

ON THE ROAD TO GREEN RECOVERY: A STOCKTAKE OF BIODIVERSITY ACTION IN UKRAINE

PRIORITISING BIODIVERSITY IN UKRAINE'S RECOVERY PROCESS

Russia's war against Ukraine has caused damage to ecosystems such as forests, wetlands and rivers, including those within protected areas. This adds further pressure to biodiversity already affected by decades of habitat degradation and unsustainable land use. As Ukraine pursues its recovery and EU accession, there is a **unique opportunity to restore damaged ecosystems** while also safeguarding the country's remaining high-value natural habitats by integrating biodiversity conservation, ecosystem restoration and sustainable natural resource management into reconstruction planning from the outset.

To build a strong evidence base for Ukraine's green recovery in regard to biodiversity, the public organisation Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group (UNCG) has undertaken a **comprehensive stocktake of biodiversity action** in Ukraine. This effort is funded by the International Climate Initiative (IKI) of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMUKN).

UNCG has mapped past and ongoing activities to protect, restore and sustainably use biodiversity as well as current challenges in order to **identify important gaps in biodiversity action**. Using a participatory approach and structured dialogue, the project helps build a common understanding of the status quo and improves coordination among stakeholders committed to protecting and restoring nature.

Building on identified gaps, the project has compiled **practical solutions and proposals for future activities**. By identifying priority actions and investment opportunities, UNCG aims to support the integration of biodiversity into Ukraine's green recovery and contribute to the country's pathway towards closer alignment with EU biodiversity conservation and restoration objectives.

PROJECT NAME

Strategic inventory and gap analysis of biodiversity actions in Ukraine

OBJECTIVES

Establishing a shared understanding and commitment among key partners in Ukraine about the status quo, ongoing activities and gaps in biodiversity actions in Ukraine, enhancing cooperation and consistent communication with external stakeholders and donors.

Identifying priority areas to mobilise expertise and finance for integrating biodiversity action into Ukraine's green recovery.

APPROACH

Combining policy review, expert interviews, thematic stakeholder consultations and engagement with regional authorities into a participatory gap analysis informed by the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030

PROJECT DURATION

07/2025 until 12/2026

FUNDED BY

International Climate Initiative (IKI) of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMUKN)

IMPLEMENTED BY

Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group (UNCG)

ADVISORY BOARD

Representatives of BMUKN, Ministry of Economy of Ukraine, Verkhovna Rada Committee on Environmental Policy, European Climate Foundation, Bohdan Khmelnytsky National University of Cherkasy, NGO Holka

CORE PARTNERS

WWF Ukraine, Nature Fund of Ukraine, Greenpeace Ukraine, Ecoaction; Society for Conservation GIS Ukraine

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ASSESSING BIODIVERSITY GAPS AND PRIORITIES FOR UKRAINE

The gap analysis combines desk research with extensive stakeholder engagement. Evidence was collected through 74 interviews with experts from government, academia, civil society and international organisations, 12 thematic focus group discussions, and consultations with regional authorities responsible for biodiversity policy implementation. This participatory approach helped ensure that the findings reflect both national priorities and practical implementation challenges.

For the gap analysis, 16 biodiversity targets derived from the objectives of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 have been selected and adapted to Ukraine's national context, policy framework and EU accession ambitions. Additionally, cross-cutting targets such as governance, law enforcement, financing, science and education have been included to identify enabling conditions for effective biodiversity action.

THE 16 BIODIVERSITY TARGETS

- Legally protect a minimum of 30% of the land and sea area
- Strictly protect at least a third of the protected areas
- Effectively manage all protected areas by defining clear conservation objectives and measures and monitoring them appropriately
- Habitats and species show no decline in conservation trends and status
- At least 30% of the total area of all habitat types listed in Annex I of the EU Nature Restoration Law (NRL) that are not in good condition are undergoing restoration
- There is a 50% reduction in the number of Red List species threatened by invasive alien species
- The decline of pollinators is reversed
- The risk and use of chemical pesticides is reduced by 50%, and the use of more hazardous pesticides is reduced by 50%
- At least 10% of agricultural land is covered by high-diversity landscape features
- Significant progress in the remediation of contaminated soil sites
- Nutrient losses from fertilizers are reduced by 50%, resulting in a reduction in fertilizer use of at least 20%

- Strictly protect all remaining Ukrainian primary and old-growth forests
- Comply with EU NRL requirements for forest indicators
- At least 30% of peatlands are in the restoration process
- Comply with EU NRL requirements for agriculture indicators
- Stop the degradation of the natural connectivity of rivers and the natural functions of associated floodplains

CROSS-CUTTING TARGETS

- Developing a new biodiversity governance framework for Ukraine
- Stepping up implementation and enforcement of environmental legislation
- Enhancing the role of the private sector in protecting biodiversity
- Creating financial mechanisms to support biodiversity
- Improving knowledge and research
- Boosting education



Kreydova Flora nature reserve, Donetsk region

KEY FINDINGS OF THE GAP ANALYSIS

The most important findings of the gap analysis include:

1 WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION ARE INCREASING PRESSURE ON BIODIVERSITY

- The Russian aggression is leading to the destruction of biodiversity in the occupied territories and along the front lines. The state's need to obtain resources for the war and reconstruction, as well as the relocation of people and businesses, is increasing pressure on biodiversity in the rear regions. There is a risk of biodiversity loss if these pressures are not adequately addressed.

