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**NATURA 2000 MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME**  
**for the period 2023–2028**

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

AECP	agri-environment-climate payments (within rural development)
AKIS	Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System
CAP	common agricultural policy
CAP Strategic Plan	Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EAGF	European Agricultural Guarantee Fund
eco-schemes	schemes for the environment and climate
ECPP	European Cohesion Policy Programme 2021–2027
EEA	European Economic Area
EIP	European innovation partnership
EMFAF	European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (for 2021–2027)
EMFF	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (for 2014–2020)
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
FMP	forest management plan
FMP FMR	forest management plan for a forest management region
FMP FMU	forest management plan for a forest management unit
FMR	forest management region
FMU	forest management unit
GAEC	good agricultural and environmental conditions of land
HMP HMR	hunting management plan for a hunting management region
HMR	hunting management region
HT	habitat type
IACS	integrated administration and control system
IPCHS	Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for the Protection of Cultural Heritage
IRSNC	Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation
JTF	Just Transition Fund
LFA	less-favoured agricultural area
LIFE	EU's financial instrument for the environment and nature (outside 2007–13)
Management Programme	Natura 2000 Management Programme for the period 2023–2028
Natura 2000 sites	special areas of protection (special protection areas and special areas of conservation together)
NNPP	National Nature conservation Programme
PAF	Prioritised Action Framework referred to in Article 8 of the Habitats Directive
pSAC	potential special area of conservation
RDP	Rural Development Programme
ReNPVO20–30	Resolution on the National Environmental Action Programme 2020–2030
RRP	recovery and resilience plan
SAC	special area of conservation under the Habitats Directive
SPA	special protection area under the Birds Directive
SMR	statutory management requirements

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 The legal and strategic framework for the Natura 2000 Management Programme

### 1.1.1 European Union law

The obligation to protect special areas of conservation – Natura 2000 sites – arises from Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p. 7), as last amended by Council Directive 2013/17/EU of 13 May 2013 adapting certain directives in the field of environment, by reason of the accession of the Republic of Croatia (OJ L 158, 10.6.2013, p. 193), hereinafter: **Habitats Directive**, in conjunction with Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds (OJ L 20, 26.1.2010, p. 7), as last amended by Regulation (EU) 2019/1010 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 June 2019 on the alignment of reporting obligations in the field of legislation related to the environment, and amending Regulations (EC) No 166/2006 and (EU) No 995/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council, Directives 2002/49/EC, 2004/35/EC, 2007/2/EC, 2009/147/EC and 2010/63/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council, Council Regulations (EC) No 338/97 and (EC) No 2173/2005, and Council Directive 86/278/EEC (OJ L 170, 25.6.2019, p. 115), hereinafter: **Birds Directive**.

The Habitats Directive requires Member States to designate potential special areas of conservation (hereinafter: pSACs) and the Birds Directive to designate special protection areas (hereinafter: SPAs). When a Member State's proposal for a pSAC is approved by the European Commission, the Member State must change the area's status to a special area of conservation (hereinafter: SAC). SACs and SPAs form the Natura 2000 network.

The Habitats Directive requires that from the day of their accession to the European Union (hereafter: EU), Member States prevent the deterioration of natural and other habitats of species and the disturbance of species for which Natura 2000 sites have been designated<sup>1</sup>, insofar as such a disturbance could be significant in relation to the objectives of the Directive. This provision applies to pSACs<sup>2</sup>, SACs and SPAs designated in accordance with the Birds Directive in conjunction with Article 7 of the Habitats Directive. The Habitats Directive also requires Member States to establish the necessary conservation measures for SACs, involving, if need be, appropriate management plans designed specifically for these sites or integrated into other development plans, and appropriate statutory, administrative or contractual measures that correspond to the ecological requirements of the natural habitat types referred to in Annex I and the species referred to in Annex II present on the sites<sup>3</sup>.

Article 8 of the Habitats Directive refers to the procedure for determining and co-financing the measures. It provides that the European Commission, in agreement with each of the Member States concerned, identifies the measures essential for the maintenance or re-establishment of a favourable conservation status of the priority natural habitat types and priority species, and makes an estimate of their financing and EU co-financing needs (prioritised action framework, hereinafter: PAF). In 2012, the European Commission proposed that Member States send their co-financing estimates in a uniform manner and that they themselves determine their prioritised action frameworks (national PAF). This applies to all species and habitat types for which Natura 2000 sites have been designated, including birds and non-priority species. Slovenia sent its first national PAF<sup>4</sup> to the European Commission in October 2013. In 2021, it prepared a new estimate and new national PAF for the financial period 2021–2027<sup>5</sup>. The European Commission has already adopted a working document *Investment needs and priorities for Natura 2000 and green infrastructure – EU-wide assessment based on Member States' prioritised action frameworks* (Brussels, 13 April 2023, SWD(2023) 99 final)<sup>6</sup>, which

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<sup>1</sup> Article 6(2).

<sup>2</sup> Designated in accordance with the criteria and procedure referred to in Article 4(5) of the Habitats Directive.

<sup>3</sup> In Article 6(1).

<sup>4</sup> Prioritised Action Framework (PAF) for Natura 2000 – For the EU Multiannual Financing Period 2014–2020.

<sup>5</sup> Prioritised Action Framework (PAF) for Natura 2000 in Slovenia pursuant to Article 8 of Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (the Habitats Directive) for the Multiannual Financial Framework period 2021–2027.

<sup>6</sup> file:///C:/Users/Jelenko104/Downloads/SWD(2023)99\_0.pdf.

summarises the information from all national PAFs. This is the European Commission's current planning tool for strengthening the financing of Natura 2000 from various EU financial instruments in the future.

The principle of primacy of the EU law applies in the EU, which means that EU law takes precedence over the national law, including constitutional provisions. All decisions of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) are binding on all Member States' authorities, including their national courts.

The CJEU has adopted several important decisions concerning Natura 2000 sites, i.e.:

- that an appropriate impact assessment must be carried out for every plan or project not directly related to or necessary for a given site's management if it cannot be ruled out on objective grounds that such a plan or project alone or in conjunction with other plans or projects would have a significant impact on the area;<sup>7</sup>
- that coherent, specific and comprehensive legal arrangements must be adopted to ensure the sustainable management and effective conservation of SPAs, taking into account the conservation objectives of the Birds Directive;<sup>8</sup>
- that a decree whereby a Member State (in this specific case Belgium) designates a special area of conservation (SAC), and makes provisions as to conservation objectives and certain preventive measures is not among the plans and programmes in respect of which an environmental impact assessment is required;<sup>9</sup>
- that for sites eligible for identification as sites of Community importance that are included in the national lists forwarded to the European Commission and, in particular, sites hosting priority natural habitat types or priority species, the Member States are required to take appropriate protective measures from the point of view of the Directive's conservation objective, for the purpose of safeguarding the relevant ecological interest that those sites have at the national level.<sup>10</sup>

The European Commission has also adopted several guidelines on the interpretation of key terms to facilitate the implementation of the Habitats and the Birds Directives. The key documents concerning the Natura 2000 network are:

- *Managing Natura 2000 sites, The provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC*,<sup>11</sup>
- *Assessment of plans and projects in relation to Natura 2000 sites - Methodological guidance on Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC*<sup>12</sup>
- *Commission note on establishing conservation measures for Natura 2000 sites*,<sup>13</sup>
- *Commission note on setting conservation objectives for Natura 2000 sites*.<sup>14</sup>

The obligations imposed by both directives have been fully transposed (inter alia with the help of the aforementioned guidelines) into the Slovenian law, i.e. the regulations on nature conservation.

The European Commission has also adopted many guidelines on managing Natura 2000 sites in relation to specific sectors (forestry, agriculture, energy, aquaculture, water management, etc.).<sup>15</sup> This programme takes these guidelines into account to the greatest possible extent.

### 1.1.2 Strategic guidelines of the European Union

Recently, the EU committed itself at the political level to achieving climate neutrality by 2050 and meeting its international commitments under the Paris Agreement. To this end, the European Council adopted the

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<sup>7</sup> Case C-127/02.

<sup>8</sup> Case C-166/04.

<sup>9</sup> Case C-43/18.

<sup>10</sup> Case C-117/03.

<sup>11</sup> Managing Natura 2000 sites, The provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, 2019: (2019/C 33/01).

<sup>12</sup> Commission notice. Assessment of plans and projects in relation to Natura 2000 sites – Methodological guidance on Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC . 2021 (Brussels, 28 September 2021, C(2021) 6913 final).

<sup>13</sup> Commission note on establishing conservation measures for Natura 2000 sites, September 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Commission note on Setting conservation objectives for Natura 2000 sites, November 2012.

<sup>15</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/guidance\\_en.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/guidance_en.htm).

