



NATURA 2000 ITALIA

INFORMA

issue 9 February 2016

3 Conservation measures, park management plans, and environmental assessments

8 Alta Murgia National Park: the SEA experience in the Park Management Plan

9 Sila National Park and Natura 2000 network: an "integrated plan" experience

10 Box Infringement procedure 2015/2163

10 Box Making Good Nature (MGN) LIFE project

12 Box LIFE GESTIRE: final conference and continuation of the project

13 Box Workshop on the management of mountain grasslands in the Alpine biogeographic region

14 Box The Environmental Assessment Portal

15 News



Photo: Enrico Calvario

Integrated planning for biodiversity: protected areas and the Natura 2000 network

The national norms to transpose Community Directives on biodiversity protection (Habitat Directive 92/43/EEC and Birds Directive 79/409/EEC, as replaced by Dir. 2009/197/EC) and environmental impact assessments (EIA Directive 85/337/EEC, as modified by Dir. 2014/52/EU and the SEA Directive 2001/42/CE), act complementary to pursue, in an integrated manner, the goals of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development through various instruments, including integrated management and



Photo: Enrico Calvario

Environmental Impact Assessments. Today, these aspects take on particular importance as concerns the designation of SACs, which concludes the process to complete the protection measures for Natura 2000 sites within the framework of planning and management tools for protected natural areas as defined by the Outline Law on Protected Natural Areas n. 394 of 6 December 1991.

This issue of the newsletter thus focuses on the procedures related to the completion of the *protection measures/management plans for Natura 2000 sites* within the framework of planning and manage-

ment tools for protected natural areas ("Plans", "Technical Implementation Norms" and/or "Regulations").

The need to complement the measures to protect and manage "habitats/species/species habitats" of community interest (pursuant to the Habitats and Birds directives) present in Natura 2000 sites (SPAs, SCIs,

and SACs) and included in partially or fully protected areas is a very current topic, both at the central level (national parks, marine protected areas, state nature reserves) and the regional one

(nature reserve, regional parks, regional marine reserves).

Indeed, the extensive overlap between Natura 2000 sites and national and regional protected areas when Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) were designated – which, pursuant to article 3 of DPR 357/97 and subsequent amendments, takes place through a Decree by the Ministry of the Environment adopted "in agreement with each region and autonomous province affected" – requires careful attention as regards procedural aspects as well.

Another key topic, closely linked to the previous one, concerns the SEA procedu-

res related to the management plans for protected natural areas.

Testifying to significant institutional interest in this topic is a recent letter from the Minister of the Environment to the presidents of Italian regions and autonomous provinces on the importance of strategic environmental assessments. The Minister stresses that “the SEA must accompany the planning process at various administrative levels, in order to support administrations with the due integration of environmental aspects in sector policies. The bodies responsible for environmental protection play a key role in ensuring that human activities remain sustainable, protecting the regenerative ability of ecosystems and resources, and conserving biodiversity, including in order to ensure an equal distribution of the advantages arising out of economic activities”. Furthermore, it highlights the problems in applying the procedure by remarking that “SEA procedures are all too often seen merely as a way to abide by norms and not as a priority instrument that qualifies the decision-making process in accordance with transparent and truly participatory modalities. In other words, the implementation of SEAs focuses more on avoiding legal action on the part of the European Community than on the awareness of the opportunities and advantages to be

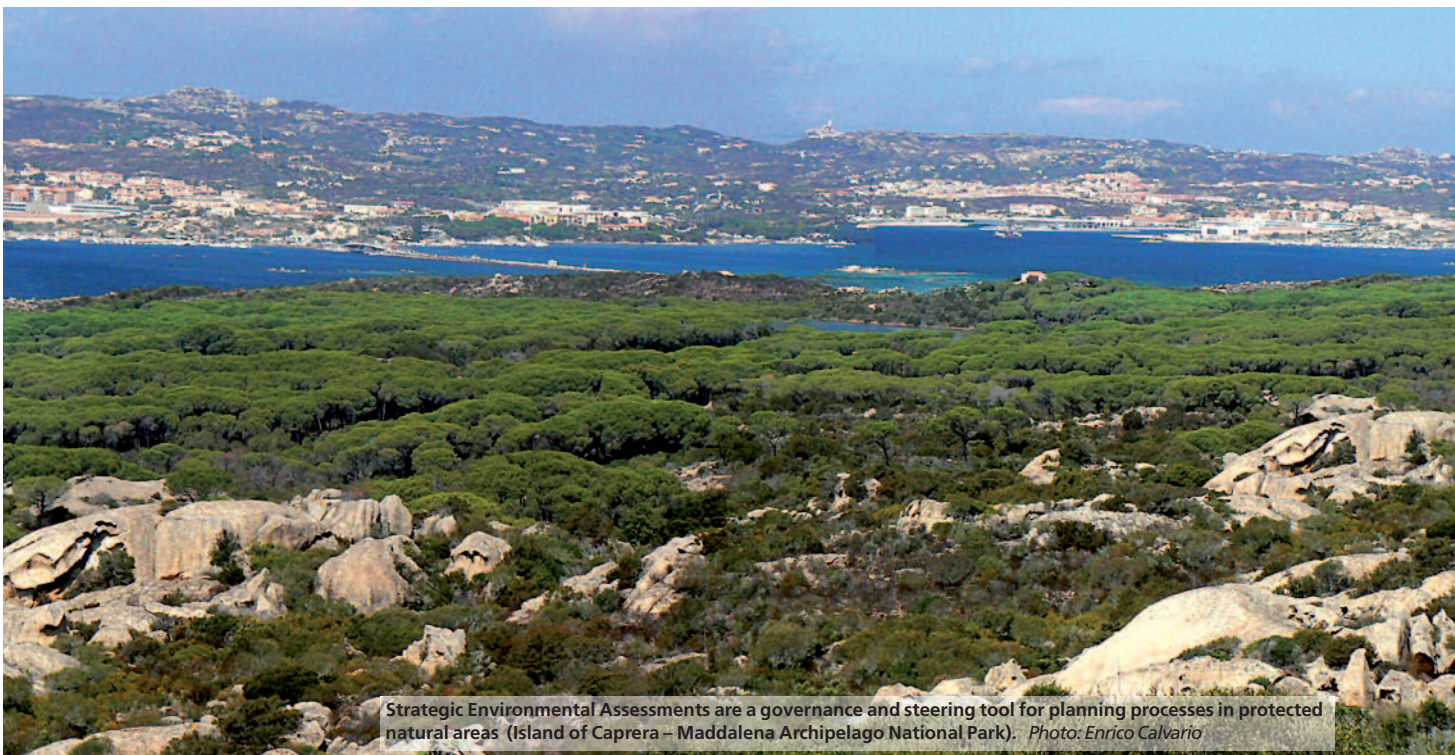
built upon to improve its effectiveness. The causes of this include the delay with which the assessment process often begins compared to the planning phase, with the risk of preventing SEAs from having an impact from the very start, and minimizing the role of analyses, alternatives, and preventive assessments of environmental effects, all of which topics are considered quite important at the local level. This is the context that frames the remarks presented here, which are destined to highlight the opportunities provided by SEAs, so that environmental assessments may accompany the entire lifecycle of a given plan or programme, from the planning stage to implementation, when the choices made must be evaluated”. The letter is available here: <http://www.minambiente.it/notizie/lettera-di-galletti-presidenti-regioni-e-province-autonome-vas-strumento-importante>

In regard to this topic, within the framework of the NOP GSA (ESF) Programme 2007-2013 – Line of intervention “Sustainable Development”- Action 7.B “Actions in support of Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA) and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) procedures”, the General Directorate for Environmental Assessments and Authorizations of the Ministry of the Environment, in collaboration with

the General Directorate for the Protection of Nature and the Sea, has planned and carried out a series of meeting which concluded in Rome on 28 October 2015 with a day dedicated to “SEAs: a governance and steering instrument for the planning of protected natural areas”.

