

Press release

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CONSERVATIONISTS: INVESTMENT AT NORMAFA NATURA 2000 SITE (BUDAPEST) THREATENS NATURAL VALUES

Environmental and nature conservation NGOs have prepared an [expert study](#) on the expected conservation impacts of the so-called 'Normafa-project'. The project aims to create a ski and leisure centre in a Natura 2000 site in Buda Hills, just at the edge of Budapest. According to the civil organisations the planned project poses considerable conservation risks, and it is conflicting both Hungarian and EU legislation.

Joining the European network of conservation areas, known better as Natura 2000, was one of the preconditions of Hungary's EU accession. Only ten years later, Hungary risks already the second conservation site under EU conservation regulations – after the destruction of a Natura 2000 habitat during an Audi investment.

Normafa and the surrounding area is part of Buda Landscape Conservation Area, and it is one of the last strongholds of biodiversity in the Hungarian capital. It is a special site, as it is one of the most valuable mosaic of natural and close-natural habitats in the central part of the country, thus having also national and international importance.

Should the project be implemented, irreplaceable natural values, protected and strictly protected plant and animal species will be threatened directly. The most important one is a strictly protected butterfly, the Damon Blue (*Polyommatus damon*), which is in the Hungarian Red Book, and that has the last remaining habitat in Hungary exactly at Normafa. Its conservation, therefore, is a conservation priority.

Sport and conservation got along well in the early 20th century, when skiing and sledging became popular, as the population of Budapest was around 1 million and skiing was a hobby of relatively few people. In addition, hay making manually to maintain ski pistes strongly supported the survival of biodiversity. Recent plans targeting significantly more people result in considerably heavier pressure on the area. In addition, modern methods preparing ski pistes for use cannot even be compared to the old-style, nature-friendly skiing. It is now in the preparatory documents of the project that even the recent number of visitors cause significant disturbance to plant and animal species. The project will further increase the environmental, conservation and social problems, as it will affect the area not only directly, where the investment takes place, but also indirectly affecting the neighbouring areas as a collateral impact (e.g. increased noise and pollution level from traffic, draining problems in the lower laying districts, when the snow melts, etc.).

Alpine ski centres are not a match to Normafa project, as some wish to suggest. One fundamental difference is that previous ones are located within large alike habitats. Thus the regeneration of the intensively used ski pistes' habitats is ensured by the plants and animals living in the adjacent areas. In case of Normafa, with an extremely small-sized area combined with special microclimate, the regeneration of flora and fauna is impossible, therefore the survival of the rare communities is very questionable – in case the project will be implemented.

Apart from the conservation concerns, the project is not harmonising the Hungarian conservation legislation – for that attempts are being made in these days to exempt the project from that legislation.

According to the organisations listed above, the project as it is planned now, threatens the natural values of Normafa, and at the same time it is conflicting national and international legislation. Therefore, signatory organisations considers the project very harmful in its recent form and they do



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not support it. As a solution, in order to meet the demand for recreation activities at Normafa, they propose to implement nature-friendly development plans – with special regard to environmental education – that do not jeopardize the long-term survival of our common natural heritage. They also suggest that from the amount to be spent on the development of Normafa, the government should support the development of other, already existing ski centres that can be maintained more economically and more environmentally friendly, and they should be made available for the broader public.

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Further information:

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Organisations contributing to the study and responsible persons:

- ⌚ Budakörnyéki Natúrparkért Egyesület (András Weiperth, secretary)
- ⌚ Greenpeace (Zsolt Szeghalmi, CEO)
- ⌚ MME/BirdLife Hungary (Gergő Halmos, CEO)
- ⌚ Védegylet (András Visnyovszky, expert)
- ⌚ WWF Hungary (László Gálhidy, manager of forest conservation programme)