

# COST Action E27

## Protected Forest Areas in Europe - Analysis and Harmonisation (PROFOR)

### Results, Conclusions and Recommendations

## Introduction

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The specific attributes of European forests often reduces the possibilities for establishing protected forest areas, or forces specific approaches for selection, establishment and management of protected forest areas. Due to the continuous use of forests historically, large original forests can be found only in the boreal zone on the European side of the Russian Foundation (Parviainen et al., 2000, European Commission, 2000). The largest natural forests strictly protected in reserves are in Finland, Sweden and the remote areas of Central and Eastern Europe. Fragmented relics of native forests still persist in mountainous areas of the Balkan, Alpine and Carpathian Region (Diaci, 1999, Mayer et al., 1987, Diaci & Frank, 2001, Korpel, 1995). Because of the intensive

historical use of forests and the specific small scale of the ownership structure, the European concept of forest protection has become a more complex and varied one than in other countries with huge areas of untouched forests (Parviainen & Frank, 2003). A specific characteristic of forest protection in Europe is the necessity to include forest areas where use has been, or still is, limited to some degree and management linked with the aims of multiple use.

The first systematic analysis of strictly protected forest areas in Europe was in the COST Action E4 Forest Reserves Research Network, carried out in 1996-1999 (Parviainen et al., 2000, European Commission, 2000). One of the main results of COST Action E4 with respect to strict forest reserves,

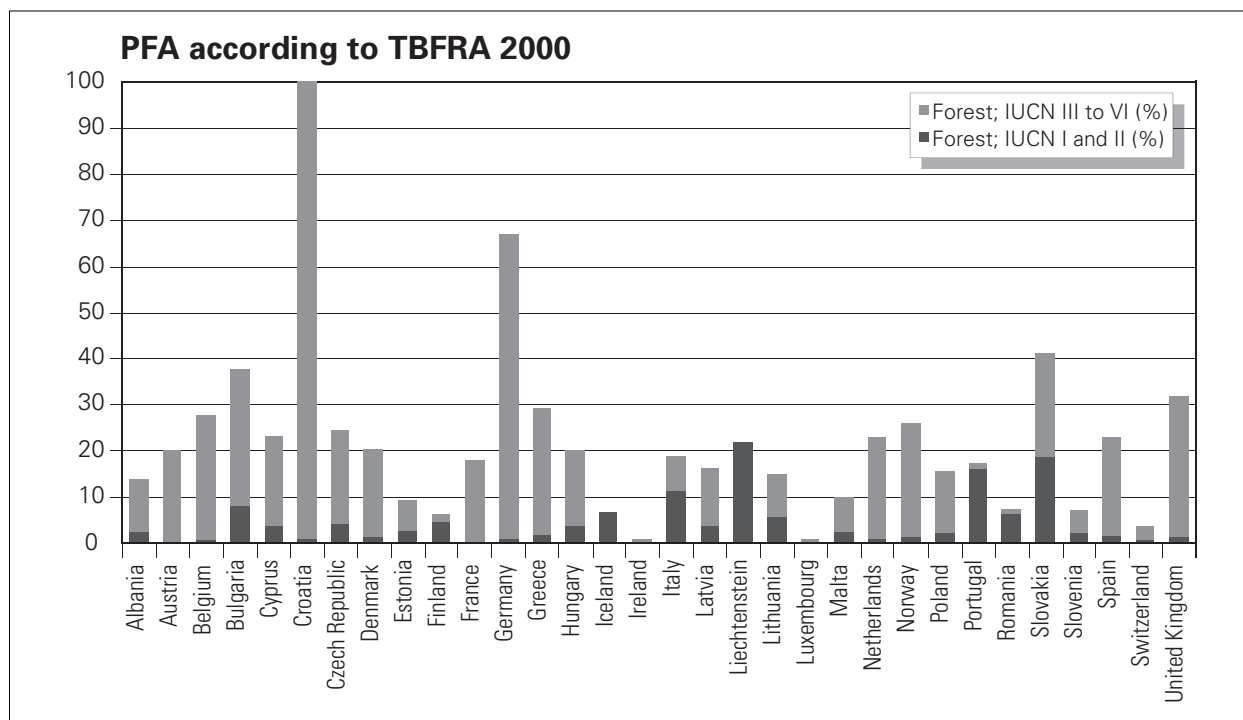


Figure 1:

Reported figures for protected forest area (relative to the total forest area), as reported in the Temperate and Boreal Forest Resource Assessment (UN-ECE/FAO) 2000.

was that the ideal non-intervention concept of developing appreciable areas of real untouched forests is not a realistic scenario for Europe.