The Rome meeting follows up on the two workshops that took place in July in Palermo and Salerno, which dealt with “Environmental assessments and integrated planning in protected natural areas and Natura 2000 sites”. The workshops analysed the topic of environmental assessment processes as related to the design and approval of planning, regulation, and management tools for protected areas combined with conservation measures and management plans for Natura 2000 Network sites. The proceedings from the Rome, Salerno, and Palermo meetings are available here: <http://www.pongas.minambiente.it/workshop-7b/misura-7b/workshop>

The interest raised by these meetings and the implementation shortcomings in completing the process for approving national park management plans have led us to delve deeper into this topic and to report, as examples, the experiences of the Sila and Alta Murgia National Parks ■



Strategic Environmental Assessments are a governance and steering tool for planning processes in protected natural areas (Island of Caprera – Maddalena Archipelago National Park). Photo: Enrico Calvario

Conservation measures, park management plans, and environmental assessments

The Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, states that for special areas of conservation, Member States shall establish the necessary conservation measures involving if need be, appropriate management plans specifically designed for the sites or integrated into other development plans and appropriate statutory, administrative, or contractual measures which correspond to the ecological requirements of the natural habitat types in Annex I and the species in Annex II present on the site. These dispositions, transposed in Italy with D.P.R. 357/97, also concern Natura 2000 sites located in protected natural areas. To this end, article 4, sections 3 and 6 of the D.P.R. establish that should Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) fall within protected natural areas, the “conservation measures for the latter under existing laws” shall apply.

As specified in articles 2 and 3 of Ministerial Decree of 17 October 2007 on minimum uniform criteria for the definition of conservation measures in SACs and SPAs, for Sites of Community Importance (SCIs), SACs, SPAs, or parts thereof falling within protected natural areas, conservation measures are identify in order to be integrated, if necessary, into the protection measures and norms defined by “the respective existing regulation and planning instruments” (e.g. Plans, Technical Implementation Norms, Regulations).

Additionally, with regards to SCIs/SACs falling partially within protected natural areas, D.P.R. n. 357/1997 specifies (art. 4, section 3, second paragraph and art. 6) that “for the por-

tion falling outside the perimeter of the protected natural area, the region or autonomous province shall adopt, after consultation with the relevant local bodies and the managing body of the protected area, all opportune conservation measures and management norms”. Therefore, according to the combined dispositions of the above-mentioned norms, for **SCIs/SACs and their portions falling within protected natural areas, conservation measures are identified by the managing body of the protected area as part of its own regulation and planning instruments**, in order to identify homogeneous conservation measures for the site as a whole, and to coordinate its management as a single unit. This norm establishes that conservation measures for the portion falling outside the perimeter of the protected natural area must be identified by the relevant region or autonomous province “after consultation” with the managing body of the protected.

To this end, the adoption and approval of the above-mentioned planning and regulation instruments, notwithstanding the *ex lege* prohibitions (*cfr* L. 394/91), always calls for the active involvement of the relevant regions/autonomous provinces, in application of the cooperation and collaboration

principles between the central state, regions, and local authorities. By the same token, the relevant region/autonomous province and the managing body of the protected natural areas can agree that the management of the site, both the portion within the perimeter of the protected natural area and the portion outside it, be entrusted to the protected natural area.

Integration of conservation measures into planning instruments for protected natural areas

As described above, in cases in which Natura 2000 sites fall within protected natural areas of national relevance, the Ministerial Decree on Minimum Criteria of 17 October 2017 calls for suitable conservation measures to be integrated into the regulation and planning instruments established by the Outline Law on Protected Natural Areas. Nevertheless, *the above-mentioned norms have been applied unevenly in Italy*, often leading to overlapping conservation measures, some of which were drawn from the planning/regulation instruments for Protected Natural Areas, and others from norms or deeds issued by the regions or autonomous provinces. This overlap mainly took place in protec-

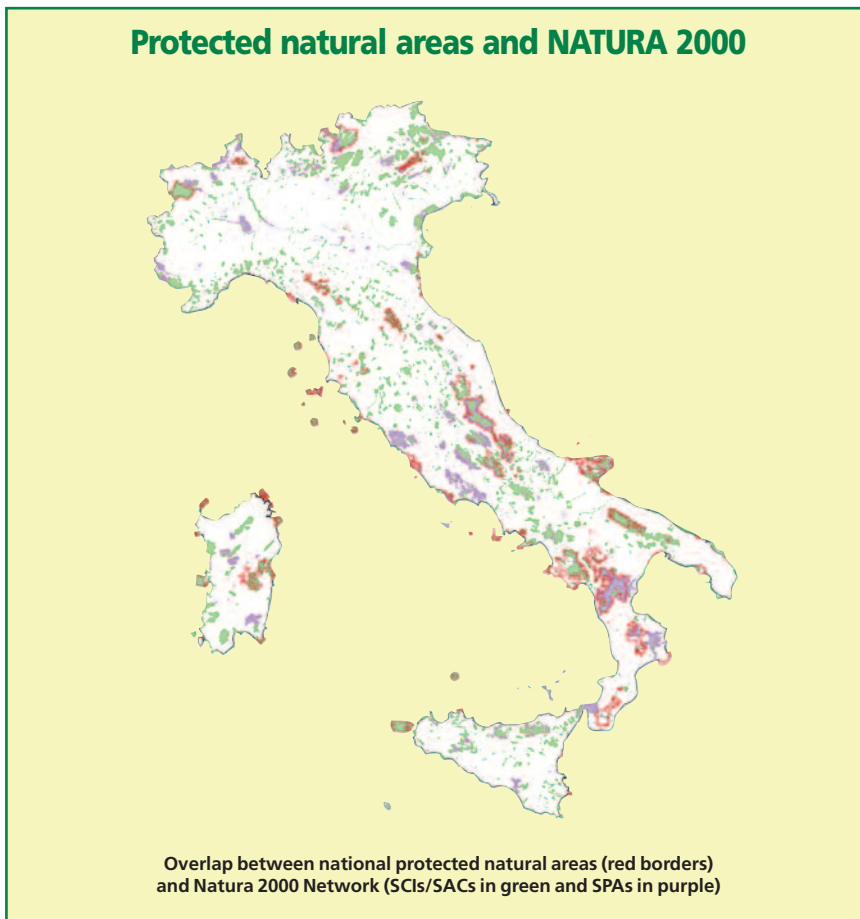
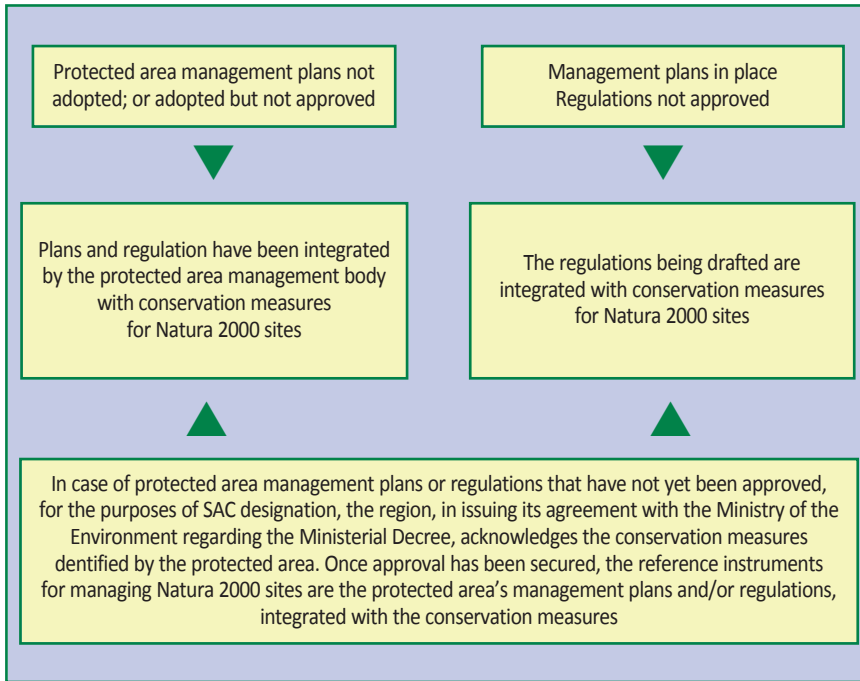
ted natural areas still without their own management plans and/or regulations, where regions and autonomous provinces may have established conservation measures for the Natura 2000 sites falling within these protected areas. In such cases, before proceeding with the agreement between the Ministry of the Environment and the regional ad-



