

Preserving Natural Complexity



Target 4: At least 15 per cent of each ecological region or vegetation type secured through effective management and/or restoration

Protection of the world's terrestrial ecoregions in 2009, UNEP-WCMC



This target focuses on the conservation of plant species through the conservation of the landscapes, or ecological regions (eco-regions) in which they exist. Types of landscape might be forests, wetlands, grasslands or deserts. Each contains a different assemblage of plant species.

Conserving a percentage of each of the different types of eco-regions that can be found on earth will ensure the conservation of the different species found in those landscapes. Conservation at the eco-region level is usually carried out through 'protected areas'. Protected areas are the

cornerstone of biodiversity conservation; they maintain key habitats, allow for species migration and movement, and ensure the maintenance of natural processes, including species evolution, across the landscape.

Where are we now?

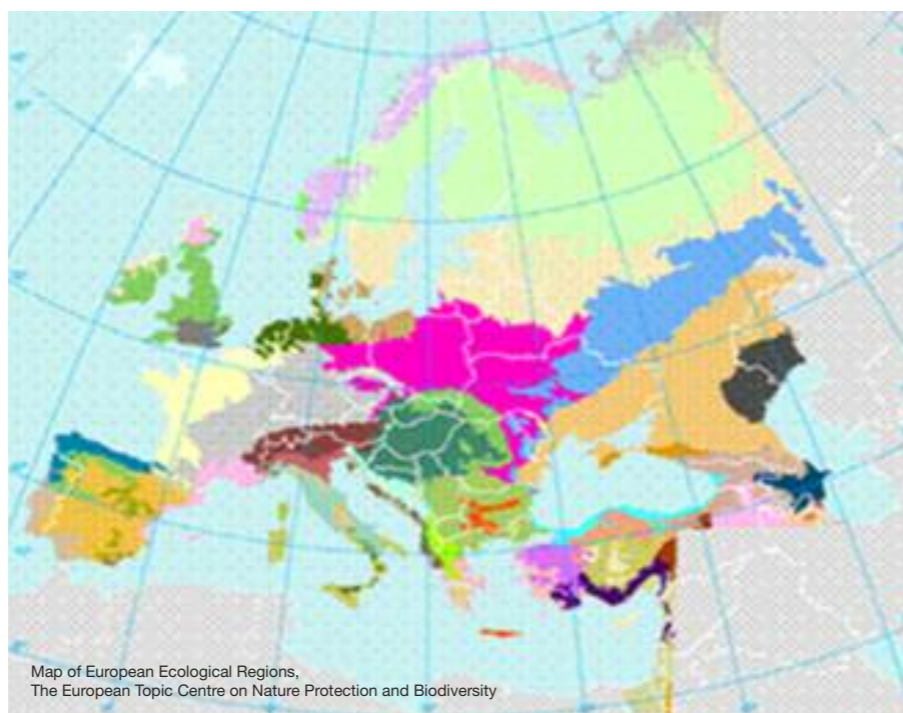
In total about 13 per cent of the world's land surface is covered by protected areas. However, not all ecological regions are equally well protected. The conservation organization WWF has identified 14 different ecological regions and in a report published in 2009, it was noted that 'only 54 per cent of the WWF terrestrial ecoregions reach 10 per cent protection.' In general, forests and mountain areas are well represented in protected



RBG Kew



Amazon Conservation Team



Map of European Ecological Regions, The European Topic Centre on Nature Protection and Biodiversity

"The wilderness holds answers to more questions than we have yet learned to ask."

Nancy Newhall



'A protected area is a clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.' IUCN



Laurel Melvor

popularized in 2005 by the United Nations Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, a four-year study involving more than 1,300 scientists worldwide. This study recognized that the health and well-being of humankind depends upon the services provided by ecosystems and their components: water, soil, nutrients and organisms.

Ecosystem services can be grouped into four broad categories:

- **Provisioning**, such as the production of food and water;
- **Regulating**, such as the control of climate and disease;
- **Supporting**, such as nutrient cycles and crop pollination;
- **Cultural**, such as spiritual and recreational benefits.

areas, while natural grasslands (such as prairies) and coastal and estuarine ecosystems, including mangroves, are poorly represented.

Ecosystem services

Protected areas perform many functions. As well as being essential for conserving biodiversity, they also deliver vital ecosystem services. The term 'ecosystem service' was



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