

## EU INTERREG IV B CENTRAL Project HABIT-CHANGE

### Summary - Policy Event, 5<sup>th</sup> March 2013, Brussels

“We cannot go back!” said Karl Falkenberg, Director General for the Environment of the European Commission at the HABIT-CHANGE policy event. Climate change is a fact and nature is responding at increasing speed. Many protected areas in Europe are already noticing the first consequences. We need healthy ecosystems because they provide valuable services and will play a significant role in carbon sequestration. However, the preservation of ecosystems and habitats in times of changing climate conditions is a challenge. Europe’s green infrastructure is part of the solution. So far, Natura 2000 is consisting mostly of isolated islands rather than functioning as a coherent network. “But it is hard to survive only on an island,” Mr. Falkenberg pointed out. Consequentially, the cohesion of the Natura 2000 network needs to be enhanced. In addition, more examples of adaptation action on site level are needed to prove the benefits of planned adaptation. The project HABIT-CHANGE presented such examples in Brussels.



Dr. Andrej Sovinc, head of the Secovlje Salina Nature Park in Slovenia, summarized the project results for his site. Sea-water rise, increasing number of summer storms, and human disturbances have a devastating effect on ground nesting birds in the low lying wetlands. To tackle these problems, a “Ground-nesting birds Action Plan” has been designed. Specific adaptation measures, like the creation of artificial islands, are now implemented.

The example of the Biebrza National Park in Poland demonstrated how nature conservation, agriculture, and tourism are affected by changing climate conditions. Protected wetlands often include meadows used for grazing, mowing, or other forms of agricultural production. Here, agricultural policy interferes with environmental protection. Mateusz Grygoruk illustrated how appropriate communication of climate-related challenges and awareness rising can improve the acceptance of adaptation actions. Active stakeholder involvement is essential to harmonize adaptation activities from agriculture with conservation goals.

For the past 3 years, HABIT-CHANGE has been searching for answers to the questions. How habitats might react to climate change? And what can be done about it? 14 investigation areas representing 89 habitat types of European importance (Natura 2000) were analysed in the Project. “During this intensive cooperation between partners from science and practice we have learned that climate adaptation on the local and regional level is not only affected by existing changes in climate. Also, the adaptive capacity of local institutions like administration of National Parks or Biosphere Reserves is a crucial component,” underlined Dr. Sven Rannow, the coordinator of the project. The lack of expertise, methods, and tools for climate adaptation as well as limited resources prevent proper management and adaptation. Much of the available knowledge and guidance does not reach local management. Dr. Christian Wilke from the TU Berlin highlighted the fact that technical and methodical guidance must be tailored to the requirements of protected area management and distributed actively. There are several ways to support the management of Natura 2000 sites in their

adaptation. First of all, capacity should be enhanced to monitor, assess, manage, and report effects of climate change. In addition, transnational cooperation and experience exchanges on climate adaptation should be enhanced. But the existing gaps in knowledge also need to be closed. Further research is needed to analyse changes and succession of Natura 2000 habitats. Methods to handle results from scenario analysis in order to make robust decisions must be developed. Finally, biodiversity protection and climate adaptation must be mainstreamed and harmonized in EU policies. Otherwise, contradictory programmes will invest in antagonistic actions and valuable resources will be spent inefficiently.

Further documentation of the event including the HABIT-CHANGE Policy Brief is available at <http://www.habit-change.eu/brussels>.