Many SPAs play an important role for many waterbird species of community interest during winter and migration; the image shows a flock of Red-crested Pochards in flight. Photo: Stefano Sarrocco.

ministration on the designation decree, the relevant region or autonomous province shall receive a commitment on the part of the managing body to adopt these measures as part of their own planning and/or regulation tools, with an eye towards integrating management tools while respect-

ing each other's jurisdictions. In light of the partial or total overlap between Natura 2000 sites and Protected Natural Areas, and the various phases in the process to define, adopt, and approve the planning and management instruments for these areas, the following scenarios may apply:



SEA and park management plans

The main goal of protected natural areas management plan, as defined by the Outline Law (L.N. 394/91) is the "preservation of natural and environmental heritage in addition to historical, cultural, and traditional anthropological heritage" and must regulate the following:

- general land use management and the identification of areas under different land use and protection regimes;
- restrictions, public or private land use destinations, and related implementation norms as concerns the various areas or parts of the plan;
- vehicle and pedestrian access systems, especially with regards to paths, infrastructure, and entrances for the disabled and the elderly;
- equipment and services for the park's management and social function, museums, visitors' centres, information offices, campsites, agricultural tourism;
- guidelines and criteria for interventions involving flora, fauna, and natural habitats.

The park management plan is thus, in and of itself, an environmental conservation plan, and for this reason there has often been, and continues to be, strong resistance against launching the SEA process, and especially the Environmental Impact Assessments as part of the SEA. Indeed, it has not yet been fully understood that this is the very instrument/process that makes it possible to identify and assess the possible negative consequences that the choices (for instance, zoning and technical implemen-



Conservation measures must pay particular attention to priority species and habitats of Community interest; the image shows priority habitat *Apennine beech forests with Taxus and Ilex (code 9210*). . Photo: Enrico Calvario

tation norms in terms of urban planning and of the discipline of farming and tourism) and/or interventions planned by the park may have on the various environmental components

In this regard, one of the added values of the SEA process, in synergy with the management plan drafting process, is that it is

associated with a participatory process which is the cornerstone of both procedures.

As the Aarhus Conference pointed out, the participatory process:

- Improves the quality of decisions;
- Strengthens their effectiveness;
- Boosts the public's participation in envi-

ronmental decisions;

- Contributes to raising awareness on environmental issues;
- Allows citizens to express their worries to institutions (which will take them into account);
- Improves the responsibility and transparency of the decision-making process

Park Management Plan			
	Procedure Art. 12 law 394/1991		SEA Procedure D. Lgs 152/2006
Park authority	Approves the criteria for the drafting of the plan	→	Drafts the preliminary report and launches the scoping procedure (90 days)
	Prepares the plan proposal	←	Prepares the environmental report and the non-technical summary
	Receives the opinion of the park community on the plan proposal		
	Executive committee approves		
	Forwards to the regional administration the plan proposal, the environmental report, and the non-technical summary		
Region	Adopts the plan (with 90 days)	↔	Public consultation (for 60 days)
	Deposits the plan (for 40 days)		
	Receives comments (for the next 40 days)		
	Forwards the comments to the park authorities for their opinion		
Park authority	Provides opinion on the comments (30 days)		
Region	Comments the park authority's opinion	→	Reasoned opinion (within 90 days)
Park authority			Prepares the revision of the plan and environmental report, if necessary
Region	Approves the plan together with the park authority and municipal administrations (for D zones) (within 120 days of the park authority's opinion on the comments)	↔	Approval Summary statement Monitoring plan
	Publishes the plan in the Official Gazette and the Official Regional Bulletin		
Park authority	Implements the plan		Informs the public on the decision
			Launches the monitoring efforts



In planning for protected natural areas and Natura 2000 sites, special attention must be paid to decisions affecting riparian corridors, which not only play an important role as “buffers”, but also provide breeding and foraging habitats for many bird species; in the image on the left, a lakeside SCI in central Italy, lacks of continuous arboreal riparian corridor, with agricultural systems close to aquatic environment; in the image below, a Siskin feeds on the seeds contained in alder catkins during the winter season in a lakeside SCI in central Italy.

Photo: Enrico Calvario

From the normative point of view, however, there is a lack of an explicit definition of the value of the Strategic Environmental Assessment process integrated into land use planning from the earliest drafting phases. Legislative Decree 152/2006 and subsequent amendments, in its transposition of Directive 2001/42/EC, does not consider the SEA as a process integrated into the drafting of the management plan or programme, but rather a technical-administrative procedure to evaluate the plan. Indeed, the ability to intervene concretely in the drafting of the park management plan on the part of the public is only provided for once the plan has been completed, and is disciplined by article 12, section 4 of LN 394/91: “The adopted plan is deposited for 40 days with the relevant municipal administrations, mountain communities, and regional administrations; anyone can view it and request a copy. Within the following forty days anyone can submit their written comments, about which the park authority shall provide its opinion within thirty days. Within one hundred and twenty days of receiving these opinions, the region shall provide its comments on them.....”

In fact, in such a context the SEA process provides formidable instruments, since it is able to constantly interact with the planning process, including during the drafting phase.

Participation is essential

to the preventive sharing of the choices of the plan, and in this regard the SEA ensures participation during the drafting and implementation of the plan through monitoring, adding significant value to the plan for the following reasons:

- It strengthens the choice of the plan’s objectives (institutional, generic, and specific) and actions, and links them to sector planning;
- It helps highlight and promote the plan’s positive aspects (stakeholders often only perceive the restrictions brought about by the plan);
- It helps make the plan drafting process public and transparent, facilitating communication and making it easier to understand the plan’s stated goals and choices/decisions made (including the imposition of restrictions);
- Provides support for zoning decisions regarding the park
- Prevents the onset of conflicts between environmental protection – and espe-

cially biodiversity conservation – needs and local development choices, making it possible to manage any potential conflicts pre-emptively;

- It provides an additional opportunity for interacting with public subjects with environmental responsibilities (SCA) and stakeholders in various sectors in order to share the best and most rational choices to protect and manage areas of great environmental value;
- It serves as “cultural validation” obtained through the trust and consensus arising from social recognition and from the authority that comes for the participatory process itself;
- It proposes possible alternative solutions for achieving the plan’s stated goals;
- It contributes to identifying certain ways of mitigating pressures and threats to the environment and biodiversity, along with any necessary corrective measures within the park;
- It assists in the collection of information

arising from analyses, plans, programmes, and any other source that may be of relevance to the park, while making it possible to identify the main problems and environmental concerns.