*European Green Deal* (Brussels, 11 December 2019, COM(2019) 640 final). A part of the strategies and other documents is related to nature conservation (species and habitat types), which are presented below.

To implement the European Green Deal, in 2020 the European Commission adopted the *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: Bringing nature back into our lives* (Brussels, 20 May 2020, COM(2020) 380 final). The strategy is also part of the *8th Environment Action Programme* (OJ L 114, 12.4.2022), whose priorities are the protection, conservation and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems, and the improvement of natural capital. The EU Biodiversity Strategy is a plan for the conservation of nature and the prevention of ecosystem deterioration, which includes specific measures and commitments for the restoration of degraded ecosystems in Member States. Key commitments by 2030 are:

1. To legally protect a minimum of 30% of the EU's land area and 30% of the EU's sea area, and to integrate ecological corridors, as part of a true Trans-European Nature Network.
2. To strictly protect at least a third of the EU's protected areas, including all remaining EU primary and old-growth forests<sup>16</sup>.
3. To effectively manage all protected areas, defining clear conservation objectives and measures, and monitoring them appropriately.

In its response to this communication of the Commission (23 October 2020<sup>17</sup>), the Council called on the Commission to integrate EU biodiversity policy objectives into relevant future legislative proposals. It also reiterated the urgent need to fully integrate these objectives into other sectors, such as agriculture, fisheries and forestry, and the need for coherent implementation of EU measures in these fields. The Council welcomed the objective of creating a coherent network of well-managed protected areas and protecting at least 30% of the EU's land area and 30% of the EU's sea area. This network should be based on the Natura 2000 network and be complemented by additional designations by Member States. The strategy was finally adopted in 2021 by way of a resolution of the European Parliament<sup>18</sup>.

With regard to the key commitments, the European Commission adopted the working document *Criteria and guidance for protected areas designations* (Brussels, 28 January 2022, COM(2022) 23 final). The document sets out a range of criteria that Member States can use to designate protected areas and determine strict protection, and includes guidelines for Member States to establish an appropriate management and monitoring of protected areas.

The Biodiversity Strategy also sets objectives related to the restoration of a significant part of degraded or carbon-rich land and marine ecosystems across Europe. Member States should ensure that the conservation trends and status of all protected habitats and species do not decline by 2030 and that at least 30% of species and habitats currently not in a favourable status are in that category by 2030, or at least show a strong positive trend by that time. In the second half of 2022, the European Commission presented an EU-wide methodology to map and assess ecosystems, and improve their conditions<sup>19</sup>.

The EU Biodiversity Strategy also envisages the restoration of freshwater ecosystems and the natural functions of rivers. It sets the target of restoring at least 25,000 km of rivers into free-flowing rivers by 2030 by removing primarily obsolete barriers and restoring floodplains and wetlands. For this purpose, at the end of 2021 the European Commission published *Biodiversity Strategy 2030: Barrier Removal for River Restoration*<sup>20</sup>, which provides technical guidelines for determining locations where barriers should be removed and an overview of EU's financial instruments through which those measures can be implemented. In relation to aquatic ecosystems, in 2018 the European Commission also published the *Guidance on the requirements for*

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<sup>16</sup> There is no official definition for *old-growth forest* yet. The European Commission published the COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT, Commission Guidelines for Defining, Mapping, Monitoring and Strictly Protecting EU Primary and Old-Growth Forests Register of Commission Documents – SWD(2023)62 (europa.eu), in which it presented its position on this term. This term is not used in the Slovenian legislation. The official translation of "old-growth forest" in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 is "*starorasli gozd*".

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/sl/press/press-releases/2020/10/23/council-adopts-conclusions-on-the-eu-biodiversity-strategy-for-2030/>.

<sup>18</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0277\\_SL.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0277_SL.html).

<sup>19</sup> EU-wide methodology to map and assess ecosystem condition, JRC Publications Repository.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.ecologic.eu/sites/default/files/publication/2022/50045-Barrier-removal-for-river-restoration.pdf>.

*hydropower in relation to EU nature legislation*<sup>21</sup>, which includes instructions for siting hydropower plants within Natura 2000 sites.

The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 will be implemented together with the *Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system* (Brussels, 20 May 2020, COM(2020) 381 final<sup>22</sup>, adopted by the European Parliament resolution of 20 October 2021<sup>23</sup>), and the new common agricultural policy with the promotion of payment schemes that are based on results supporting the long-term sustainability of nature and agriculture. In accordance with the Farm to Fork Strategy, the European Commission will adopt measures to reduce the overall use and risk of chemical pesticides by 50% by 2030. The strategy also aims to bring back at least 10% of agricultural area under high-diversity landscape features, to ensure that at least 25% of the EU's agricultural land is organically farmed by 2030, and to reverse the loss of genetic diversity. Both strategies will significantly contribute to the aim of stopping the decline in the number of pollinators, which is the key objective of the *EU Pollinators Initiative*<sup>24</sup>, adopted in 2018.

In order to achieve the agricultural objectives, it is essential to step up the efforts to protect soil fertility, reduce erosion and increase organic matter in soil. In support of this, in 2021 the European Parliament adopted the *Resolution on soil protection (2021/2548(RSP))*<sup>25</sup>. In November 2021, the *Soil Strategy for 2030 – Reaping the benefits of healthy soils for people, food, nature and climate* (Brussels, 17 November 2021, COM(2021) 699 final) was adopted. The content related to nature conservation is linked, in particular, to: (i) limiting the drainage of wetlands and organic soils and restoring managed and drained peatlands, in order to maintain and increase soil carbon stocks, minimise flooding and drought risks, and increase biodiversity; (ii) increasing biodiversity in agricultural land, possibly in the context of the nature restoration law; and (iii) restoring polluted soils. With regard to biodiversity, the European Commission will also increase the efforts to map, assess, protect and restore biodiversity and support the establishment of a global soil biodiversity observatory.

In order to preserve forest ecosystems at the EU level in accordance with the Biodiversity Strategy, the *New EU Forest Strategy for 2030* (Brussels, 16 July 2021, COM/2021/572 final; Council Conclusions, 5 November 2021<sup>26</sup>) was adopted. It includes measures to strengthen forest protection and restoration, enhance sustainable forest management, and improve the monitoring of and effective decentralised planning on forests in the EU with a view to ensuring resilient forest ecosystems and enabling forests to perform their multifunctional role. The strategy also focuses on sustainable forestation and is accompanied by a roadmap for planting at least three billion additional trees in the EU by 2030 – fruit trees and site-appropriate tree species that are adapted to forest functions. The strategy also envisages the strict protection of primary and old growth forests, highlighting the need to map them and establish protection regimes. The European Commission will also submit a legislative proposal for establishing a framework for forest monitoring, reporting and data collection at the EU level by using remote-sensing technologies and geospatial data integrated with ground-based monitoring.

The EU's biodiversity strategy for 2030 emphasises that the implementation of *Regulation (EU) No 1143/2014 on the prevention and management of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species*<sup>27</sup> and other relevant legislation and international agreements must be accelerated. The aim should be to minimise, and where possible eliminate, the introduction and establishment of alien species in the EU. The objective is to reduce the share of established invasive alien species by 50% and maintain the number of Red List species (the species threatened by alien invasive species). The aforementioned regulation requires EU Member States to implement measures for the prevention, early detection, rapid eradication and control of invasive alien species on the list of invasive alien species of Union concern. The regulation lays down rules to prevent, minimise and mitigate the adverse impact of the introduction and spread, both intentional and unintentional, of invasive alien species on biodiversity in the EU. Controlling invasive alien species helps reduce or prevent their adverse impacts on native species and their habitats, on habitat types, and on ecosystem services, economy, and human well-being and health.

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<sup>21</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/9d8c1c3d-b7c7-11e8-99ee-01aa75ed71a1/>.

<sup>22</sup> [https://food.ec.europa.eu/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy\\_en](https://food.ec.europa.eu/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy_en).

<sup>23</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0425\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0425_EN.html).

<sup>24</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2019-0104\\_SL.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2019-0104_SL.html).

<sup>25</sup> <https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/summary.do?id=1660535&t=d&l=en>.

<sup>26</sup> <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13537-2021-INIT/sl/pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/SL/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32014R1143>.



### 1.1.3 Law of the Republic of Slovenia

The **Environmental Protection Act** (ZVO-2, Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 44/22, 18/23 – ZDU-1O and 78/23 – ZUNPEOVE) establishes a systemic framework for nature conservation focusing in essence on biodiversity conservation. The Environmental Protection Act ensures the environment is protected against burdens as a basic prerequisite for sustainable development, and within this framework lays down basic environmental protection principles, environmental protection measures, monitoring of the environment and environmental information, economic and financial instruments for environmental protection, public environmental protection services and other issues related thereto. The purpose of environmental protection is to promote and direct social development that provides for long-term conditions for human health, well-being and quality of life, and for the conservation of biodiversity.