Data on protected forest areas have been collected internationally in connection with other forest inventory data through Temperate and Boreal Forest Resource Assessment of UN-ECE/FAO (TBFRA, 2000, United Nations, 2000), using the "Protected Area Management Categories" of IUCN (1994). The IUCN classification system has been developed for worldwide use and includes 6 protection categories. It was intended to improve communication and understanding amongst experts and to provide international standards to help governments raise the quality of protected area management and international data collection. The IUCN classification system works ideally for the assessment of large, continuous forest areas, but is not so easily applied to the forests of Europe.

The European Environment Agency (EEA) and its European Topic Centre on Nature Conservation (ETC/NC) in Paris, the Council of Europe and the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) started in 1995 to co-ordinate their activities related to a data basis on designated areas. The "Common Database on Designated Areas" (CDDA) includes the information from nationally designated areas, EU designations and international designations. The aim is to produce an overall database on all protection categories and a complete database of all protected sites in Europe. It collects all designation types by national names, numbers and surface area, and contains information on over 50 000 designated areas from 48 countries, covering more than 800 various national designation types. These numbers show that the comparison of protected forests is extremely difficult because of the numerous categories and definitions. CDDA, however, does not make any analysis of the harmonisation of national designations; it is neither designated nor used for reporting purposes.

The Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE) is a high-level process for forest policy dialogue and co-operation, that covers forest biodiversity issues. MCPFE developed the first set of Pan-European Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management within the so-called Helsinki-process (1993-1995). One of the indicators for the criterion "C4: Maintenance, conservation and appropriate enhancement of biological diversity in forest ecosystems" is "Area of forest and other wooded land protected to conserve biodiversity, landscape and specific natural elements, according to

the MCPFE Assessment guidelines". This means that countries are requested to monitor, assess and report the Protected Forest Areas (PFA) that exist in the country (both in absolute and relative figures) (MCPFE, 2003a, b). MCPFE also collaborates with the ministerial process "Environment for Europe" and the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (PEBLDS).

*Table 1:  
MCPFE classes of protected and protective forest and other wooded land respective protected area management categories of IUCN and designation types used by EEA in its data base on designated areas (CDDA)*

MCPFE Classes		EEA	IUCN
1. Main Management Objective "Biodiversity"	1.1. "No Active Intervention"	A	I
	1.2. "Minimum Intervention"	A	II
	1.3. "Conservation Through Active Management"	A	IV
2. Main Management Objective: "Protection of Landscapes and Specific Natural Elements"	B	III,V,VI	
3. Main Management Objective: "Protective Functions"	(B)	n.a.	

The MCPFE classes are congruent both to the Protected Area Management Categories of IUCN – The World Conservation Union and the Common Database on Designated Areas (CDDA) managed by the EEA.

The initiatives have produced very varied results on the state and numbers of types of forest protection in Europe. The reasons for the difficulties in comparison include the different definitions of forest, variation in the protection categories and in the activities permitted in protected areas, differences in the naturalness and continuity of forests, and differences in the protection objectives (Parviainen & Frank, 2003). A clarification of the state of forest protection in different countries is needed in order to achieve a harmonised discussion.

Both the IUCN and the MCPFE classification systems are unlikely to be altered - they are internationally accepted and endorsed. Clarifications and guidelines on the criteria to be used are, however, needed to prevent further differences in interpretation. COST E27 Working Group 2 gives some recommendations for interpretations to allow more harmonised assessments and reporting of PFA, and in order to avoid these interpretation-based differences. However, a harmonisation phase, bringing together the focal points responsible for national