In summary, the environmental assessment and planning processes for protected natural areas, if properly integrated and compared, and in light of their shared purposes (protec-



Photo: Enrico Calvario



Incidence studies and strategic environmental assessments can provide important indications on how to reduce impacts on natural resources and design effective environmental restoration efforts. Foto: Enrico Calvario.

tion of environmental heritage, involvement of local communities, opportunities for innovation, and engines for new economic development opportunities, including the green economy), are able to provide synergic actions and lead to decision choices both in terms of truly sustainable development and the effective protection of biodiversity. Nevertheless, certain aspects need to be improved in order to:

- Ensuring reduced costs, simplifications, and reliable deadlines for both processes;
- Guaranteeing citizens and stakeholders the right to consultation, in order to protect the public interest;
- Disseminating (at all levels) a “culture of integration”, so that SEAs can truly become an integral part of the park management plan process, accompanying through every phase of planning.

Integration between SEAs and Environmental Impact Assessments in the management plans for protected natural areas

The specific goal of an Environmental Impact Assessment is to analyze and evaluate any implications that the plan/programme may have on maintaining a functional state of ecological conservation and protecting core elements of biodiversity (habitats and species) within the European Community as identified and defined by Directives 92/43/CEE “Habitats” and 2009/147/ECC “Birds”.

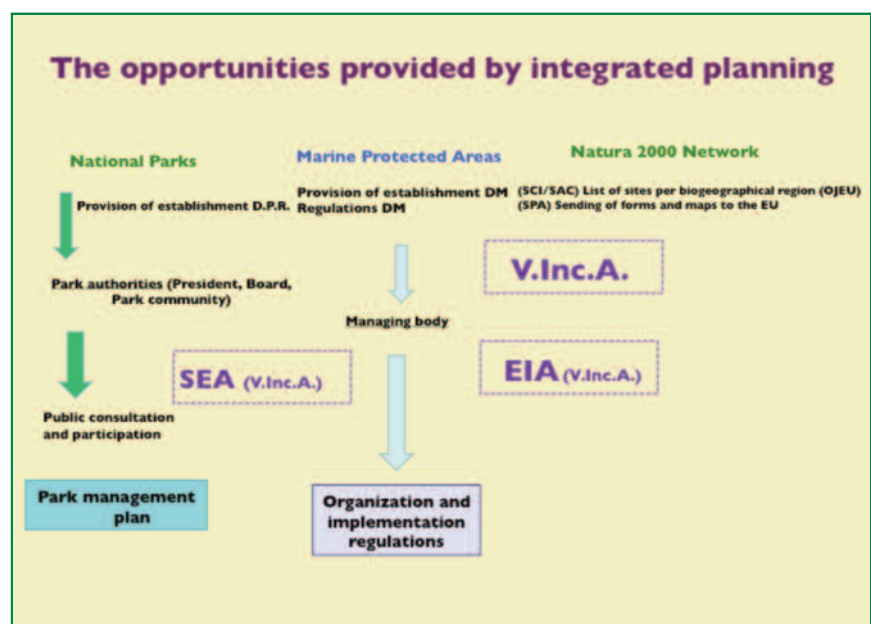
Legislative Decree n. 152/2006 and subsequent amendments, article 3, section 3, esta-

lishes that SEAs shall include Environmental Impact Assessment procedures. To this end, the environmental report must contain the elements developed during the study for the implications assessment, drafted according to the guidelines in Annex G to DPR 357/97 combined with the “Methodological guide to the dispositions of article 6, paragraphs 3 and 4 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC” which provides technical and methodological support for the drafting of impacts assessments.

Article 5 of DPR 357/97 states that the natural and environmental value of existing or proposed sites of community importance and special areas of conservation must be taken into account in land use planning. This is a general principle that aims to prevent the approval of land use management instruments that conflict with the need to conserve habitats and species of community interest.

In coordinating SEA and Environmental Impact Assessment procedure, the evaluation on the part of the competent authority must extend to the Implications Assessment’s conservation goals or must acknowledge the outcome of the Implications.

In this regard, the strategic goals of the plan or programme will be better oriented on the back of the outcome of the implications assessment, since in Sites of Community Importance the natural history value of the area subject to land use planning should outweigh other environmental values. Additionally, it is important to stress that the implications assessment applies both to interventions taking place within Natura 2000 sites and those that, while taking place outside such sites, may have significant implications for the conservation status of the natural heritage preserved within such sites. ■



Alta Murgia National Park: The SEA experience in the Park Management Plan

In 2016, the Alta Murgia National Park will complete the approval process for the Park Management Plan, which lasted nearly six years, an enormous span of time in light of everyday happenings. And yet, park management plans are rightly considered the main source of proper land management and the source of protection and development strategies compatible with fragile territories. Such a long span of time to define the park management plan is not unique to our national Park. The abnormal duration of procedures to approve management plans on the part of regional administration is an entrenched habit. Over time, however, this duration has reached truly biblical proportions, in light of the additional requirements that have been added to comply with Community, national, and regional dispositions regarding environmental assessments. **Fabio Modesti**, the park's interim director, had this to say about the SEA experience in the planning process for the Alta Murgia National Park.

Thoughts on the SEA experience in the management plan for the Alta Murgia National Park

Burdensome procedures are often caused by a failure to the planning process and environmental assessment procedures into a single process. As a consequence, procedures that are practically identical – such as processes to involve the public – are often repeated, adding unnecessary layers of bureaucracy. The public involvement process for the park management plan is similar in many ways to that for SEAs. Both aim to increase citizen participation in governance choices and in transformations of the landscape and environment. Pursuant to the Outline Law on Protected Natural Areas (n. 394/1991 and subsequent amendments), the public consultation process for park manage-

ment plans has a well-defined timeline and procedures that include an observation and a counter-deduction phase. The consultation process for SEAs, as transposed by D.Lgs. 152/2006 and subsequent amendments, has a timeline and characteristics which, while different, can nevertheless encompass public involvement processes within the framework of the park planning process.

Another administrative procedure included in the process to approve park management plans is the Environmental Incidence Assessment (DPR 357/97 and subsequent amendments – known in Italy by its acronym “VInCA”). Although integrated into the SEA procedure, the Appropriate assessment is often seen as an additional bureaucratic burden in the process to approve park management plans. Many of the subjects involved in this process ask themselves why a planning tool whose purpose is the protection of wildlife, plants, landscapes, and natural resources in general should ever be evaluated for its “significant incidence” on the habitats and species found in a Natura 2000 site.

Within the framework of Natura 2000 site management, the Appropriate assessment is an assessment process that can assign the right value to the resource being protected, and if necessary steer the goals and intervention priorities established by the management plan or programme.

The goals of the management plan for a national park – a very large site – can take on con-

flicting characteristics due to the multiple interests at stake. This happens when the various stakeholders fail to recognize the value of the resource being protected, especially in case of a natural resource, where the value of ecosystem services to local populations is difficult to understand. In this regard, the Appropriate assessment as part of the SEA procedure can help identify priority actions for protection, since the species and habitats listed under Directive 92/43/EEC will receive pre-eminent attention even when found in areas of the park that are not under an adequate protection regime for them. In this case as well, the Appropriate assessment can help better steer the park's objectives, in this case in terms of zoning. Indeed, the Natura 2000 approach updates the zoning concept in that it does not establish protection levels for a defined area of land; instead, it calls for specific protection actions for habitats and species, with the full involvement of the local population. ■



A centuries-old Macedonian Oak (*Quercus trojana*), for which the Alta Murgia National Park constitutes the northernmost known site. Alta Murgia National Park archives. Foto Giuseppe Carlucci.