Nature conservation is part of the environmental protection system with common planning and programming, joint environmental assessment procedures, common arrangements for environmental monitoring, public information on environmental data and their availability, an environmental tax for the use of natural resources, non-governmental environmental protection organisations acting in the public interest, and the regulation of natural resource concessions. The Environmental Protection Act regulates the national environmental protection programme, which also includes the national nature conservation programme for 2020–2030. Operational environmental protection programmes are defined in Article 73 of the Environmental Protection Act. They are adopted by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia (hereinafter: Government), taking into account the procedure provided in Article 74 of the Environmental Protection Act.

The **Nature Conservation Act** (ZON; Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 96/04 – official consolidated version, 61/06 – ZDru-1, 8/10 – ZSKZ-B, 46/14, 21/18 – ZNOrg, 31/18, 82/20, 3/22 – ZDeb, 105/22 – ZZNŠPP and 18/23 – ZDU-1O) establishes a comprehensive nature conservation system whose purpose is to protect natural values and preserve biodiversity components. It defines the subjects, methods and measures of conservation, the organisation, financing, programming and planning of nature conservation, and other content required to ensure efficacy in this field. The subjects of conservation for the purposes of biodiversity conservation that are determined or determinable regionally include habitat types that are maintained in a favourable state as a matter of priority, the habitats of nationally or internationally protected wild plant and animal species, ecologically important areas and special areas of protection (hereinafter: Natura 2000 sites), which form the European ecological network. Endangered and nationally or internationally protected wild plant and animal species are also the subjects of conservation. Every subject of conservation is designated by a relevant implementing regulation, an instrument issued by the minister responsible for nature conservation or a governmental decree.

Procedures related to Natura 2000 sites are determined by the Nature Conservation Act, which defines Natura 2000 sites as ecologically important areas that are indispensable for attaining or maintaining a favourable status of birds in the EU (SPAs), as well as of other animal and plant species, along with their habitats and habitat types (SACs). Due to the differences in designation, the Decree on Natura 2000 sites<sup>28</sup> also designates the SPAs as Natura 2000 sites. In the national legislation, the SACs are only designated as pSACs or potential Natura 2000 sites until the European Commission adopts a decision thereon. Within six years of such a decision, the Member State must designate pSACs as SACs. By means of decree in January 2012, Slovenia designated SACs, which simultaneously also became special areas of protection or Natura 2000 sites, and stipulated that, until a new management programme was adopted in accordance with the amended Article 13 of the Decree, the detailed conservation objectives and measures to achieve these objectives provided in the operational programme, i.e. the Natura 2000 management programme, would apply to the conservation of these areas. In accordance with the European Commission's note, a SAC designation must include conservation objectives and conservation measures to achieve these objectives, which should correspond to the ecological requirements of the species and habitat types for which the area concerned was

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<sup>28</sup> Decree on special areas of protection (Natura 2000 sites) (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 49/04, 110/04, 59/07, 43/08, 8/12, 33/13, 35/13 – corr., 39/13 – Dec. of the CC, 3/14, 21/16 and 47/18).

designated.<sup>29</sup> In 2015, the Natura 2000 Management Programme (2015–2020)<sup>30</sup> was adopted, which determined conservation objectives and conservation measures in accordance with the Commission note.

The conservation of SPAs and SACs comprises the conservation of the favourable status of plant and animal species, their habitats and habitat types. It is ensured by measures aimed at achieving conservation objectives (hereinafter: conservation measures). Conservation measures are measures under the Nature Conservation Act and other regulations that can contribute to the conservation of Natura 2000 sites. This includes various plans for the sustainable management of natural resources and contract-based protection, for example under the regulations on agriculture and forestry (national and EU)<sup>31</sup>. Conservation measures are specified in a special management programme adopted by the Government as an operational environmental protection programme, whose content and adoption procedure is laid down in the Environmental Protection Act (paragraph two of Article 33 of the Nature Conservation Act). In addition, Article 24 of the Nature Conservation Act states that the Government prescribes in detail the manner of conservation and (point 5) "actions and limitations in relation to activities that, individually or in mutual interaction, pose a threat to plant and animal species, or their habitats or ecosystems".

Conservation measures under the Nature Conservation Act are direct and indirect measures. Direct measures include, in particular, contract-based protection and stewardship, restoration, temporary protection and protection. One of the most important indirect measures for protecting Natura 2000 sites is assessing the acceptability of the impact that plans or activities affecting nature will have on the Natura 2000 conservation objectives. The appropriate assessment of plans is part of the procedure for strategic environmental impact assessment, which is carried out pursuant to the environmental protection regulations, while the acceptability of activities affecting nature is assessed as part of the procedure for granting environmental approvals, nature conservation approvals, permits for activities affecting nature, or other permits. Appropriate assessments are regulated in detail by the Nature Conservation Act (Articles 33a, 101, 101a, 101b, 101c, 101d, 101e, 101f, 104a and 105a), the Decree on special areas of protection (Natura 2000 sites) and the Rules on the appropriate assessment of impacts caused by the execution of plans and activities affecting nature in protected areas (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 130/04, 53/06, 38/10 and 3/11). They have been carried out in accordance with the requirements of the Habitats Directive since Slovenia's accession to the EU.

The Natura 2000 Management Programme for the period 2023–2028 (hereinafter: Management Programme) determines the conservation measures necessary to achieve the conservation objectives of Natura 2000 sites, which are carried out pursuant to the applicable legislation. It also determines measures targeting identified legal, administrative and development gaps, with the aim of including expert content in legislative, administrative and contractual measures and, in particular, in other planning systems (e.g. management plans for protected areas, forests, fisheries and fish farming, and waters). Biodiversity conservation measures and the system for the conservation of natural values are also integrated into cultural heritage protection measures. If the conservation and development guidelines for natural values apply to cultural landscapes or monuments of designed landscapes protected pursuant to the Cultural Heritage Protection Act (ZVKD-1; Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 16/08, 123/08, 8/11-ORZVKD39, 90/12, 111/13, 32/16, 21/18 – ZNOrg and 78/23 – ZUNPEOVE), they are specified in agreement with the minister responsible for cultural heritage.

Article 10 of the Nature Conservation Act provides that the Act's provisions on the obligation to preserve biodiversity and protect natural values do not apply to:

- emergency measures and protection, rescue and relief activities carried out in the event of a natural or other disaster in accordance with the regulations governing protection against natural and other disasters;
- emergency measures carried out during times of increased risk related to response measures in the event of a natural disaster caused by water in accordance with the regulations governing waters, which constitute urgent work in the course of protection, rescue and relief activities during times of increased risk of damage caused by water;
- emergency measures carried out for State defence in accordance with defence regulations.

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<sup>29</sup> Commission note on the designation of special areas of conservation, May 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Natura 2000 Management Programme (2015–2020).

<sup>31</sup> Paragraph two of Article 33 of the Nature Conservation Act.

An exception referred to in the preceding paragraph applies from the moment a natural or other disaster occurs until the day when the competent authority decides, in accordance with the regulations governing protection against natural and other disasters, that conditions for ending response actions have been established. An exception referred to in indent three of the preceding paragraph applies during an increased risk of attack on the State, the imminent threat of war or declared state of emergency or war until the day the end of such state or risk is declared in accordance with defence regulations. In carrying out urgent works and emergency measures, the requirements of nature conservation must be taken into account to the greatest possible extent. Pursuant to the provisions of the Protection Against Natural and Other Disasters Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 51/06 – official consolidated version, 97/10, 21/18 – ZNOrg and 117/22), the activities in the event of a natural disaster are directed by the competent Civil Protection Commander. The programmes for recovery after a natural disaster pursuant to the Natural Disaster Recovery Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 114/05 – official consolidated version, 90/07, 102/07, 40/12 – ZUJF, 17/14, 163/22, 18/23 – ZDU-1O, 88/23 and 95/23 – ZIUOPZP) are adopted by the Government. Within 60 days of the day when the circumstances referred to in paragraph one of Article 10 of the Nature Conservation Act cease, the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation (hereinafter: IRSNC) must determine the impact of urgent works and emergency measures on the objectives of biodiversity conservation and natural values conservation.

The **Decree on Special Areas of Protection (Natura 2000 sites)** (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 49/04, 110/04, 59/07, 43/08, 8/12, 33/13, 35/13 – corr., 39/13 – Dec. of the CC, 3/14, 21/16 and 47/18; hereinafter: Natura 2000 Decree), determines special areas of protection or Natura 2000 sites, conservation objectives in these areas and conservation guidelines for attaining or maintaining the favourable status of plant and animal species, along with their habitats and habitat types, whose conservation is in the EU's interest, as well as other rules of conduct for the conservation of these areas.