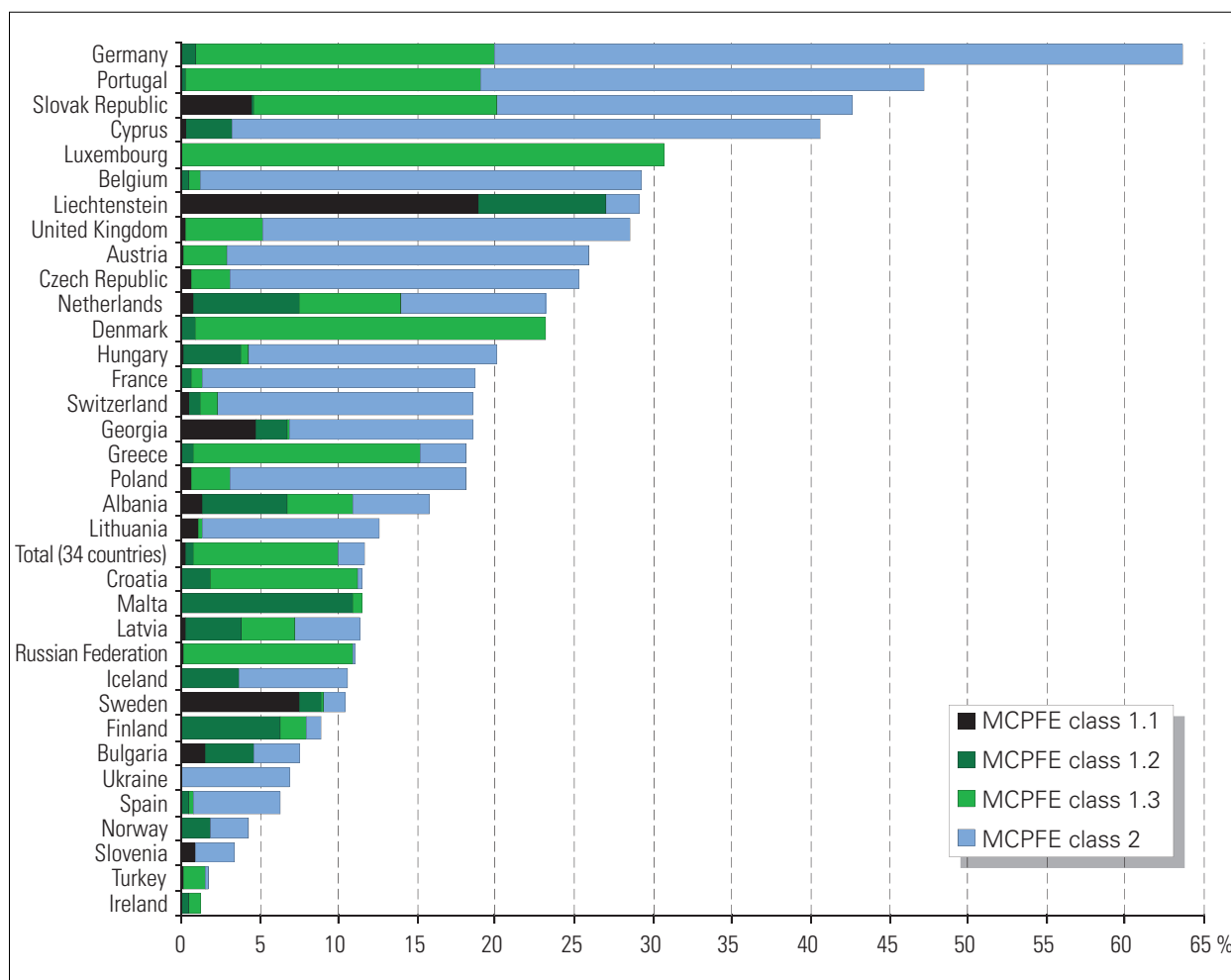


Figure 2:

Share of protected forest and other wooded land in 34 European countries. Source: MCPFE (2000 and 2002). (Figure taken from MCPFE, 2003 b)

Note: Ukraine was provided data only on MCPFE class 2; information on MCPFE classes 1.1 to 1.3 is not available. In Germany and Portugal all Natura 2000 areas are under class 1.3

reporting, still will be necessary, as it is impossible to clear out all imaginable differences in interpretation.

To analyse the large number of PFA categories and classification systems at both the national and international level, the EU-COST action E27 "Protected Forest Areas - Analysis and Harmonisation" was launched in 2002 with a term of 4 years. The main objective of the action is to describe, analyse and harmonise the wide-range of PFA categories used in European countries within the context of existing international systems of protected forest areas. The scientific programme covers PFA definitions, national classifications and their historical and legal background, analysis of options for the integration of data collected in national forest inventory programmes, and harmonisation of definitions and identification of problem areas when using international classification systems and reporting to international organisations.

### What is COST?

COST is an intergovernmental framework for European Co-operation in the field of Scientific and Technical Research, allowing the co-ordination of nationally funded research on a European level. COST is based on actions. These are networks of co-ordinated national research projects. The Actions are defined by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU, COST, 2001) signed by the Governments of the COST states wishing to participate in the Action. COST Actions cover basic and pre-competitive research as well as activities of public utility. COST has a geographical scope beyond the EU; most of the Central and Eastern European countries are members. COST also welcomes the participation of interested institutions from non-COST member states without any

geographical restriction. More information can be found at the COST-website: [www.cordis.lu/cost](http://www.cordis.lu/cost)

### COST Action E27 objectives

The main aim of the action is to harmonise the wide-range of Protected Forest Area categories used in European countries within the context of existing international systems of protected areas.