Sila National Park and Natura 2000 network: an “integrated plan” experience

Hosting as many as 25 Sites of Community Importance, one site of national interest, and 3 Special Protection Areas within its boundaries, the Sila National Park provides an excellent opportunity to integrate the conservation goals and strategies of the Habitats Directive with the Italian protected area system.

The purpose of the conservation measures was to turn the existing management plan for the Sila National Park into an “integrated plan” encompassing the scientific and methodological bases and the actions that make a national park belonging to the Natura 2000 network an adequate scenario for carrying out the mandatory monitoring, reporting, and conservation goals established by the Habitats Directive.

There is a vast reference legal framework relevant to the conservation goal of the Sila National Park, but there are four main norms to be taken into consideration here: First and foremost is the Decree of the Ministry of the Environment of 17 October 2007 on “Minimum uniform criteria for the definition of conservation measures for Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs)”, which defines uniform minimum criteria for the following activities in national parks and their ecological networks: agriculture, land development, hunting, fishing, industrial activities, extractive activities, processing of raw materials, energy extraction, forest and natural resource management, and protection of natural habitats.

To this end, the national park has entrusted the drafting of conservation measures for areas within the park that are part of the Natura 2000 network to the Department of Ecology of the University of Calabria and

to the Department of Forestry and Agricultural Management of the “Mediterranea” University in Reggio Calabria.

The conservation measures for Natura 2000 sites were adopted as part of the park management plan, thus resulting in an integrated plan pursuant to the Decree of the Ministry of the Environment (D.M. of 3 September 2002) and the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, and they were approved by the Calabria regional government through DGR 243/30.05.2014.

The integration of the park management plan through the conservation measures for the ecological network comprised the following phases and activities:

- 1) Preliminary phase to verify the natural resources present in the SCI/SAC/SPAs through in-depth studies and better monitoring. This phase was completed in spring/summer/fall 2009, following up on the activities carried out to draft the park management plan. It should be stressed that knowledge on the park’s ecological network was very fragmented, since most data on flora and fauna dated back to the 1980s, with the exception of a summary published in Agriconsulting’s Technical Report for 2008. For SCIs in particular, much of the data on flora and fauna came from historical studies from the mid-20th century or even the 19th. The recent efforts greatly improved knowledge on habitats, flora, fauna, and species of conservation interest.
- 2) Quantification of the conservation status of the SCI/SAC/SPAs and assessment of the



Typical landscape, Sila National Park. Photo from the Park’s website.

- national importance of the populations of species of interest. In this phase, several important plant and animal species included in the Habitats Directive (annexes II and IV) were discovered or re-discovered. This made it possible to re-define the conservation status of the flora, fauna, and Natura 2000 habitats, an essential requirement for moving on to the threats analysis.
- 3) Analysis of threats to species and habitats of conservation efforts through the compilation of matrixes and forms.
 - 4) Mapping of the SCIs so that they may better reflect the distribution of flora, fauna, and forest resources, and in order to rationalize their management. Each area of community importance features its own habitat map, at an adequate scale for the conservation measures to be planned. This has led to a better definition of specific conservation goals for SCI/SAC/SPAs, making it possible to redraw their boundaries and assess existing restrictions.
 - 5) The material discussed above, summarized in brief data sheets, has made it possible to define general and specific conservation measures for each area.
 - 6) Finally, procedures and measures to monitor existing environmental emergencies were presented, with the aim of assessing the conservation status of habitats and species and to comply with reporting obligations.

Infringement procedure 2015/2163

On 23 October 2015, the European Commission sent Italian authorities a letter placing them in default pursuant to article 258 of the Treaty, since the six-year term to designate Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) has expired. Sites of Community importance are designated as SACs by the Member State within six years at most, establishing the necessary conservation measures to ensure a satisfactory conservation status for habitats, species habitats, and species of Community interest listed in the site's standard forms (as established under article 4, section 4 of the Habitats Directive). Over the last few years, the Ministry of the Environment and of the Protection of Land and Sea has asked regions and autonomous provinces to accelerate the process to define site-specific conservation measures. Additionally, it has promoted coordination actions, including through informal meetings, and involving, in areas for which they are competent, other institutional subjects such as the Ministry for Agricultural, Food, and Forestry Policies, given the relevance of rural development policies for the implementation of conservation measures in Natura 2000 sites, including in light of EAFRD planning for 2014/2020.

On 4 November 2015 and on 20 January 2016, the Ministry of the Environment organized two meetings

with all competent regional departments, during which meetings it was stressed that the full implementation of the Natura 2000 Network is not only one of the government's policy priorities, but also one of the goals of the National Biodiversity Strategy approved on 7 January 2010 by the State-Regions Conference. As a result, it is crucial to define as quickly as possible the conclusion of the process to identify and approve conservation measures in the SACs that are yet to be designated.

In these meetings, the regional administrations stressed that the main obstacle concerns the procedure to approve management plan/measure necessary for designation, for which procedure political bodies are responsible. For this reason, the competent regional councillors were asked to provide their fullest cooperation to facilitate regional approval processes in order to allow the closure of the infringement procedure as quickly as possible.











Currently, the sites of Community importance identified in Italy and their designation status are as follows:

- Italian sites: 2314
- Sites to be designated for which the six-year term has expired: 1743
- Sites to be designated for which the six-year term has not expired: 49
- Sites already designated as SPAs: 522



SACs must adopt specific conservation measures to ensure the satisfactory conservation status of the habitats, species habitats, and species of Community interests they host.

Foto: Enrico Calvario

Region/Autonomous province	SPA						
	Designation date	Documentation	N° sites	surface area on land		surface area at sea	
				ha	%	ha	%
Basilicata	16/09/13		20	30.824	3.06	0	0
Friuli Venezia Giulia	21/10/13		56	129.173	16.43	3	3.61
Liguria	24/06/15		14	32.138	5.93	0	0
Lombardy	30/04/2014 02/12/2015		46 1	109.228	4.58		
Marche	06/05/15		1	109	0.01	0	0
Apulia	10/07/15		21	34.298	1.76	7	0.45
Autonomous Province Trento	28/03/14		123	43.609	7.03		
Umbria	07/08/14		95	102.981	12.17		
Valle d'Aosta	07/02/13		27	34.607	10.61		
Sicily	21/12/15		118	224.397	8.69	414	0.01
TOTAL			522	741.364	1.71	10	0,06

Documentation on designated SACs can be downloaded at this link: <http://www.minambiente.it/pagina/zsc-designate>; by clicking on the Natura 2000 Network logo in the "Documentazione" column of the table, users can access information for each region and autonomous province.

Making Good Nature (MGN) LIFE project

The Making Good Natura LIFE+ project (<http://www.lifemgn-servizioco-sistemici.eu/IT/home/Pages/default.aspx>) is the first Italian project that aims to develop new environmental governance paths for the protection of agricultural and forest ecosystems through the development of qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods for the ecosystem services provided by Natura 2000 sites.

The goal of the project is to create the conditions for the effective management of habitats, plants, and animals listed under the Habitats and Birds Directives, by providing Natura 2000 site administrators with management and self-funding tools that can help remunerate conservation activities.

