

Green Infrastructure for Europe: The Southwestern Carpathians – “Europe’s Wilderness”



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1 million

THE SOUTHERN
CARPATHIANS INCLUDE
1 MILLION HECTARES
OF EXISTING
PROTECTED AREAS

WHAT IS GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE?

Europe is densely populated, with much of its land intensively used and fragmented. As a result, the continent has lost many habitats and ecosystems, and with them a host of valuable ecosystem goods and services. The idea of “green infrastructure” is to reconnect and restore nature areas in order to improve the overall quality of the countryside and urban areas while delivering valuable services to society like fresh water, clean air, healthy soil, flood control, fish and fowl.

In contrast to most “grey” infrastructure such as motorways, bridges, water and sewage treatment plants, “green” infrastructure provides multiple benefits: wetland areas for example help mediate floods and droughts, purify water, provide vital nurseries for fish and habitats for other animals, but also are areas for rest and recreation.

Recognising these benefits, the EU and member states have recognized Green Infrastructure as an important tool for conserving biodiversity as well as for regional development, water management and adapting to climate change¹.

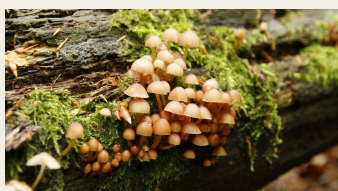
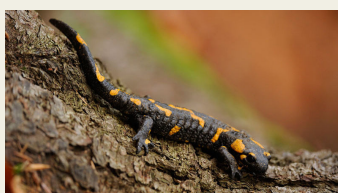
¹ EC Communication: Green Infrastructure – Enhancing Europe’s Natural Capital, COM(2013) 249 final.
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/ecosystems/index_en.htm

Europe’s Wilderness

The Southern Carpathians, which stretch across Romania and across the Danube into Serbia, cover a vast area of more than 1.4 million ha. They include some of the most valuable areas of the entire Carpathian range, including virgin and old growth forests that are home to brown bears and other large carnivores. The area includes the spectacular Iron Gates, where the Danube pushes through the Carpathians between Serbia and Romania. It also includes an area between Retezat and the Iron Gates that has been identified by Greenpeace as the last major intact forest landscape in Europe outside of Scandinavia and Russia. Settlements are scarce, with low human impact and activities in its “core” areas, based mainly on sustainable use of natural resources and services.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE FOR EUROPE

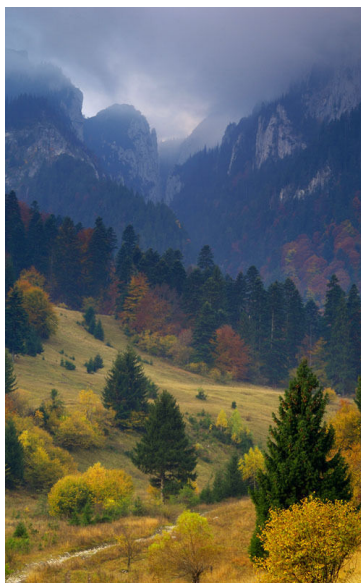
The Southern Carpathians wilderness is important for securing Europe’s natural wealth, both as important habitats and corridors for migration. The ancient forests provide not only vital homes for brown bears and other animals, but also a host of benefits for people, from climate and water regulation to erosion control and carbon sequestration.



They also provide local people with livelihoods based mainly on sustainable use of natural resources and services.

The area is almost entirely covered by an extensive network of protected areas of different IUCN categories and Natura 2000 sites, including jewels such as Retezat, Domogled and Piatra Craiului National Parks.

1 million ha



WWF’s aim is to preserve this unique area by enhancing its protection and management while promoting related opportunities for local development. A large, core wilderness area will be secured surrounded by areas with natural habitats and landscapes shaped by traditional land-use practices, e.g. transhumance activities of livestock or small-scale, extensive agricultural practices. Visitors will have the unique opportunity to wander for days, experiencing only the wonders and spirit of nature interrupted at times by a harmonious presence of herding the livestock of local communities. Small villages or settlements will provide shelter and food to those who would like to rest and learn about local culture and traditions.

WWF is working with authorities and stakeholders to develop coordinated management for the existing protected areas; promote new ideas and management measures to secure the core wilderness areas and low impact activities in surrounding areas; build capacity on wilderness/natural landscape management for protected area managers and for land and natural resource managers; and promote the area as one of Europe’s premier ecotourism destinations.



Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet’s natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

wwf.panda.org/dcpo

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