The Natura 2000 Decree regulates in detail the planning of conservation of Natura 2000 sites and potential Natura 2000 sites. The planning is similar for both SPAs and SACs, so hereinafter both types of areas are considered special areas of protection, for which the term “Natura 2000 site” is used.

Article 12 of the Natura 2000 Decree provides that a programme for managing Natura 2000 sites (i.e. this document) must be drawn up, as the fundamental planning document for achieving conservation objectives within Natura 2000 sites. A management programme includes detailed conservation objectives, conservation measures or detailed conservation guidelines, the entities responsible for or implementing these measures or guidelines and their financing for each Natura 2000 site. The content of the Management Programme is described in detail in Section 1.3.3 Composition of the Natura 2000 Management Programme for the period 2023–2028. Any determination of conservation measures must take into account the characteristics of the Natura 2000 site concerned, including sociodemographic, economic and cultural characteristics, the actual status of the ecosystem and the existing and potential risk factors.

The Decree also states that a management programme is an operational plan concerning nature conservation, which is adopted by the Government on the proposal of the ministry in accordance with the nature conservation regulations.<sup>32</sup>

The **Spatial Planning Act** (ZUreP-3; Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 199/21, 18/23, – ZDU-1O, 78/23 – ZUNPEOVE and 95/23 – ZIUOPZP), whose aims include: (i) to create and protect landscape diversity, distinctness and quality; (ii) to facilitate adaptation to climate change; (iii) to facilitate the transition to a low-carbon society based on circular economy, reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, efficient energy use and the use of renewable energy sources; and (iv) to facilitate nature conservation and the protection of the environment, cultural heritage, agricultural land and other spatial qualities.

This Act transposes the following into the Slovenian legislation:

- Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 June 2001 on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (OJ L 197, 21.7.2001,

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<sup>32</sup> Article 13 of the Decree on special areas of protection (Natura 2000 sites).

p. 157) with regard to spatial planning documents, in the part concerning environmental impact assessment of plans and programmes;

- Directive 2011/92/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment (OJ L 26, 28.1.2012, p. 1), as last amended by Directive 2014/52/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 amending Directive 2011/92/EU on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment (OJ L 124, 25.4.2014, p. 1), in the part concerning the integration of environmental impact assessment with the procedure for siting, planning in detail and permitting development projects of national importance;
- Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p. 7), as last amended by Council Directive 2013/17/EU of 13 May 2013 adapting certain directives in the field of environment, by reason of the accession of the Republic of Croatia (OJ L 158, 10.6.2013, p. 193), in the part concerning the appropriate assessment of plans and programmes, and of activities affecting nature, if they are integrated with the strategic environmental impact assessment of spatial planning documents and environmental impact assessment within procedures for siting, planning in detail and permitting development projects of national importance;
- Directive 2014/89/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 July 2014 establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning (OJ L 257, 28.8.2014, p. 135).

Pursuant to the listed directives, the Spatial Planning Act states that in the procedure for drawing up spatial planning documents, a strategic environmental impact assessment and appropriate assessment with regard to protected areas must be carried out. Environmental impact assessments and/or appropriate assessment with regard to protected areas must also be carried out in procedures for drawing up national spatial plans.

The Spatial Planning Act also envisages the planning of development zones and other planning zones, which are intended for, among other things, the implementation of measures for environmental protection, nature conservation, protection of cultural heritage and preservation of distinctive landscape characteristics.

The aims of the **Order on the Spatial Development Strategy of Slovenia** (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 76/04, 33/07 – ZPNačrt, 61/17 – ZUreP-2 and 199/21 – ZUreP-3) include the integration of certain environmental protection components in planning the spatial development of activities and in promoting conservation of biodiversity, natural values, and natural processes as the essential components of a thriving natural environment.

**Cave Protection Act** (ZVPJ; Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 2/04, 61/06 – ZDru-1, 46/14 – ZON-C and 21/18 – ZNOrg) regulates the protection and use of caves, protection regimes, conservation measures and other rules of conduct, including the restoration of polluted or damaged caves. Many Natura 2000 sites have been designated because of the cave-dependent species or the habitat type HT 8310 Caves not open to the public.

Caves are natural values of national importance and are the property of the State.<sup>33</sup>

The conservation of caves is primarily subject to the provisions of the Cave Protection Act. Subsidiarily, the provisions of regulations governing nature conservation also apply. The Cave Protection Act regulates the mandatory rules of conduct with regard to caves, considering different aspects of human activity that could affect caves' value-related characteristics. One such rule of conduct relates to the exploration and research of caves and parts thereof, and requires that any person who explores or researches caves is specially trained, aware of cave protection rules and listed in the register of qualified cavers kept by the competent ministry. Pursuant to the Cave Protection Act, 14, the 196 currently known caves are classified by access regime as closed caves (very sensitive and vulnerable caves that can be entered only in exceptional cases for research or conservation purposes; there are 6 such caves), open caves with controlled access (vulnerable caves due to frequent visits, which require access control and regular monitoring of their state; there are 282 such caves), and open caves with free access (all other caves). The Cave Protection Act provides a protection regime for all caves, determining prohibited behaviours in caves with precisely defined exceptions, which are mostly conditional on special permits. It also determines the mandatory conduct in cases when a cave may be

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<sup>33</sup> Article 5 of the Cave Protection Act.

destroyed due to other public interests overriding the interest of preserving a natural value. In conserving caves, conservation measures, such as stewardship, protection, temporary protection, and restoration, may be implemented. Cave stewardship is defined in great detail and adapted to the characteristics of caves.

A cave may only be used under a concession agreement for the use of the cave. A concession is not required for supplying residents with drinking water. There is a range of legal provisions regulating the implementation of concessions, including the provisions on permits for arranging open caves. Special attention is paid to guided tours of caves. Cave guides must be well trained, especially in cave conservation, pass a competence examination and be registered in the register of cave guides kept by the ministry.

The **Action Plan to Address the Priority Pathways of the Introduction and Spread of Invasive Alien Species of Union Concern (2022–2027)**, adopted by Minister's Decision No 542-23/2022-2550-18 of 20 May 2022<sup>34</sup>, contains objectives and activities for addressing three priority pathways for the introduction and spread of invasive alien species. The strategic objectives set out in the action plan are intended to preserve the endangered species and habitat types most threatened by the invasive alien species, primarily in protected areas, in Natura 2000 sites and in other areas relevant to nature conservation. Operational objective 6.1.4 envisages that objectives aimed at controlling invasive alien species and preventing their spread will be included in the Natura 2000 Management Programme.

The **Resolution on the National Environmental Action Programme 2020–2030 (ReNPVO20–30)**<sup>35</sup> refers to three areas of action: (i) the protection, conservation and enhancement of natural capital; (ii) development towards a low-carbon society that uses natural resources efficiently, prevents waste generation and reuses or recycles waste; and (iii) protection against environmental risks. The ReNPVO20–30 envisages that the measures for the protection, conservation and enhancement of Slovenia's natural capital<sup>36</sup> will, among other things, maintain the country's high level of biodiversity and protect natural values. The scope of public interest in the conservation of biodiversity and conservation of natural values is defined in the National Nature conservation Programme (hereinafter: NNPP)<sup>37</sup>, which is an integral part of the National Environmental Action Programme (hereinafter: NEAP). The NNPP's substantive foundations are biodiversity and natural values, for which objectives and guidelines are set to be implemented in practice through the measures of the Programme for the Conservation of Plant and Animal Species and their Habitats and Ecosystems, the Programme for the Establishment of Protected Areas and the Restoration of Natural Values, and the Strategic Plan of Biodiversity Conservation in Slovenia.

The measures required to fully achieve the global targets of biodiversity conservation in accordance with Article 6 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (Aichi Targets) are summarised in a special table. They must be considered together with the NNPP's long-term objectives and guidelines, the measures listed in the table and other sections of the ReNPVO20–30 (mainly on soil, water, biosafety and support measures). The most important NNPP objective for biodiversity conservation is to maintain the favourable status of habitat types in terms of scope and quality, especially those in ecologically important areas and in Natura 2000 sites.

The NNPP also states that the planned measures for biodiversity conservation and protection of natural values will be implemented in protected areas and in Natura 2000 sites. Large-scale protected areas are expected to be expanded, while no additional expansions of Natura 2000 sites are planned.

### **Instruments establishing protected areas**

One of the most important and traditional nature conservation measures is legal protection or the establishment of a protected area. Protected areas may be small- or large-scale protected areas. Large-scale protected areas are landscape, regional and national parks. They are established to protect natural values and preserve biological and landscape diversity. Small-scale protected areas are natural monuments, strict nature reserves and nature reserves. The latter two, in particular, are used for biodiversity conservation.

Slovenia has several protected areas that lie partly or entirely on one or more Natura 2000 sites. In general, biodiversity conservation in protected areas also ensures the conservation of Natura 2000 sites.