The project involved twenty-one pilot sites from the Natura 2000 network, for a total surface area of 90,239 hectares. Italy's high ecosystem and socio-economic diversity is captured by the involvement of 7 regions (Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Emilia Romagna, Marche, Lombardy, and Sicily) and all three biogeographical regions: Alpine, Mediterranean, and Continental.

In order to achieve its stated goals, in addition to the drafting and application of an evaluation model for ecosystem services, the project also implements a governance model based on PES and self-funding systems to improve management performance in agricultural and forest sites in the Natura 2000 network.

In order to make the project replicable in every Natura 2000 site, Web-Gis software was designed to assess and quantify ecosystem services, and to serve as a virtual assistance platform. Additionally, a handbook will be published to support managing bodies in applying the LIFE-MGN model to Natura 2000 sites at the national and community levels.

After three years of meetings with managing bodies and local stakeholders, agreements for Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES), the main focus of the project, are now being defined. The agreements signed so far include several pilot Natura 2000 sites located within certain parks, such as the Sasso Simone e Simoncello Inter-regional Park, the Pollino National Park, and the Cilento, Vallo di Diano e Alburni National Park. Also worth mentioning is the drafting of a framework agreement between local forest management bodies, the CURSA University Consortium for Socio-economic Research and the Environment (project leader), and the Phoresta Onlus association on carbon credits from the forests included in the sites.

An agreement between park authorities and a representative of local livestock farmers was signed at the Sasso Simone e Simoncello Inter-regional Park. The agreement calls for a payment of about € 10,000 until 2021 for the surface area (1,108 hectares) used for grazing cattle, sheep, and horses within the military range included in the SPA "Western slopes of Mount Carpegna, Torrente Messa, Poggio di Miratoio". The park will manage these pastures so as to preserve their ecosystem functions, thus preserving the local habitats and bird species of Community interest.

The PES agreement signed for "La Fagosa Timpa dell'Orso" concerns

the "genetic resources" ecosystem service, and aims to protect the Bosnian Pine (*Pinus leucodermis* Ant.). It is not restricted to the SCI, but was extended to the Pollino National Park as a whole. The Bosnian Pine is an endemic species of great conservation interest found in the park, whose existence value, according to the EURAC Academy in Bolzano, amounts to € 1.2 – 1.5 million. Additionally, tourist spending estimated at between € 300,000 and 700,000 each year is attributed to the presence of this tree species. The goal of this PES is to protect Bosnian Pines from forest fires, one of the main threats to their survival. The agreements, stipulated within the framework of the AIB campaign for fire control, monitoring, and telephone operators, are reward-based, in that the associations that sign the contract receive economic incentives that diminish as the surface area affected by fire increases. The PES agreement, which entered into force in 2015, will be renewed annually during the next AIB campaigns. In 2015, the agreement resulted in the monitoring of about 110,000 hectares of woodland in the park and the involvement of 27 associations.



Front cover of the LIFE project brochure, which can be downloaded from this link http://www.lifemgn-serviziocosistemici.eu/IT/Documents/Life+mgn_brochure.pdf

Another interesting product of the project, which makes the MGN model applicable in other sites, is Web-GIS:

(<http://lifemgn.eurac.edu/map/index.php?mapset=mgn&lang=it>).

This is a specific IT tool, based on web technologies and aimed at the managing bodies for Natura 2000 sites. This innovative tool can also be applied by other administrations. It uses beneficiary data to identify the site's ecosystem services according to type and to quantify their value. It is organized as a WebGIS geo-database that makes it possible to manage each project's numerical cartography (e.g. land use, hydrography, infrastructure, administrative boundaries, mapping of ecosystem services, etc.) and serves as a tool to share geospatial data with other users.

The project's final conference is scheduled for late May: "The economics of nature: ecosystem services and PES for a more effective management of the Natura 2000 Network". The conference will include a session dedicated to local stakeholders and representatives involved in the process, who will be invited to a discussion on PES and ecosystem services.

The conference will also present an analysis of the ecosystem services identified in the project's 21 pilot sites, a demonstration and implementation of the governance models referring to them, and a series of remarks by speakers from the institutional, scientific, and socioeconomic spheres. The topics will include ecosystem services and PES, including in light of the changes brought about by the recent Law. 221 of 28 December 2015 "Environmental dispositions to promote green economy measures and to contain the excessive use of natural resources".

If you are interested in the Making Good Natura LIFE+ project, register here to receive our newsletter: <http://www.lifemgn-serviziocosistemici.eu/IT/newsletter/Pages/default.aspx>

LIFE GESTIRE: final conference and continuation of the project

On 24 February 2016 Palazzo Città di Lombardia in Milan hosted the final conference of the LIFE Gestire Project, whose main goal was to adopt a regional strategy for the management of Natura 2000 Network sites and improve citizens' knowledge on the enormous trove of biodiversity protected by the 242 Natura 2000 Network sites in Lombardy.

Significant products

Some of the project's most innovative products include the "New portal on funds for the Natura 2000 Network" www.finanziamenti.naturachevale.it, the only one of its kind in Italy, which aims to build the ability all actors involved in the management of Natura 2000 Network, and especially management bodies, to attract public and private funds and thus boost the economic and financial sustainability of the Network itself.

The portal is organized in four sections:

- **Funding from public competitions:** describes all sources of funding from public competition relevant to the Natura 2000 Network in Lombardy. The section presents both consolidated sources that have been used in the past and potential sources.

- **Match funding:** completes the section on funding from public competitions with a description of less traditional match funding opportunity, listing case studies and useful documents to better understand tools such as Payments for Ecosystem Services.

- **Funding search:** this tool allows users to search for funding opportunities by activity/intervention under the Prioritised Action Framework (PAF). Searches can also be made by beneficiary type, keyword, and province.

- **News:** reports information on public competitions and other relevant news on funding for the Lombardy Regional Network.

Another important product of the LIFE GESTIRE project is the *Financial plan for the management of the Natura 2000 network in Lombardy in 2014-2020*, which is essentially an extrapolation based on past costs and revenues and in an estimate of the need for investment (expenses) and availability of funds (revenue) in the future. Through a careful analysis of the costs needed to maintain and improve the Natura 2000 network and the availability funds to invest in the future, the financial plan identified a large gap between revenue and expenses: about € 125.87 million in a worst-case scenario, € 155.08 million in an intermediate scenario, and € 139.29 in an optimistic scenario. In addition to the systematic use of European and regional funds, it will also be necessary to identify new funding alternatives, such as Payments for Ecosystem Services and specifically-targeted levies.

The continuation of the project

The conference also provided an occasion to discuss the continuation of the project, which will take place through the LIFE IP GESTIRE 2020 project approved by the European Union. The project will last 8 years (2016 – 2023) and will employ about 2,000 people, with funding amounting to € 17.3 million, and with partners including the Lombardy Regional Government, ERSAF, the Italian State Forestry Corps, LIPU, WWF, and Comunità Ambiente. The "integrated projects" were conceived as part of the LIFE programme to implement European environmental legislation on a broader scale and boost the impact of funding for plans drafted at the regional, multi-regional, or national levels. They must follow a comprehensive approach that ensures the involvement of all stakeholders and must have at least one additional source of funding.

The project aims to support infrastructure, management, regional policies, training, and environmental awareness activities related to biodiversity conservation, encouraging ecological corridors and fighting invasive flora and fauna.

The main objectives are as follows:

- Creating an integrated management

system that ensures that the conservation goals under the Birds and Habitats directives are met;

- Ensuring the economic and technical sustainability of Natura 2000 management activities by implementing the PAF (Prioritized Action Framework)

- Promoting the development of policies and actions to achieve:

- The active management of habitats and species;
- The coherent management of Natura 2000 sites and surrounding areas, while guaranteeing ecological connectivity at the local level;
- The monitoring of the results of the actions;
- The constant monitoring of activities that interfere with Natura 2000 sites;
- The training of qualified professionals to manage Natura 2000 sites.

