



## **Ministry of Sustainable Development & Infrastructure, Luxembourg: Eurosite Workshop**

### **Natura 2000 Site Managers: their key role, profile and importance for Europe's nature**

#### **Summary**

This workshop took place in Remerschen, Luxembourg, from 6 to 8 October 2010. Designed in partnership with Frank Wolff, Government Attachée in the Department of Environment and member of Eurosite's Council for Luxembourg, the workshop was identified early in the year as being of significant interest in the International Year of Biodiversity.

Supporting implementation of Natura 2000 is a specific priority for Eurosite. Through a variety of projects and dedicated events, such as the workshop in Luxembourg, Eurosite is able to draw upon and share the best of good practices being developed and applied in Natura 2000 sites across Europe. Importantly, this includes working with organisations in the EU 27 Member States, but also neighbouring countries and those in pre-accession in particular. The Eurosite network affords a valuable opportunity for site managers to discuss their practices and compare approaches. The sharing of practical experience and site-based know-how are trademark practices for Eurosite.

Over the course of three days, 31 delegates from 9 countries participated, including the Czech Republic, Croatia, France and the United Kingdom, as well as Luxembourg. Participants attended from 15 organisations, representing a mix of statutory agencies and NGOs. In line with the aims of the workshop, the great majority of delegates were practicing site managers (and also managers of site managers) with specific interest in and responsibilities for implementation of Natura 2000.

#### **Workshop Purpose**

The main purpose of the workshop was to discuss the key role of site managers in implementing Natura 2000 and practical ways to support transfer of knowledge and innovation between practitioners across Europe. Drawing upon the experience and knowledge of participants to contribute to improving site management effectiveness, the workshop enabled comparison and benchmarking of approaches in different countries around Europe. There were 5 case study contributions to present actual Natura 2000 sites and present 'real life' examples in the Czech Republic, Croatia, United Kingdom, France and Luxembourg.

#### **Main Conclusions:**

- Natura 2000 is the key EU policy to conserve Europe's biodiversity and, as such, it deserves special focus.

- Each Natura 2000 site is important and unique, and all are valuable, designated on the basis of conservation features, species and habitats listed as requiring special protection under the annexes to the Birds and Habitats Directives. It is important to remember that each Natura 2000 site is part of a pan-European network of sites, the largest of its kind in the world.
- Natura 2000 provides an ideal framework for learning and continuous improvement, especially in relation to managing the challenges and threats to biodiversity, such as those coming from climate change. Within the Natura 2000 network, there are important opportunities to share 'real life' experience and new ideas, to compare, benchmark and, where appropriate, improve nature conservation practices.
- Although only 17% of EU territory is currently designated as Natura 2000, the benefits for biodiversity are cumulatively much higher: in the coming years, as more sites are designated and the implementation process continues, it will be possible to generate a greater critical mass of high quality, well-managed sites to yield greater benefits for biodiversity.
- Particularly in relation to climate change, there will be a need for sensible adaptive management approaches, whereby the effectiveness of planned management activities can be assessed in terms of expected outcomes: it will be increasingly important to monitor contributions to defined nature conservation objectives for Natura 2000 sites.
- Fostering the resilience of ecosystems is key for biodiversity retention and mobility. A range of initiatives are currently being discussed and are highly likely to be further developed to support and enhance implementation of Natura 2000 – these include:
  - More fully developing connectivity around and between sites to maximize the conditions necessary to increase biodiversity and halt its decline;
  - So-called 'Green Infrastructures' are likely to be increasingly important, especially when biodiversity considerations are fully integrated into spatial and landscape planning approaches;
- Integrated approaches to the funding of Natura 2000 are currently being discussed within the EC and new/ revised mechanisms will be developed in the coming period. This is particularly important for site managers who can spend a significant amount of time either seeking to secure funding for projects on their Natura 2000 sites and, when successful, administering project contracts. In this context, the following points were made:
  - It is likely that LIFE+ Nature and Biodiversity will become a core component of increasingly programmatic approaches to funding – for example, LIFE+ can be used to generate leverage, working in packages with funds from other sources, such as Rural Development and Agricultural funding mechanisms.
  - Learning how to better and more accurately value the services provided by ecosystems will be increasingly important in order to trigger funds from other sources not traditionally used to target or realise biodiversity priorities;
  - Development of more flexible mechanisms (generally) would be helpful – for example, spending on areas outwith Natura 2000 sites where that is justified to achieve LIFE project (Natura 2000/ biodiversity focused) priorities;
  - There is a need to address concerns about the current LIFE funding mechanisms, especially in relation to application and management of project funds – for example, smaller NGOs in particular face significant cash-flow problems associated with the phased structure of project payments; there are also important opportunities to extend the scope and usage of LIFE funds through reviewing the scale of projects supported – for example, one idea is a small grants funds for smaller scale but nonetheless important projects, perhaps administered on behalf of the EC.