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<sup>34</sup> Action plan to address the priority pathways of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species of Union concern (2022–2027).

<sup>35</sup> Resolution on the National Environmental Action Programme 2020–2030 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 31/20 and 44/22 – ZVO-2).

<sup>36</sup> Section 4. Guidelines and goals for environmental protection, nature conservation and water management.

<sup>37</sup> Section 5.1 Biodiversity and natural values – National Nature Protection Programme.

The establishment of a protected area, conservation and development objectives, protection regimes and other mandatory rules of conduct, the method of managing the protected area and the manager are determined by the legal instrument establishing the protected area, which can be an act, a governmental decree or an ordinance of a local authority. The responsibilities and powers conferred by public law to the managers of protected areas are broadly defined by the Nature Conservation Act. The instrument establishing a protected area defines the responsibilities of this public service in more detail, in accordance with the characteristics of the area concerned.

The most important instruments by which the State established protected areas (they also include Natura 2000 sites), which are managed as a public service or under a concession agreement, are the following: the *Triglav* National Park Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 52/10, 46/14 – ZON-C, 60/17, 82/20 and 18/23 – ZDU-1O), the *Škocjanske jame* Regional Park Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 57/96, 46/14 – ZON-C and 18/23 – ZDU-1O), the *Trebče* Memorial Park Act (Official Gazette of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list SRS*], Nos 1/81 and 42/86, and Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 8/90, 110/02 – ZGO-1 and 119/02 – ZON-A), the Decree on the *Sečoveljske soline* Landscape Park (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 29/01, 46/14 – ZON-C and 48/18), the Decree on the *Goričko* Landscape Park (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 101/03 and 46/14 – ZON-C), the Decree on the *Škocjanski zatok* Nature Reserve (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 75/13 and 46/14 – ZON-C), the Decree on the *Strunjan* Landscape Park (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 107/04, 114/04 – corr., 83/06, 71/08, 77/10 and 46/14 – ZON-C), the Decree on the *Kolpa* Landscape Park (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 85/06, 46/14 – ZON-C and 54/18), the Decree on the *Ljubljansko barje* Landscape Park (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 112/08, 46/14 – ZON-C and 75/22), the Decree on the *Radensko polje* Landscape Park (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 104/11 and 80/18), and the Decree on the *Ormoške lagune* Nature Reserve (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], No 23/17). The areas protected by municipalities that are managed in such way are the *Notranjska* Regional Park, the *Logarska dolina* Landscape Park, the *Pivška presihajoča jezera* Landscape Park, the *Zgornja Idrijca* Landscape Park, the *Debeli rtič* Landscape Park and the *Središče ob Dravi* Landscape Park.

## 1.2 Natura 2000 network in Slovenia

Slovenia is one of the countries with the richest biodiversity, as has been shown by many foreign and domestic studies. Its diversity is also reflected in the large share of the country's territory included in the Natura 2000 network, which Slovenia declared when it joined the EU on 1 May 2004, and expanded and supplemented in 2013. Some minor amendments were also made in 2012, 2014, 2016 and 2019.

Today, Slovenia has 355 Natura 2000 sites, of which 324 are SACs and 31 SPAs. Together they cover 7,681.1 km<sup>2</sup> or more than 37% of the country's territory. Slovenia thus ranks first among EU Member States in the share of territory included in the Natura 2000 network.

Table 1: Areas of Natura 2000 sites in Slovenia (Source: IRSNC)

Biogeographical region	Land areas (km <sup>2</sup> )			Marine areas (km <sup>2</sup> )			Share (%) of the territory in:		
	SACs	SPAs	Natura 2000	SACs	SPAs	Natura 2000	SACs	SPAs	Natura 2000
<b>Alpine</b>	3,669. 4	2,942. 6	4,163. 8	0	0	0	47.9	38.4	54.4
<b>Continental</b>	2,967. 2	2,126. 5	3,511. 7	0.1	0.1	0.1	23.5	16.9	27.8
<b>Mediterranean</b>	0 <sup>38</sup>	0 <sup>39</sup>	0.1	0.8	5.0	5.4	0.4	2.3	2.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,636. 6</b>	<b>5,069. 1</b>	<b>7,675. 6</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>32.4</b>	<b>24.8</b>	<b>37.5</b>

Natura 2000 sites are designated to maintain the favourable status of the habitats of species and habitat types of European importance. Under Natura 2000, Slovenia protects 205 animal and 28 plant species and 60 habitat types, which is slightly over 10% of all Natura 2000 species and habitat types in the EU.

Table 2– The number of qualifying<sup>40</sup> species and habitat types in accordance with the directives (Source: Petkovšek 2017)<sup>41</sup>

	Number of qualifying species and habitat types
Number of species – Birds Directive	119
Number of species – Habitats Directive	114 (9)
Number of habitat types – Habitats Directive	60 (16)
<b>Number of species and habitat types – total</b>	<b>293 (25)</b>

NOTE: In the brackets are the numbers of priority species and habitat types for whose conservation the EU has particular responsibility in view of the proportion of their natural range falling within the territory referred to in Article 2; these priority species and habitat types are indicated by an asterisk (\*) in Annexes I and II – Article 1(h) of the Habitats Directive.

The adequacy of the designated Natura 2000 network is verified by the sufficiency index, which is based on the number of species and habitat types appropriately included in the network. Following its expansions (most recently in 2019), the Slovenian Natura 2000 network appropriately includes 97% of priority species and habitat types. The status of 3% of the species is not sufficiently known for them to be appropriately included in the Natura 2000 network. The sufficiency index for Slovenia is 98 (of 100)<sup>42</sup>.

<sup>38</sup> Area is less than 0.1 km<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> Area is less than 0.1 km<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> A qualifying species or habitat type is a species or habitat type for which a Natura 2000 site was designated. Each Natura 2000 site has at least one qualifying species or habitat type.

<sup>41</sup> Petkovšek, 2017: Slovensko omrežje Natura 2000 v številkah/Slovenian Natura 2000 network in numbers. Varstvo narave, 30, 99–126.

<sup>42</sup> Slovenian State of the Environment Report 2022.

