regional, trans-national level on ecological networks, as part of the reporting on the implementation of the Kiev Resolution on biodiversity, related to the implementation of a '[Pan-European Ecological network](#)'. The report is presented at the Pan-European Conference of Ministers, in October 2007, in the framework of the "Environment for Europe" process.

Ensuring the availability of harmonised data sets for integrated assessments and specific synthesis

- As part of the EEA integrated platform for spatial assessment of land use, water and biodiversity, datasets on Natura 2000 and on nationally designated areas are being used for analysis such as: urban and agricultural temperature, connectivity, core areas within a green background infrastructure
- The dataset on Nature 2000 sites is regularly used in various RTD projects including projects on climate change and ecological networks
- By providing a quality checked data set on nationally designated areas, the ETC/BD has made a significant contribution to the COST Action E27 on Protected Forest Areas in Europe (PFAs). This project aimed at analysing and harmonising the concept of PFAs thereby supporting the development of indicators under the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe.

Streamlining data flow on protected areas by collaborating with international organisations

- The ETC/BD has made a large contribution to developing the joint project on a Common Database on Designated Areas between the EEA, the World Conservation Monitoring Centre and the Council of Europe. This collaboration is considered by UNEP-WCMC as a model which could be applied to other regions of the world
- The ETC/BD has facilitated a collaboration between the EEA and the Ramsar Bureau (to streamline the reporting by countries of digitised information on wetlands of European importance.

What are the main challenges ahead?

- It is important to 'make a case' on European protected areas during the next World Conservation Union congress in Barcelona, October 2008
- Major input from the EEA-ETC/BD is expected for the 1st Conference on «European Implementation of the CBD Work-Programme on Protected Areas, taking into account the Ecosystem Approach », to be organised by the EU Presidency at the start of 2009
- Complete the gaps in CDDA coverage by EEA countries and ensuring the completeness of the dataset at pan-European level through active collaboration with UNEP-WCMC and Council of Europe
- To evaluate the effectiveness of protected areas and ecological networks in particular in the perspective of rapid land use and climate changes.

What have we learned from our experience?

The ETC/BD has significantly contributed establishing a structured and regular data flow on protected areas in Europe. There is still little information available on the ecological components of sites, at least for nationally designated areas, which represents a limitation for integrated assessments on biodiversity trends. The process for developing biodiversity indicators to assess the 2010 target, including indicators on protected areas may be an important driver to further streamline such information.