

Green Infrastructure - Enhancing Europe's Natural Capital

Title

On Monday 6th May the European Commission launched a **new strategy** to encourage the deployment of green infrastructure. The strategy also revealed a clear policy signal to ensure that the enhancement of natural processes that provide multiple benefits, such as green infrastructure, becomes a systematic part of spatial planning. This is a key element of the implementation of the EU's **Biodiversity Strategy towards 2020**.

Europe's landscape is dramatically modified every day by fragmentation, change and intensification of land use as a result of persistent human development. Urban expansion and construction of road and energy infrastructures have degraded and divided valuable ecosystems affecting habitats and species and reducing the spatial and functional coherence of the landscape.

Green Infrastructure uses nature to provide ecological, economic and social benefits. It is a key tool to a sustainable spatial planning and development.

Ariel Brunner, Head of EU Policy for BirdLife Europe stated "Green infrastructure is crucial for biodiversity conservation and is a cost efficient way of supporting climate adaptation, natural disaster risk reduction and improved human well-being."

Also, by always integrating natural processes in relevant EU policy areas (e.g. Regional Development, Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation, Agriculture and Forestry, Disaster Prevention, Water Quality and Quantity, Flood Management, Waste Water Treatment, Health, etc) the aim of the new strategy is to develop synergies within these areas and opportunities for cost-efficient alternatives to "Grey Infrastructure". This should help save ecosystems and ecosystem services for human well-being.

BirdLife Europe welcomes the strategy and expects it to, as it promises, effectively trigger a new impetus to strengthen **Natura 2000** as a resilient and coherent network of sites and to link this to Member States' commitment to restore 15% of degraded ecosystems by 2020.

The first occasion for the Commission to show its resolution in turning words into action will be the design and approval of Member States' spending plans (Operational Programmes) for the main EU funds over the next few months. The European Commission should provide more

guidance and support to Member States in providing spatial planning benchmarks which will include the new strategy's guidelines.

Ariel Brunner concluded "The next few months will show whether the Commission is ready to work with Member States to ensure that this modern concept is used in the planning of EU investments that are still too often focused on "grey infrastructures", including those that are environmentally harmful and economically unaffordable."

More information see:

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/ecosystems/index_en.htm http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-404_en.htm