## Natura 2000 network

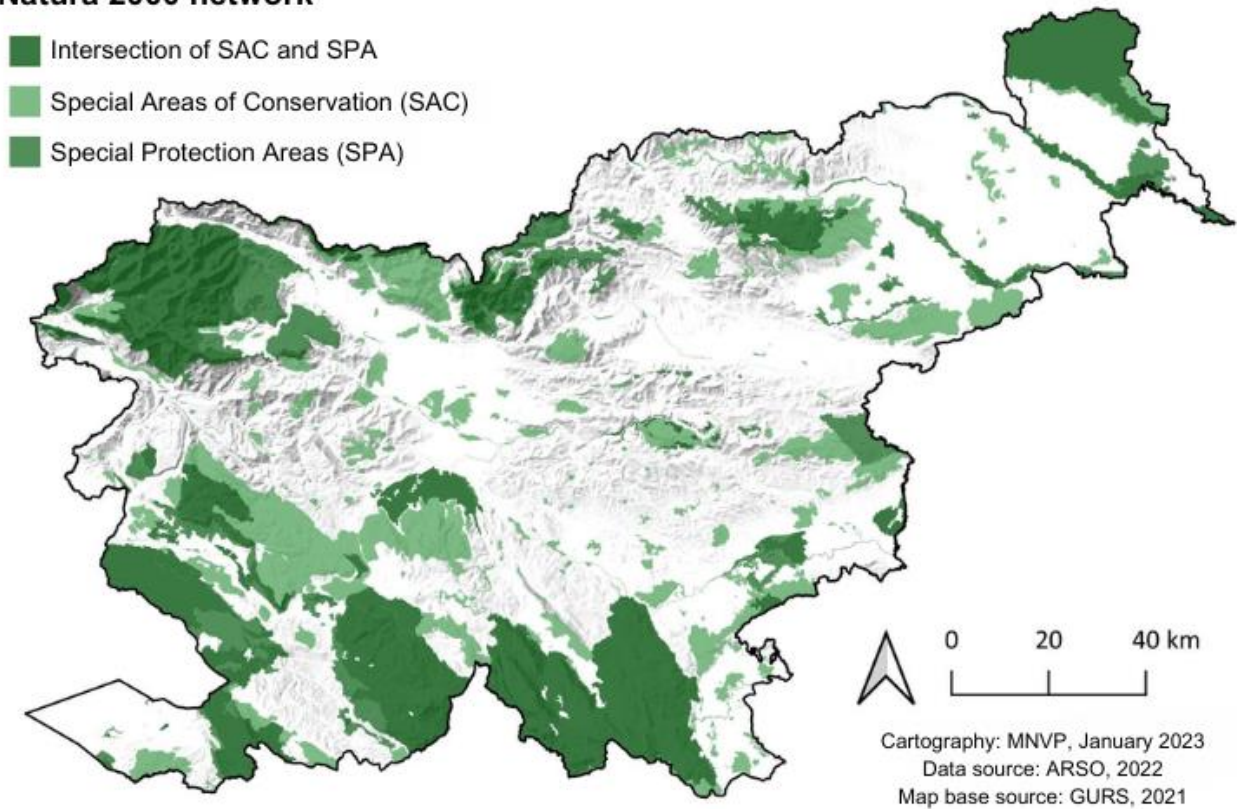


Figure 1: Natura 2000 network in Slovenia

Approximately 70% of the Slovenian Natura 2000 network consists of forests. The utilised agricultural areas cover approximately 20% of the total Natura 2000 area, the majority are meadows (13%). Roughly 4% of the area is above the tree line. Fresh waters cover only slightly over 1% of the network area; however, they are the habitats of a large number of qualifying species and habitat types. Caves play an important role in the Natura 2000 network and are the subject of conservation on over 70 sites. Human dwellings are important for reproduction, resting and wintering of some species, in particular birds (e.g. the white stork (*Ciconia ciconia*) and Eurasian scops owl (*Otus scops*)) and mammals (e.g. bats), which is why it is essential that the Natura 2000 also includes some built-up areas, in particular buildings that are cultural monuments. In total, urban areas cover 2% of the network area.



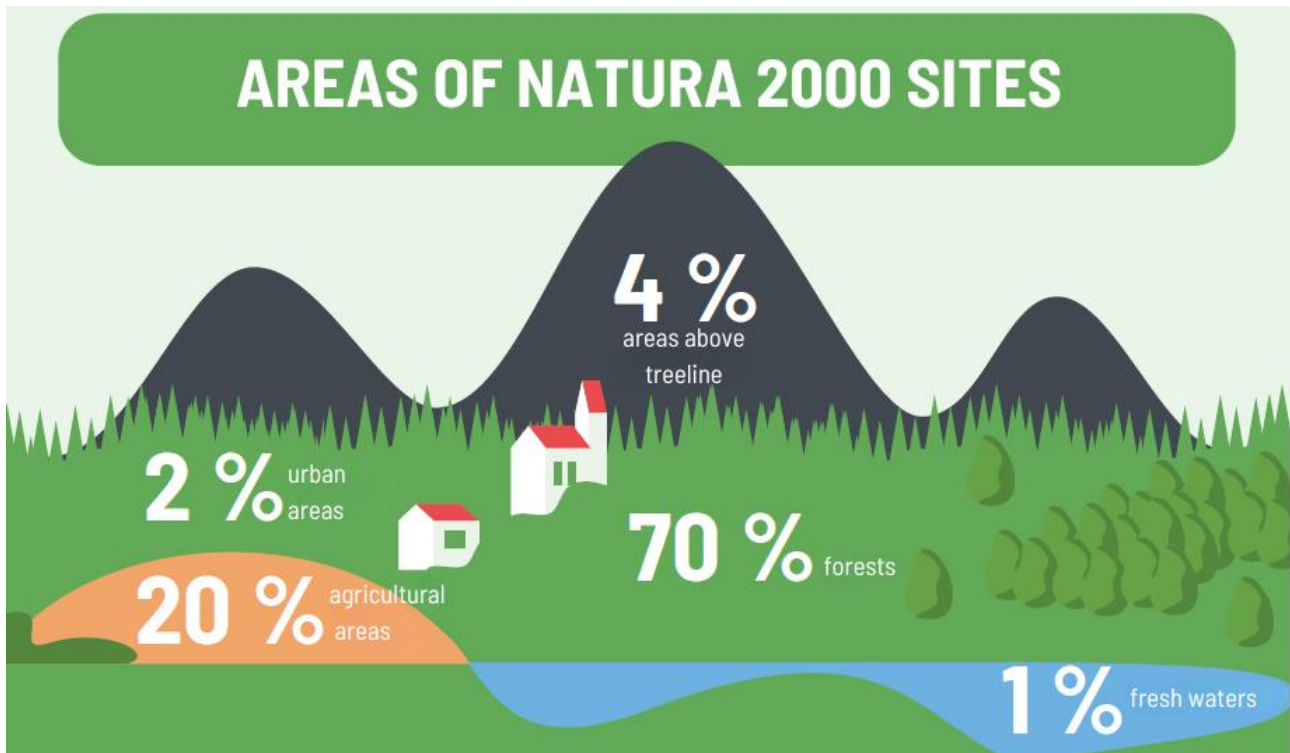


Figure 2: Areas of Natura 2000 sites in Slovenia by use (Source: LIFE-IP NATURA.SI)

The Natura 2000 network has been designated in the majority of EU countries, including Slovenia. It includes the most preserved habitats of European endangered species or habitat types. Every six years, their conservation status is reviewed in all EU Member States by using relatively uniform methodology. The last reports on the conservation status of species and habitat types made pursuant to Article 17 of the Habitats Directive and Article 12 of the Birds Directive cover the period from 2013 to 2018<sup>43</sup>. These assessments were also the main expert bases for this document. Additional information on the status of species and habitat types required to set the management programme's long- and short-term objectives was obtained during the drafting of this document at many workshops held with experts on particular species and habitat types. These experts provided their assessments of the species and habitat type status on particular Natura 2000 sites based on literature and studies, or based on their knowledge if no literature or studies were available (*best expert opinion*).

The assessment of the species and habitat type status within Natura 2000 sites is provided in the Overview of conservation status of species and habitat types of the Natura 2000 network<sup>44</sup>. The overview establishes that the status of specialist species is markedly worse than that of the species with a wider range of ecological requirements. It particularly highlights the unfavourable status of certain species and habitat type groups, such as forest galliforms and species that need large quantities of dead wood (e.g. woodpeckers and beetles), as well as species living in wet meadows. The overview also highlights the disappearance of certain butterfly species on several Natura 2000 sites. Dry meadows also have poor conservation status. Among the aquatic and riparian species and habitat types, those dependent on natural river dynamics (gravel bars, erosion banks, riparian vegetation) have the worst conservation status.

<sup>43</sup> Reporting pursuant to Article 17 of the Habitats Directive.

<sup>44</sup> Kačičnik Jančar et al., 2022: Pregled stanja vrst in habitatnih tipov omrežja Natura 2000/Overview of conservation status of species and habitat types of Natura 2000 network.

## 1.3 Natura 2000 Management Programme

### 1.3.1 Purpose of the Natura 2000 Management Programme

The main purpose of the Management Programme 2023–2028 is to set conservation objectives and measures to achieve them, which fulfils the obligation *to protect special areas of protection – Natura 2000 sites* imposed on Slovenia by the Birds Directive and Habitats Directive (see Section 1.1). Slovenia will thus achieve the EU's objective of maintaining the favourable conservation status of plant and animal species and habitat types of European importance. By implementing this programme, the Government will contribute towards the objectives of the European Green Deal and of the documents and strategies based thereon, including the NEAP (NNPP).

This Management Programme defines in detail the conservation objectives for species and habitat types for the programme period and for the long term, and the measures to be taken in Natura 2000 sites to achieve the programme objectives. It also determines the competent sectors and entities responsible for implementing the conservation measures. Due to the large number of objectives and measures, they are set out in two annexes: **Annex A: Detailed Conservation Objectives of the Natura 2000 Management Programme for the Period 2023–2028** and **Annex B: Measures of the Natura 2000 Management Programme for the Period 2023–2028**. Indicating the sectors to which the measures referred to in Annex B apply facilitates the establishment of links with strategic plans and development programmes of other sectors. This Management Programme also includes a list of priority projects, which is set out in **Annex C: Proposals for Priority Projects with the List of Sites, Habitat Types, Species and Priority Cultural Heritage Structures**. The list includes proposals for the key content of priority projects, which were designed by prioritising specific on-site conservation activities required for achieving the detailed conservation objectives of the Management Programme. The Management Programme and its Annexes serve as a starting point for approving and financing projects under the European Cohesion Policy Programme 2021–2027 (hereinafter: ECPP), the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (for the period 2021–2027) (hereinafter: EMFAF), the Climate Change Fund, the Slovenian Forest Fund, and certain cross-border Interreg programmes, and for co-financing and implementing standard and strategic LIFE projects (SNaP), projects financed by the CAP and other projects, and as a basis for the absorption of these funds. A special annex to the Management Programme also includes a list of activities aimed at reducing the gap in the skills and knowledge required for more efficient management – the list of required research, expert opinions and monitoring (**Annex F: List of Planned Monitoring and Research Activities**).