## Specific Roles & Responsibilities of Natura 2000 Site Managers

There are common issues and core functions involved in working on Natura 2000 sites: these can be identified as **management processes** - such as engaging multiple stakeholders in Natura 2000 management, resolving conflict, developing management plans, communication and outreach strategies etc, - and **management activities** carried out on sites – such as, mowing, fencing, grazing, removing invasive alien species, restoration or rehabilitation actions, public information services and interpretation facilities etc.

During the workshop, participants identified the following roles and responsibilities as being of particular importance for Natura 2000 site managers:

- **Core management functions** – these include ‘basic’ professional skills required for effective site management and to achieve favourable conservation of each site’s features: for example, site management and activity planning, development of site-based nature conservation objectives, implementation, data gathering and monitoring etc. Site managers require a wide range of skills, access to diverse sources of information and to develop extensive specialist knowledge about their site and field of expertise.
- **Exercising judgement and assessing the impact of on-site activities** – often, site managers are required to exercise judgement (based on experience) about what actions to take and when. Also, there is a need to make decisions about what is or is not in the public’s interest and develop sophisticated decision-making techniques. There may be a need to conduct impact assessments and develop compensation measures. Comparing approaches with others to build knowledge about what works or does not work on similar sites can be extremely useful here to achieve better results.
- **Working in partnership** – approaches involving other agencies, NGOs, local government organisations and others, are becoming an increasingly important part of a site managers’ daily work and routine. This involves effective negotiation and communications skills, especially when necessary to reconcile (sometimes) competing objectives and priorities regarding a specific site and its uses.
- **Public awareness raising and outreach** – this is a critical area of work, often involving and requiring a significant investment of dedicated time, energy and capital finances (media campaigns, promotional activities, production of accessible literature and other materials, visitor services, display notices etc.)
- **On-site Access and interpretation** - are key services provided by site managers to ensure people understand why a site is important, provide information about its features and increase their enjoyment. Often, a balance is required between encouraging and promoting responsible access in ways which respect and safeguard a site’s integrity – for example, working with specific interest groups, such as local mountain bikers, climbers, walkers, visiting school groups etc, can enable dialogue building, promote active involvement in site management and also enable people to fully enjoy and appropriately utilise a site.
- **Communication and relationship building** – this includes more than provision of information. Site managers often have a central place within a local community and require excellent interpersonal skills to build effective working relationships. This is also extremely important in dealings with all stakeholder groups. The range of stakeholders can be extremely diverse – for example, those working on a site and depending on it for

their living, landowners, colleagues in a site manager's own organisation (important for fulfilling support management functions), staff of other organisations engaged in nature conservation, and all external contacts, such as the media, national level officials and representatives from the European Commission. In most cases, it is extremely helpful if the site manager is seen to come from the site and has a strong connection with it, its nature and the people living and working there.

- **Site-based research, volunteering and other complementary services** - several delegates noted the importance of Natura 2000 sites for research purposes and that this could be an important 'growth area' for Natura 2000 site management. Also, the value of coordinated input from groups of volunteers was identified, for example in terms of supporting data gathering for monitoring purposes or for routine maintenance work.

During the workshop, participants confirmed that a wide spectrum of individuals and organisations have specific responsibilities for managing Natura 2000 sites (or different components of it). 'Site managers' are not always employed personnel of an agency or an NGO – for example, they can also be individual, private landowners working (sometimes) under contract in return for a financial grant. In such arrangements, there is often the need for a site manager to manage that relationship and ensure agreed activities are being delivered.

Developing ways to increase capacity, improve performance and build knowledge about on-site management processes and practices involved in implementing Natura 2000 were identified as a key area for future action. Opportunities to support the knowledge building and transfer processes involved were discussed as an integral part of the workshop, including an option to develop a LEONARDO project; LIFE Information and Communication was also identified as another potential funding mechanism.

## **Acknowledgements**

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