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## Recommendations for an EU Green Infrastructure Strategy

### GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Europe is the most fragmented continent today, which is not only under great pressure from habitat fragmentation, but also from the intensive use of its ecosystems. As a result European ecosystems are used beyond their carrying capacities and many of the ecosystem services they deliver are degraded, which has far reaching consequences both for the European economy and the wellbeing of its citizens. Consequently the most important goal of the EU Green Infrastructure Strategy should be to maintain and if possible, enhance the natural functions of ecosystems.

To achieve that, all kinds of anthropogenic pressures on ecosystems need to be reduced to the limits of the carrying capacity by targeting their common socio-economic drivers. If the drivers remain untouched, the pressures on ecosystems will be regenerated all the time. This was exactly the case with the European Union's efforts to halt biodiversity loss by 2010, which failed because its numerous measures were ultimately end-of-pipe solutions. Ensuring the favourable conservation status of Natura 2000 species and habitats, also through ensuring their connectivity is necessary, but not enough; we also have to work at the wider landscape level. Thus the GI Strategy should be part of and contribute to a holistic environmental policy, which can tackle the overuse of ecosystems and natural resources.

### SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- The GI Strategy should aim to limit further degradation of green areas, and stand for the largest possible reconstruction of natural cover through setting targets and introducing incentives.
- The GI Strategy should adopt a complex landscape-approach and contribute to an overall land-use shift from intensive to sustainable land use. The GI Strategy should set a roadmap for the preparation of an incentive system for this, e.g. in the form of an innovative land use quota scheme, which can ensure sustainable land use in the long term through the system of selling and buying land use rights to comply with stricter and stricter annual national targets.
- The GI should be deliberately created, designated and preserved. Under GI we understand elements of spatial structure, both at small and large scale, which enhance

biological and landscape diversity as well as support ecosystem services of (semi-)natural landscapes.

- Natura 2000 should be at the heart of Green Infrastructure in order to leverage the mutually valuable aspects. Green Infrastructure should connect Natura 2000 sites, by developing ecological corridors and restoring degraded natural habitats in order to enhance connectivity.
- Besides Natura 2000, GI should contribute to the restoration of natural elements of the wider landscape, resulting in its enhanced naturalness and better permeability for native species.
- The GI Strategy should set targets and indicators as well as a baseline of natural land cover against which GI effectiveness should be measured as the natural land cover increases. In addition to a group of general EU targets, specific national targets are necessary, which can respond to their specific situation (e.g. landscape structure, road network). MSs should be involved in the preparation of this from the early phase.
- The GI Strategy should ensure that the legal basis and criteria for wilderness is created on EU level, a wilderness register is compiled and the first 'EU wilderness' areas are designated. The GI Strategy should set clear and measurable EU and national wilderness targets (e.g. the Czech NGO Hnutí DUHA, Friends of the Earth CR have initiated a discussion in the Czech Republic about re-wildening 3% of its territory).
- The concept and objectives of GI should be integrated into other relevant EU policies, such as the Common Agricultural Policy, Cohesion Policy, the formulating EU Strategy on Invasive Alien Species, and last but not least the GI Strategy should be an integral element of a holistic 7<sup>th</sup> EAP as well.
- Also, the GI Strategy and other EU nature legislation (WFD, HD, etc.) should be complementary.
- GI should be also integrated into other policies on national level with special focus on spatial planning. Efforts of national initiatives, such as the National Ecological Networks, Green Belt, etc. need to be acknowledged and they should form integral part of the GI in order to avoid possible duplication.
- At this very early stage, a financial model needs to be worked out for support of the GI implementation with the view of including it in the discussion of the new EU financial perspective. Besides it should be discussed if a Green Infrastructure Directive is necessary to provide the legal background for the implementation.
- Special emphasis needs to be put on the cross-border elements of GI, that the objectives, management and reporting are harmonised.
- Integration into the CAP should ensure that agricultural systems become more sustainable and balanced between the provision of food and many other goods and services at the same time.
- The GI Strategy should support the EU's climate change mitigation target by avoiding C emission from forestry. Recent scientific studies have shown that C sequestration and storage is, in the long-term, significantly higher in non-managed forests or forests under sustainable management than those with intensive use, especially if we calculate with dead biomass and soil carbon. Therefore, old-growth forests should go under non-intervention management, and all further natural forests should be managed in a sustainable way. Also techniques should be applied within the CAP that enhance the soil's natural productive capacity through increasing its soil organic carbon (SOC). Enhanced SOC content increases carbon sequestration, water and nutrient retention and decreases the risk of erosion, therefore contributes to climate change mitigation and adaptation as well as to long-term food security.

- Restoring natural habitats should play a key role both in the mitigation and ecosystem based adaptation measures to climate change, therefore, this should form one of the main focus-points of Green Infrastructure. Key measures include the restoration of water-based ecosystems, especially floodplains, peatlands and wetlands to enable their natural water retention capacity (against both droughts and floods); allowing the natural dynamics of habitats (resulting in a heterogenic structure hosting micro-habitats from different succession stages, especially valid for forestry), restoring connectivity between fragmented sites to enable species' migrations.
- Integration of GI into development planning under the regional policies should be ensured in the early phases. As far as possible, the positive and negative impact of planned developments on ecosystem services should be included in the cost-benefit analyses also in monetary terms, which can ensure that public funds are used for the best options to deliver essential services for the citizens. (As an example for delivering services in a cost effective way, the floodplain revitalization and landscape-scale integrated water management (handling drought and flood jointly) should be acknowledged and supported.) On the other hand, biodiversity *per se* should be important on its own right due to its intrinsic values and not only due to the economic value derived by ecosystem services that provide human benefits. Therefore, a biodiversity check should be pre-condition for all EU funded projects.
- The GI Strategy should also acknowledge that raising environmental awareness is necessary. Local interest should be promoted and advocacy should be strengthened in order to prohibit potentially harmful investments with on the ground cooperation.

CEEweb for Biodiversity is a network of non-governmental organizations in the Central and Eastern European region. Our mission is the conservation of biodiversity through the promotion of sustainable development.