The objectives of the action are:

- To enhance the quality and clarity of information on PFAs at both the national and the European level, to allow comparison of data and information on PFAs and serve as a basis for international data collection.
- To compile information on the historical background and restrictions applied to different national PFA classifications. To collect all relevant definitions of all categories of PFAs including forests with protective functions.
- To make the reporting of national PFA information from national sources to international organisations transparent and comparable, such that this information can be used in the assessment of forest resources.
- To attempt a tentative description and quantification of the total economic value of PFAs.
- To seek the best options for the harmonisation of national data and definitions on PFAs within the context of international data collection processes.

### The COST Action E27 structure

Member countries of COST Action E27 are Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom. For further details please visit our project homepage: <http://bfw.ac.at/020/profor/>

Besides the 25 European signatory countries the following international organisations have an official observer status and are fully involved in the working process with full access to all documents and data:

- Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE) – Liaison Unit in Warsaw
- European Environment Agency (EEA) – European Topic Centre on Nature Protection and Biodiversity in Paris

COST E27 PROFOR further co-operates directly with the following organisations:

- International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
- Environment for Europe – Pan European Biodiversity and Landscape Diversity Strategy (PEBLDS)
- United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN-ECE)

The COST Action E27 is based on 3 Working Groups, each covering specific working packages:

<p><b>Management committee (MC)</b> One or two representatives from each member country Chair: Georg Frank, Austria Vice-Chair: Jari Parviainen, Finland</p>		
<p><b>Steering committee (SC)</b> Chair, vice-chair, co-ordinators of the working groups, action secretary, scientific secretary</p>		
<p><b>Working Group 1 (WG1)</b> Jim Latham, U.K.</p>	<p><b>Working Group 2 (WG2)</b> Kris Vandekerkhove, Belgium</p>	<p><b>Working Group 3 (WG3)</b> Andreas Schuck, Germany</p>
<p><b>Description and Analysis of Protected Forest Areas – National Dimension</b></p>	<p><b>Harmonisation and Improvement of Information on European Protected Forest Areas – International Dimension</b></p>	<p><b>A Clearing House Mechanism for European Protected Forest Areas</b></p>

### **Working Group 1: Description and analysis of PFA – national dimension**

Working Group 1 of COST E27 is charged with describing the national dimension of PFAs in Europe. That is, to describe the different sorts of PFAs that exist, to review their current state and historical development, and to provide an understanding what the differences are between them and why. The work involves the collection and analysis of detailed information about PFAs throughout Europe, investigation of key concepts such as 'naturalness', compilation of other essential or critical 'key terms', and tentative exploration of the economic aspects of PFAs. The results should support the work of Working Group 2, and help to formulate recommendations for the treatment of PFAs at the international level, as well as providing a general understanding and broad reference work on PFAs for scientists, foresters, policy makers and conservationists.

A major output of WG 1 are the Country Reports (Latham et al., 2005). They give a concise account of the main figures for each country participating in COST Action E27. The Country Reports have a consistent structure and content to allow comparisons to be easily made, although flexibility has been encouraged so as not to constrain genuine differences of approach between countries.

### **Working Group 2: Harmonisation and improvement of information on European PFA – international dimension**

The principal aim of the Working Group 2 is concentrated on Task 2 of the action: enhancement of the quality and clarity of information on PFA at the European level, by delivering input to the three following Work Packages:

- Clarifying and presenting options to harmonise „Protected Forest Area“ terms in collaboration with the IUCN international system of protected area management categories
- Analysing the current procedure for reporting to international organisations and especially the procedures for PFA and identification of problem areas when using international classification systems.

- Clarifying the use of the UN-ECE Timber Committee „Temperate and Boreal Forest Resources Assessment (TBFRA)“ classification of „forest“ and „other wooded land“ with focus on protected forest areas.

Working Group 2 has compared and evaluated both the MCPFE and IUCN categorisation system. In an internal discussion paper, which is the basis for section 3 in this publication and further conclusions and recommendations build up on it, both systems have been described, compared and evaluated, using the results of TBFRA, the MCPFE's State of Europe's Forests 2003, and the input from the country experts of COST Action E27, collected by means of a questionnaire and country reports.

### **Working Group 3: A clearing house mechanism for European Protected Forest Areas**

The description of the Action, its progress, and the preparation and presentation of the results to the user community is of major importance. The World Wide Web allows making information available in a cost-effective and pertinent fashion. Internet technology also allows for the production of interactive databases and discussion forums, which can be made open or closed to public use. The project website is used as an essential communication, management and dissemination tool for the Action. The website is established and maintained by the European Forest Institute in Joensuu, Finland. For further details see <http://www.efi.fi/projects/coste27/>

#### **Legal notice**

It must be emphasised that the material presented and any views and opinions expressed within this report, are those of the relevant authors and not necessarily those of any official body within the signatory states.

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