### 1.3.2 Development of the Natura 2000 Management Programme

The Government adopted the first management programme, i.e. the *Operational Programme – the Natura 2000 Site Management Programme for the Period 2007–2013* in October 2007. This programme already set detailed conservation objectives for each species and habitat type in Natura 2000 sites and conservation measures or guidelines for achieving the objectives. The Government adopted the next Natura 2000 Management Programme (2015–2020)<sup>45</sup> in 2015. This programme was subsequently amended twice (in 2015 and 2016). At the beginning of 2021, it was extended until the adoption of a new programme in 2022. An analysis of the programme implementation was conducted for each relevant sector, such as nature conservation<sup>46</sup>, agriculture<sup>47</sup>, forestry<sup>48</sup>, water management<sup>49</sup> and fisheries<sup>50</sup>, as well as an overall analysis of measure implementation in the period 2015–2020<sup>51</sup>, including a summary of recommendations from the

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<sup>45</sup> [http://www.natura2000.si/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Dokumenti/Life\\_Upravljanje/PUN\\_ProgramNatura.pdf](http://www.natura2000.si/fileadmin/user_upload/Dokumenti/Life_Upravljanje/PUN_ProgramNatura.pdf).

<sup>46</sup> Jelenko Turinek et al., 2021: Analiza izvajanja ukrepov Programa upravljanja območij Natura 2000 2015–2020 za obdobje 2015–2019, Sektor varstvo narave.

<sup>47</sup> Kirbiš et al., 2020: Analiza ciljev in ukrepov Programa upravljanja območij Natura 2000 2015–2020 za obdobje 2015–2019, Sektor kmetijstvo.

<sup>48</sup> Danev et al., 2020: Analiza Programa upravljanja območij Natura 2000 (2015–2020) za sektor gozdarstvo in upravljanja z divjadjo.

<sup>49</sup> Hrovat et al., 2020: Analiza Programa upravljanja območij Natura 2000 2015–2020 za obdobje 2015–2019, Sektor upravljanja z vodami.

<sup>50</sup> Čarf et al., 2020: Analiza izvajanja ukrepov Programa upravljanja območij Natura 2000 2015–2020; za obdobje 2015–2018, Sektor ribištvo.

<sup>51</sup> Jelenko Turinek et al., 2022: Analiza Programa upravljanja območij Natura 2000 2015–2020 KROVNI DOKUMENT.

sectoral analyses. Based on the analysis findings, the present Natura 2000 Management Programme and operational programmes for spending EU funds include amended and upgraded measures.

The analysis of the status of species and habitat types within Natura 2000 sites is presented in the report Overview of Conservation Status of Species and Habitat Types of the Natura 2000 Network<sup>52</sup>.

In the future, certain systemic changes will have to be made and additional sources of funding provided, which is also stated in the PAF<sup>53</sup>. The support processes, which provide a better overview of proposed measures and facilitate the input of data and the monitoring of measure implementation status, which can be linked to the achievement of objectives, must also be upgraded.

### 1.3.3 Composition of the Natura 2000 Management Programme for the period 2023–2028

This Management Programme is in accordance with the Natura 2000 Decree<sup>54</sup>, which lays down the mandatory content of operational programmes for the management of Natura 2000 sites. It provides:

- i. **detailed conservation objectives**, which generally refer to zones and derive from the conservation objectives determined by this regulation, as well as conservation objectives for the preservation of habitats of endangered plant and animal species and habitat types, which are preferentially preserved in a favourable condition, in accordance with the regulations in the field of nature conservation and adopted strategies and programs with which it is planned in the field of nature conservation.
- ii. **measures for achieving conservation objectives**, whereby the set of measures is determined according to the Natura character of the area, namely:
  - nature conservation measures, including the entities responsible, time limits and financial resources;
  - measures for the adapted use of natural resources, specifying the plan for the use of natural resources, detailed conservation guidelines to be considered when preparing the plan and the entity to implement the plan;
  - measures for adapted agricultural practices facilitating the achievement of conservation objectives and the method of the measures' implementation;
  - water management measures, including a water management plan, detailed conservation guidelines considered in the plan and the entity to implement the plan;
  - other measures, if necessary to ensure the favourable status of plant and animal species and habitat types, e.g. cultural heritage protection measures facilitating the achievement of conservation measures and the method of implementation of these measures;
- iii. **indicators** that must be regularly monitored in order to determine the effectiveness of measures regarding the achievement of a favourable status of plant and animal species, along with their habitats and habitat types, including the entities responsible, time limits and financial resources;
- iv. **conservation measures and activities** necessary to ensure the connectivity of the European ecological network;
- v. **research activities** in the field of basic and applied sciences that are essential for improving knowledge of the ecology of plant and animal species and habitat types.

Natura 2000 sites to which this Management Programme refers are the SPAs designated pursuant to the Birds Directive and the SACs designated pursuant to the Habitats Directive.

The **detailed conservation objectives** are provided in **Annex A: Detailed Conservation Objectives of the Natura 2000 Management Programme for the Period 2023–2028** (hereinafter: Annex A). The **measures** for achieving the detailed conservation objectives for the programme period 2023–2028 are provided in **Annex B: Measures of the Natura 2000 Management Programme for the period 2023–2028** (hereinafter: Annex B).

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<sup>52</sup> Kačičnik Jančar et al., 2022: Pregled stanja vrst in habitatnih tipov omrežja Natura 2000/Overview of conservation status of species and habitat types of Natura 2000 network.

<sup>53</sup> Prioritised Action Framework (PAF) for Natura 2000 in Slovenia 2021–2027, 2020.

<sup>54</sup> Article 12 of the Decree on special areas of protection (Natura 2000 sites).

Priority projects for achieving the programme's objectives, which are financed from the ECPP, and the basis for implementing the strategic and standard LIFE projects are set out in **Annex C: Proposals for Priority Projects with the List of Sites, Habitat Types, Species and Priority Cultural Heritage Structures.** (hereinafter: Annex C).

Other annexes were added to facilitate the implementation of measures in certain sectors. **Annex D: List of Plans Required for the Conservation of Natura 2000 Sites** (hereinafter: Annex D) is intended for the majority of measures that are implemented as sectoral planning in forestry and fisheries. **Annex E: Target AECF Areas for Biodiversity Conservation** (hereinafter: Annex E) applies to the implementation of sectoral measures in agriculture.

**Annex F: List of Planned Monitoring and Research Activities** (hereinafter: Annex F) determines the activities to monitor the status of species, their habitats and habitat types, and the effectiveness of measures, compile basic inventories and carry out mapping to determine species and habitat status, and conduct studies to gain better insight into the ecology of species or processes within habitat types to improve their management.

## 2 DETAILED CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

The Natura 2000 Decree lays down **general conservation objectives**, which apply to the entire Natura 2000 network<sup>55</sup>.

In its notice<sup>56</sup>, the European Commission states with regard to the SACs that conservation objectives should be determined so as to contribute to maintaining or attaining the favourable conservation status of species or habitat types (which is determined at the level of the country's biogeographical region). Due to the level of specificity and changes in the status, it is reasonable to lay this down in a document that is valid for a limited period, i.e. in the management programme, which is laid down in paragraph three of Article 6 of the Natura 2000 Decree.

Complementing the Natura 2000 Decree, the Management Programme specifies **detailed conservation objectives**, which generally refer to each species or habitat type in each Natura 2000 site and are based on the conservation objectives of the Decree<sup>57</sup>. Due to their extensiveness, the detailed conservation objectives are provided in **Annex A**, including both the **long-term detailed conservation objectives** and the **detailed conservation objectives for the programme period**.

The detailed conservation objectives for the programme period are determined on the basis of the long-term detailed conservation objectives, which are based on the reference values for the favourable status<sup>58</sup>. Reference values were introduced by the European Commission, primarily for reporting on the implementation of the Habitats and the Birds Directives<sup>59,60</sup>.

The long-term detailed conservation objectives concerning favourable status define the key requirements that must be fulfilled for a species or habitat type to have a favourable conservation status. The detailed conservation objectives for the programme period define the requirements that must be fulfilled in the programme period 2023–2028 in order to gradually (sometimes through several programme periods) achieve the favourable conservation status of a species or a habitat type. The detailed conservation objectives for both the long-term and the programme period define the following: i) population size (the multi-annual average in species with natural fluctuations in population size); ii) habitat or habitat type size; and iii) specific structures in the habitat and the use of or processes in the habitat required to maintain the favourable status of the species or habitat type for each species or habitat type. These categories are indicated in the column **Type of conservation objective** in Annex A.

Annex A first lists Natura 2000 sites (the columns **Site ID** and **Site name**), and Natura 2000 **Site group** if the SACs and SPAs overlap. The next five columns<sup>61</sup> contain all qualifying species or habitat types on the site concerned, to which the objectives indicated in the next columns of the line apply. The next columns apply to the long-term detailed conservation objectives<sup>62</sup> and the final columns to the detailed conservation objectives for the programme period<sup>63</sup>. Depending on the situation on site, detailed conservation objectives for the programme period determine whether the state should first be determined or maintained, restored, monitored or improved in order to maintain or restore the favourable conservation status of species or habitat types. If

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<sup>55</sup> Article 6 of the Decree on special areas of protection (Natura 2000 sites).

