



Ecological Restoration in Europe: Fiction or reality?

THE SOCIETY FOR ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION URGES PRIORITY ACTION

FOR ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION THROUGHOUT EUROPE

Belgium, 12 September 2008 – About 500 experts from more than 40 countries concluded at the 6th European Conference on ecological restoration SER2008(*) that present measures for the restoration of Europe's natural capital need to be strengthened considerably.

Several European experts presented their point of view at the conference and are available for interviews to go further into detail locally on the European conclusions below. Interviews with SER representatives, keynote speakers or other experts who participated in the conference can be arranged by contacting Kris.Decler@inbo.be, +32 476 50 50 11

1. Less than 50% of the species and habitat types protected by the EU Habitats Directive are in favourable conservation status

From the first results of the EU member states reports to the European Commission in 2007 it was concluded that less than 50% of the species and habitat types protected by the EU Habitats Directive are in favourable conservation status. Species-rich grasslands, bogs, mires and fens, freshwater habitats and dunes are amongst the most endangered habitat types. Member state statistics can be downloaded from: <http://biodiversity.eionet.europa.eu/article17>.

More information: keynote Rania Spyropoulou (European Environmental Agency, DK).

2. The monetary value of ecosystem functions globally amount around 32,349 billion US dollar per year

It is obvious that ecosystems provide essential ecological services to mankind, such as water regulation, carbon sequestration, air- and water-purification, natural resources (wood, fish), recreational and tourism benefits and spiritual health. The monetary value of ecosystem functions globally amount around 32,349 billion US\$ per year. Many economic studies became available which show that expenditures on ecological restoration can not be seen as simply financial costs, but merely represent an investment with in the end a large socio-economic return. Natural and semi-natural ecosystems represent a considerable economic capital but in conventional economic theory and practice are not valued enough as such. The benefits of ecosystem conversion generally go to private owners while the costs (in terms of reduced or lost services) are burdened upon



society at large, including future generations. A shift is necessary from a society that is used to make damage-payments to a society that invests in ecosystem restoration and built-up of Natural Capital instead of depleting it. It is estimated that implementing the Natura 2000 Network in Europe will create about 125,000 jobs and bring benefits through restored ecosystem services far exceeding the necessary investment of 6 billion euros per year.

More information: keynote Rudolf De Groot (Wageningen University, NL) and Storm Cunningham (Resolution Fund, USA).

3. Stakeholder engagement and building partnerships are key factors for successful ecological restoration.

In the different EU-member states more investments are needed to support communication and cooperation between local groups and movements (e.g. nature conservationists, farmers, foresters, fishermen, recreation people, landowners) with different perceptions or visions of nature. (Re-)establishment of trust between these groups with a focus on possible mutual ecological and socio-economical benefits is necessary to facilitate ecological restoration and overcome conflicts. Compensation measures in case of loss of private income are a fair solution in the pursuit of a sustainable, ecologically healthy society, common ecosystem services and the right of future generations to inherit a beautiful natural environment. Also care is needed to ensure that the top-down (European Commission to member state to local community) and bottom-up community-driven approaches mesh as much as possible. More information: Jozef Keulartz (Wageningen University, NL).

4. An ecological restoration strategy for Europe can not rely on the implementation of the Natura 2000 network alone.

In order to adapt for the impact of global climate change and to allow migration of species between fragmented Natura 2000 areas, stepping-stones, robust nature corridor areas and sufficient ecological connectivity within the agricultural landscape are essential.

More information: Paul Opdam (Wageningen University, NL), Jim Harris (Cranfield University, UK).

5. Ecological restoration policy needs to be better integrated and legally assured in other policy fields

In order to be effective, Europe's biodiversity and ecological restoration policy needs to be better integrated and legally assured in other policy fields, such as agriculture, transport, energy, climate change and economic development, both on the European and the regional scale. The integration of Natura2000 policy in the Water Framework Directive is exemplary. An opposite example is the relation between biodiversity and agricultural policy. In eastern European countries a drastic deterioration of valuable habitats is currently taking place at an alarming rate due to changes in agricultural land use after transition to market economy. Various types of semi-natural grasslands are most seriously affected, with abandonment on the one hand and agricultural intensification on



the other hand. Locally adapted agro-environmental schemes are urgently needed to counteract these losses. Otherwise the same development like in Western Europe will take place with a considerable decline of valuable habitats and species, especially those depending on agricultural management of low intensity and a much higher cost for ecological restoration afterwards. More information: Norbert Hölzel (University of Münster, D)

6. The European Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration International offers its experience to improve the ecological status of degraded habitats in Europe and, particularly, those included in Natura 2000.

(*)SER2008

The theme of the SER2008-conference in Ghent, Belgium was: "Towards a sustainable future for European ecosystems. – Providing restoration guidelines for Natura 2000 habitats and species." 323 presentations discussed different aspects of ecological, social, economical and legal issues of ecological restoration practice in Europe. Abstracts of these presentations, including keynotes and many case studies, are available through the press-link on the homepage of the conference website: www.SER2008.be.