The LIFE IP GESTIRE 2020 project proposes a highly participatory management model coordinated by the Lombardy regional government. It is developed through the establishment of a series of committees and working groups to steer and jointly plan interventions. These include the "Co-ordination Committee", the "Natura 2000 Group", the "Permanent Technical Roundtable", and the "Complementary Funds Committee" that deals with complementing the funding of the project's activities with other funds and Community programmes. In addition to representatives from the Lombardy regional government and the project's partners, the working groups also include staff from protected area management bodies and representatives of the various stakeholder groups. The "Theme-based working groups" are responsible for designing the various actions and monitoring their development while always keeping the various stakeholders closely involved in the process.



If you are interested in the LIFE Gestire project, visit the following link:
<http://www.naturachevale.it/it/i-risultati-del-progetto/>

Workshop on the management of mountain grasslands in the Alpine biogeographic region

Within the framework of the biogeographical process for the Alpine Region, Laufen (Germany) hosted a workshop dedicated to the management of Natura 2000 grassland habitats. The workshop was attended by about 60 experts and managers working with this habitat. The goal of the workshop - organized by the Bavarian Academy for Nature Conservation and Landscape Management (ANL) and Butterfly Conservation Europe (BCE) with the support of ECNC-European Center for Nature Conservation – was to exchange knowledge and experiences in order to identify problems and solutions for the conservation of grasslands and the invertebrates that call them home. On Italy's behalf, the Autonomous Province of Bolzano presented a contribution on the classification, management, and assessment of grasslands in the province's Natura 2000 sites.



Photo: Enrico Calvario

Characteristics and conservation status of grasslands

The origins, management, and species richness of grasslands in the Alpine biogeographic region is closely tied to extensive agriculture; hence, the conservation of these habitats greatly depends on farming practices. Changes in traditional farming practices, especially the intensified use of grasslands in valley bottoms and at more accessible elevations, and the abandonment of less suitable areas, are among the leading causes behind the degradation and disappearance of semi-natural grasslands. These qualitative and quantitative losses affect the characteristic animals and plants of these habitats. The conservation status of grasslands is generally getting worse, and workshop participants stressed the need for sustainable habitat management to maintain or restore a satisfactory conservation status, along with the need to devote more resources to

funding similar management efforts for grasslands both in Natura 2000 sites and elsewhere in the region.

Actions and recommendations for grassland conservation

ANL shall draft guidelines for the management of grasslands in the Alpine biogeographic region, based on the experiences discussed over the course of the workshop. These guidelines shall include optimal management measures, habitat recovery techniques, and suggestions to prevent abandonment.

Workshop participants also appealed to the competent authorities to ask them to explicitly include in planning processes the importance of these habitats for biodiversity, their historical and cultural significance, and the ecosystem services (e.g. carbon sequestration, pollination, medicinal plants) they provide.

They also asked for close cooperation between the farming community, ecologists, and the competent authority, and the improve transfer of knowledge among all stakeholders in order to develop more integrated management practices. They reiterated the essential importance of an active involvement of farmers in the restoration and management of semi-natural grasslands, by appealing to their pride and creating long-term bonds of trust, in order to identify practical solutions for proper grassland management.

The competent bodies for the regulation and development of Natura 2000 must create the right conditions to allow farmers to continue to manage grasslands efficiently. This requires more flexibility in applying rules and the removal of the obstacles that currently limit farmer's ability to implement suitable management practices.

Another way to improve the current situation and to contribute to slowing the increase of intensive farming practices in Alpine pastures and grasslands is to pay greater attention to agricultural incentives aiming to support the production of goods for the community. Finally, another crucial aspect that emerged during the workshop is the need to strengthen the monitoring and implementation of the Habitats directive, including through additional funding.



Photo: Joachim Mulser

The vast storehouse of knowledge related to the traditional management methods that conserve the biodiversity of natural and semi-natural grasslands is a precious resource that must be preserved.

The Environmental Assessment Portal

The Ministry of the Environment's Environmental Assessment Portal (www.va.minambiente.it) is an efficient tool providing information on ongoing procedures, and allows users to submit remarks:

- It is the sole access point for all administrative and technical information on SEA procedures for which the central government is responsible;
- It provides specific techniques for preparing and sending digital documentation for SEA procedures pursuant to D.Lgs 152/2006 and subsequent amendments;
- Makes available online -line all administrative and technical informa-

tion on SEA procedures;

- Makes it possible to consult the status of procedures in real time;
- Allows the public to submit their remarks during the public consultation phase, including via certified email;
- Provides information on integrated EIA-SEA and EIA-APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT procedures and on trans-border consultations;
- The home page ("*Dati ambientali in evidenza*" section) provides a monthly web-GIS services that makes it possible to view the areas affected by ongoing SEA procedures and their status.



Foto: Enrico Calvario

A Spanish LIFE project gives rise to a “Handbook for Journalists” on popularizing the Natura 2000 Network.

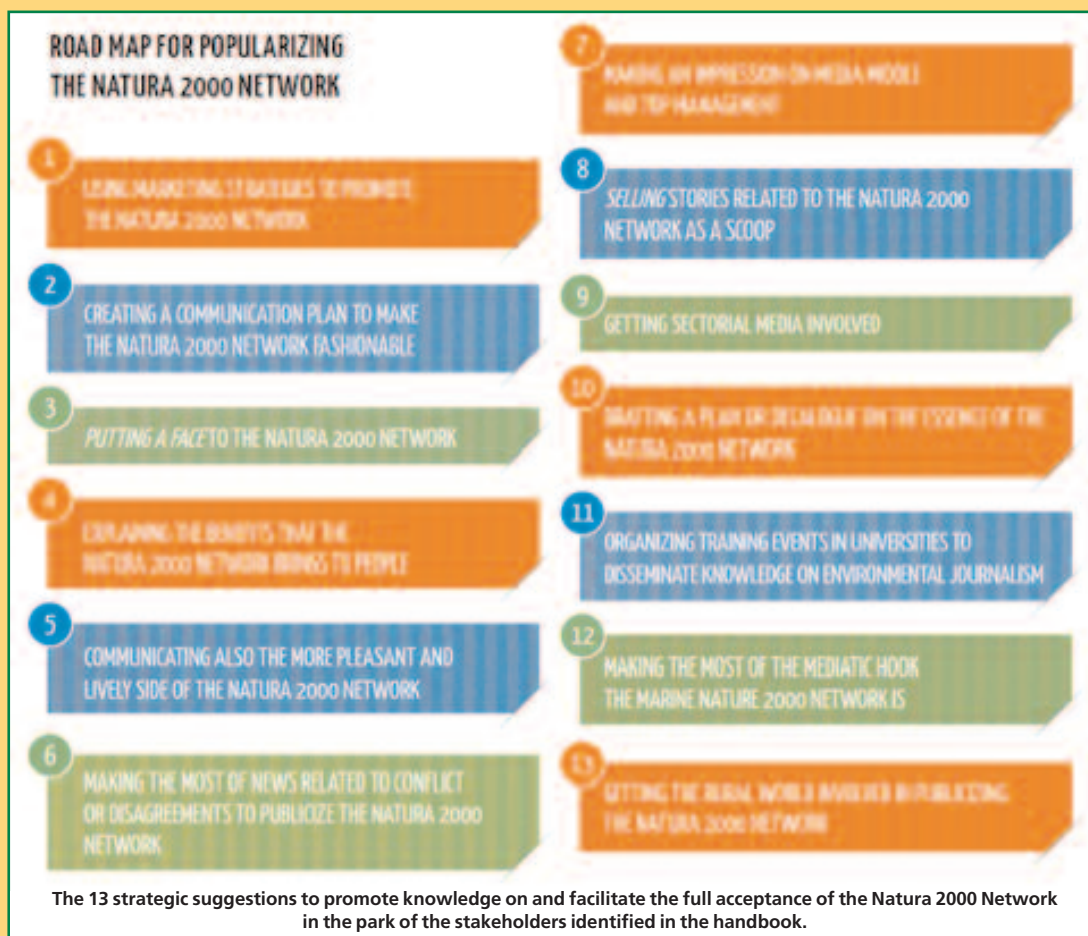
In November 2015, as part of a “LIFE Information-Communication” project titled “Activa Red Natura 2000: Connecting people with biodiversity” coordinated by the Spanish Society for Ornithology (SEO/BirdLife), a handbook for journalists on popularizing the Natura 2000 network was published in both Spanish and English.