2 UKRAINE RETAINS SIGNIFICANT BIODIVERSITY ASSETS WORTH PROTECTING

- Many natural habitats in Ukraine remain in good condition. These include grasslands, old-growth and primary forests, wetlands, and rivers free of dams with connected floodplains. A significant portion of these habitats is located on public lands and is managed either by the government or by local municipalities. Therefore, the conservation of existing ecosystems should be prioritised alongside restoration actions.



Mount Apetska, Carpathians

3 GOVERNANCE, FINANCING AND CAPACITY GAPS CONSTRAIN BIODIVERSITY ACTION

- The state's current capacity is insufficient for systematic work in the field of biodiversity conservation. Ukraine needs a stronger institutional framework for biodiversity conservation at both the national and regional levels, including the establishment of a special government agency responsible for biodiversity with regional branches.
- Gaps and inconsistencies in the legislative framework limit opportunities for large-scale investments in biodiversity conservation and restoration. While many of the required technical regulations could be developed with adequate technical support and do not require major political debate, the adoption of key draft laws related to EU approximation continues to be delayed by a lack of political consensus.
- Biodiversity conservation is funded almost exclusively by public budgets and international assistance. There are very few investment mechanisms for biodiversity conservation from the private sector. Philanthropy is underdeveloped. There are special budget funds for land use, forestry, and water management that are funded by special taxes. A dedicated state fund aimed at biodiversity conservation is absent.
- Preserving biodiversity in accordance with EU standards requires a large number of qualified environmentalists, biologists, and geographers. However, the number of students in these fields is declining every year, and the quality of teaching does not reflect current practices.
- The moratorium on business inspections introduced after the start of the full-scale invasion, together with the limited capacity of the State Environmental Inspection, reduces the enforcement of environmental safeguards. In particular, compliance with biodiversity-related requirements under Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA) is often not verified.

4 TARGETED SUPPORT CAN BUILD ON EXISTING SUCCESSES

- Progress is more visible in areas where many NGOs have worked systematically for many years, particularly in forest and peatland protection, the creation of new protected areas, and the improvement of management of existing ones.
- Areas with limited or non-systematic NGO engagement, such as pollinator conservation, sustainable land use, preservation of free-flowing rivers and floodplains, and reduction of pesticide use, show slower progress.

MOVING TOWARDS GREEN RECOVERY: AN OUTLOOK ON SOLUTIONS

The gap analysis shows that biodiversity conservation in Ukraine requires more than site-based investments. While support for protected areas remains important, long-term impact depends equally on stronger institutions, enabling legislation, sustainable financing mechanisms and the integration of biodiversity considerations into broader recovery and development processes.

As a basis for future projects, a series of solutions has been elaborated based on the identified gaps. The proposed solutions address three complementary levels: (1) cross-cutting policy and governance challenges at the national level, (2) the 16 biodiversity targets assessed as part of the analysis, and (3) three priority areas to further develop promising concepts, respond to national priorities and identify opportunities for future donor engagement and investment.

1 PROPOSED SOLUTIONS FOR CROSS-CUTTING TARGETS

- **Establishment of a central government agency**
Creating a dedicated government agency – the Nature Protection and Conservation Agency – with regional offices to effectively manage protected areas and the Emerald Network (the precursor to Natura 2000 in Ukraine). This agency would consolidate the functions related to biodiversity conservation that are currently scattered across various agencies.
- **Integration of landscape planning into state planning**
Introducing biodiversity-sensitive landscape planning as a mandatory component of state planning documents and major investment projects, including as part of the SEA procedure
- **New educational approach**
Building new interdisciplinary academic programmes at universities that bridge the fields of ecology, finance, geography, and law, in partnership with EU universities. In spatial planning, climate finance, natural habitat management, and etc.

2

PROPOSED TARGET-RELATED SOLUTIONS

- **Creation of protected areas**
Creating a practice of purchasing private land for conservation purposes using funds from the state budget, private individuals, businesses, and foreign partners
- **Peatland restoration**
Implementing pilot projects to assess CO₂ emissions from land use, including drained peatlands, and developing policy options for carbon taxation for land use
- **Free rivers preservation**
Supporting the State Water Resources Agency in compiling and maintaining the national water cadastral system
- **Forest protection**
Developing and approving a new legislation for defining and protecting old-growth forests in accordance with the new EU methodology.

3

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS FOR PRIORITY AREAS

- **Comprehensive biodiversity support programme**
Developing an integrated approach to addressing institutional, legislative and financing gaps while strengthening biodiversity governance at national and regional levels
- **Peatland restoration through MoorFutures**
Implementing the German MoorFutures approach to peatlands restoration funded by private business, based on a pilot project in the Chernihiv region
- **Landscape Planning Lab Ukraine**
Supporting the integration of biodiversity and ecosystem considerations into local spatial and urban planning processes



More solutions for cross-cutting targets, all 16 biodiversity targets and priority areas can be found in the complete gap analysis, which will be published at the end of August 2026.

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PROJECT:

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