The publication originates from a Natura 2000 workshop on communication held in Madrid in December 2013 and organized by SEO/BirdLife, APIA (Association of Journalists for Environmental Information), and the EFE press agency.

The LIFE + Natura 2000: connecting people with biodiversity project

aims to contribute to the full implementation of the “Birds” (2009/147/EC) and “Habitats” (92/43/EEC) by facilitating and promoting better knowledge and awareness of the significance and development opportunities of the Natura 2000 Network.

The authors of the handbook also sketched out a road map for promoting the Natura 2000 Network that includes 13 strategic suggestions for facilitating its full acceptance on the part of stakeholders. The handbook can be downloaded here: <http://activarednatura2000.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Natura2000Network.Handbook-for-journalists-.pdf>



European Parliament resolution of 2 February 2016 on the mid-term review of the EU's Biodiversity Strategy.

On 2 February 2016, with 592 votes in favour and 52 votes against, the European Parliament welcomed the mid-term review of the EU's Biodiversity Strategy and the 'State of Nature' reports, stressing the strategic importance of these reports for achieving the EU's biodiversity target.

This vote was particularly important in light of the conclusion of the “fitness check” on the Habitats and

Birds Directives, whose final vote is scheduled by the European Parliament for April 2016, concluding a lengthy process that began in spring 2015.

This process appears to respect the wishes expressed by about 500,000 European citizens who signed an international petition last in support of the Habitats and Birds Directives, which directives must thus be supported and applied in full and with conviction.

Audit by the European Court of Auditors on the management of the Natura 2000 Network.

In December 2015 the European Court of Auditors launched an audit on the management of the Natura 2000 Network in Member States, in order to address the following issue: does the management of the Natura 2000 Network effectively contribute to stemming biodiversity loss?

The main goal was to obtain from Member States comparable information on the ways in which the Natura 2000 Network is implemented and monitored, and on the attribution of funds (public funds, whether EU, national, or other funds) for management activities. A similar initiative was attempted in the past with the questionnaires on article 8 of the Habitats Directive.

The survey included a questionnaire in Word format on the implementation and monitoring of the Natura 2000 Network in addition to a form to communicate information on funding, broken down into the 25 spending items already included in the PAF (Prioritised Action Framework), form in Excel format. The main topics about which Member States were asked to provide information were as follows:

- Site management
- Funding and network resources
- Monitoring
- Information obligations
- Commission guidelines

The Ministry coordinated and processed the data from regional ad-

ministration on regional Community programmes (Environment Departments, working in conjunction with Agriculture Departments, which are responsible for EAFRD funds, and Planning Departments, which are responsible for ERDF funds) implemented with resources for LIFE projects, and with an extrapolation of funds for national protected areas and general information for the part of the survey related to the implementation and monitoring of the Natura 2000 Network.

It was a complex task involving the vetting and processing of data that was not always homogeneous. Nevertheless, the level of cooperation on the part of regional administrations was satisfactory, in spite of the difficulties associated with collecting precise data on Natura 2000 sites, which data are not easy to disentangle from spending on areas outside the Natura 2000 Network.

This task made it possible to provide an initial response to the European Court of Auditors, and estimated that the resources earmarked for 2014-2020 do not meet regional funding needs (calculated on the basis of the PAFs drafted by regional administrations and on an estimate of average costs per hectare for Natura 2000 sites).

This provides food for thought in terms of the need to optimize systems to monitor and trace the resources invested in the Natura 2000 Network, so as to ensure more effective interventions and an improved implementation of the Habitats Directive and the National Biodiversity Strategy.

The new biogeographical seminar process continues: a workshop on the management of Mediterranean forests in Natura 2000 sites is scheduled for May.

Between 9 and 11 May, 2016 the enchanting Luberon Regional Park in Provence (France) will host the next appointment in the biogeographical seminar process promoted by the European Commission's Environment DG. This two-day workshop will deal with topical issues related to the management of Mediterranean forest habitats, with a particular focus on integrated management within Natura 2000 sites to reconcile conservation and silviculture goals. The challenges and opportunities inherent in planning and promoting ecological connectivity in a sector of great economic significance will underlie the approaches that will be illustrated during field trips and discussed during inter-disciplinary sessions. Once again, the goal is to promote exchanges of knowledge and discussion among participants. The workshop will be of particular interest to regional and local operators in charge of forest management and nature conservation in the Mediterranean region.

National Biodiversity Strategy: meeting of the Joint Committee on the 2013-2014 Report and on the Mid-term Revision – A working group on Appropriate assessment is established.

The first 2016 meeting of the Joint Committee – the main governance body for the National Biodiversity Strategy, comprising representatives from the central administration, regional administrations, and autonomous provinces – was held on February 17. At the top of the agenda was the presentation of the **2013-2014 Report** drafted by ISPRA and completed by the Ministry's Directorate for the Protection of Nature and the Sea, with contributions from the members of the Joint Committee. The Report discusses and assesses the progress achieved in 2013-14 in the Strategy's working areas, on the basis of selected indicators.

The second item on the agenda was the presentation of the **Mid-term Review of the National Strategy**. This is a planning document that aims to define a framework of priority interventions within a broader national and European context.

Specific issues will be dealt with in more detail after approval by the State-Regions Conference, including through the establishment of ad hoc technical roundtables. In fact, the meeting marked the launch of the **working group on guidelines for environmental incidence assessments**, to which all regions and autonomous provinces are asked to participate with their representatives.

NATURA 2000 ITALIA informa

EDITORIAL TEAM:

Maria Carmela Giarratano, Laura Pettiti

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE:

Enrico Calvario, Caterina Caracausi, Giuseppe Luzzi, Fabio Modesti, Joa-

chim Mulser, Giorgio Occhipinti, Emanuela Perinelli, Nicoletta Tartagliani

THIS NEWSLETTER IS AVAILABLE IN ITALIAN AND IN ENGLISH.

and in the website of the Ministry of Environment and Territorial Protection at: http://www.minambiente.it/home_it/me

[nu.html?mp=/menu/menu_attivita/&m=Re te_Natura_2000.html#Documenti_di_riferimento.html](http://www.minambiente.it/home_it/me/nu.html?mp=/menu/menu_attivita/&m=Re te_Natura_2000.html#Documenti_di_riferimento.html)

Reproduction is authorized, except for commercial purposes, provided the source is acknowledged.

GRAPHIC DESIGN: Sagp srl, Roma

PRINTING: February 2016