<sup>56</sup> Commission notice C(2018) 7621 final, Brussels, 21 November 2018, Managing Natura 2000 sites — The provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC.

<sup>57</sup> Article 6 of the Decree.

<sup>58</sup> Referenčne vrednosti, ZRSVN, 2021.

<sup>59</sup> Favourable Reference Values Expert group on Reporting under the Nature Directives 21 March 2017.

<sup>60</sup> Defining and applying the concept of Favourable Reference Values for species and habitats under the EU Birds and Habitats Directives, Technical report, 2018.

<sup>61</sup> Species/HT code; EU code ; Species/HT name; Scientific name of the species; Taxonomic group.

<sup>62</sup> Value of the long-term detailed conservation objective (numerical) MIN.

Value of the long-term detailed conservation objective (numerical) MAX.

Unit of numerical value of the long-term detailed conservation objective.

Value of the long-term detailed conservation objective (non-numerical).

Detailed spatial placement of the long-term detailed conservation objective.

<sup>63</sup> Programme-period detailed conservation objective.

Value of the programme-period detailed conservation objective (numerical) MIN.

Value of the programme-period detailed conservation objective (numerical) MAX.

Unit of numerical value of the programme-period detailed conservation objective.

Value of the programme-period detailed conservation objective (non-numerical).

Detailed spatial placement of the programme-period detailed conservation objective.

the objective is numeric, it is indicated how large the habitat, habitat type or population must be for the objective to be considered reached, or what specifically must be provided in the environment to reach the objective.

For a better understanding of the long-term or programme-period objectives, the column **Population to which the conservation objective applies** indicates the type of bird population, i.e. whether it is migrating, nesting or wintering on the Natura 2000 site concerned. If a bird species is a qualifying species for the site, this means that its population reproduces, i.e. nests on the site. An additional objective may be set for the same site that applies to the same species but to the population only present on the site at the time of migration. There is also the column **Definition of the type of structure to which the long-term / programme-period detailed conservation objective applies**, which only applies to certain objectives concerning bats, birds and fish.

Some Natura 2000 sites (SPAs and SACs) overlap in some parts. In Annexes A, B and E, such sites are given additional name indicated in the column **Site group**. Detailed conservation objectives for sites that were designated for more than one species or habitat type are harmonised so that the objectives for different species are not in conflict. Annex A to the Management Programme sets out more than 1,800 objectives, which translate into more than 15,000 long-term detailed conservation objectives and more than 15,000 programme-period detailed conservation objectives for the species and habitat types within Natura 2000 sites.

## 2.1 Species and habitat type zones

The detailed conservation objectives set out in Annex A generally apply to zones within Natura 2000 sites and not necessarily the entire site for every species. Species and habitat type zones are presented on the website of the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation (IRSNC)<sup>64</sup>. They are also included in the information system Nature Conservation Atlas<sup>65</sup>. From January 2025, they will also be available in the information system Narcis<sup>66</sup>.

The basis for the designation of zones is Article 9 of the Natura 2000 Decree, which provides that within Natura 2000 sites, the habitats of the plant and animal species and the areas of habitat types due to which the Natura 2000 site was designated may be graphically defined as zones of these species' habitats or of habitat types. This Article also provides that the boundaries of zones may be changed due to the changes in the natural environment, which can be caused by natural processes, conservation measures and other activities aimed at improving the condition, permitted activities and other actions affecting the environment, or based on additional expert justifications. The zones determine where is the area on which the target area of the species' habitat or of the habitat type must be ensured – reference zones.

**Reference zones** of species and habitat types are zones that represent the favourable status of that species or habitat type. They serve as the baseline value of the favourable status to be attained/maintained and allow comparisons of the current and the baseline/desired status. They are determined based on the situation at the time of the designation of the Natura 2000 site or on the first adequate data available. Reference zones are designated for species or habitat types that have been sufficiently studied to determine their favourable status with adequate certainty. They are not designated for every species and habitat type on every Natura 2000 site.

Reference zones may be drawn as ranges whose area represents the numerical value of the long-term detailed conservation objective indicated in Annex A. In some cases the drawn range represents the area within which the species or habitat type occurs in a certain proportion. In such case, the non-numerical value of a long-term/programme-period detailed conservation objective in the Management Programme (Annex A) would be, for example: "the habitat type is present in a zone of 34 ha in which it covers 10% of the area" or "the species is present in a zone of 310 ha, in which there is 20% of the suitable habitat". The detailed conservation objectives for the programme period in Annexes A and B are presented in a similar way.

For aquatic species, such as fish, lampreys, crustaceans and the thick-shelled river mussel (*Unio crassus*), the reference watercourse length and the share of a suitable habitat within this reference length are determined instead of reference zones. In such a case, the non-numerical value of a long-term/programme-period detailed conservation objective would be, for example, "the species is present in 24 km of the watercourse, of which 60% is a suitable habitat".

During the preparation of this Management Programme the zonation was extensively revised. Based on the newer data and knowledge on species and habitat types, approximately one half of species and habitat type zones were designated anew.

The **actual zones of species and habitat types** reflect the areas of recent occurrences of habitats of these species or of habitat types. They are classified **according to their quality**, which indicates how precisely we can determine (graphically define) the habitat of a species or a habitat type on a Natura 2000 site. Zone quality does not indicate how well preserved is a habitat. Zone classification by their quality:

- **Good species/habitat type zone** determines the species' habitat or the habitat type well – the species or the habitat type is present (covers) the majority of the zone's designated area.
- **Acceptable species/habitat type zone** roughly determines the species' habitat or the habitat type. Such a zone includes areas where the ecological conditions are such that the species or habitat type may be present, but no data on this are available. A zone of acceptable quality is generally larger than would be the species' or habitat type's zone of good quality.

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<sup>64</sup> <https://zrsvn-varstvonarave.si/kaj-varujemo/obmocja-natura-2000/cone-vrst-in-habitatnih-tipov/>.

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.naravovarstveni-atlas.si/web/profile.aspx?id=NV@ZRSVNJ>.

<sup>66</sup> <https://narcis.si/#!>.

- **Inadequate species/habitat type zone** determines the area where the species or habitat type could be present. Inadequate zones are generally very large (can cover an entire Natura 2000 site). Only areas where the species or habitat is definitely not present (e.g. built-up areas) are excluded from such zones.

Important parts of habitats, such as nesting, spawning and other breeding grounds, may be designated within a Natura 2000 site as **structure zones** for individual species, which are recorded in a special register. A structure zone can also be outside a Natura 2000 site, if it is of key importance for a species inside the Natura 2000 site.

**Expansion zone** is an area where, in the event of poor conservation of a habitat or habitat type, favourable conditions could be established for the extension of that habitat type or suitable habitat for a species.



### 3 MEASURES TO ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVES

In accordance with the note of the European Commission<sup>67,68</sup>, **conservation measures are means of achieving the detailed conservation objectives**. The Management Programme imposes the implementation of these measures mostly on public entities, but indirectly also on private entities, in particular landowners and water right holders, which the Management Programme does not regulate in more detail. The conduct of private entities is regulated by sector-specific legislation, which in key fields prescribes mandatory sectoral plans for the use and conservation of natural resources (for forests, fish and game). Sectoral plans and measures for the management of natural resources (forestry, game management, fisheries, water management, the use of mineral resources, etc.) and adequate spatial planning contribute significantly to the favourable status of species and habitat types within Natura 2000 sites in Slovenia. Actions taken by owners of agricultural land, for which there is no sectoral planning, can be directed by the financial instruments of the common agricultural policy, in particular those related to rural development.

Wherever sectoral plans exist, the nature conservation content is included in the management of natural resources through nature conservation guidelines and opinions. Specific guidelines for achieving the detailed conservation objectives or implementing conservation measures are provided in the nature conservation guidelines. If measures are implemented through nature conservation guidelines, the sectoral measures in overlapping areas are determined in the procedure for issuing nature conservation guidelines.

If there are no nature conservation guidelines or if the implementing (sectoral) measures for managing natural resources must be determined at a higher planning level, the conservation measures are included in the procedure for drafting operational programmes that determine the management of natural resources.

For the agricultural sector, target areas for key sectoral measures are determined. These areas are related to zones in joined sites and are, therefore, listed in the separate Annex E. Overlapping is not relevant to the implementation of horizontal measures, so it is not necessary to determine the zones of potential entry.

In addition to the measures that directly form habitats (forestry, agricultural, fisheries and water management measures), the Management Programme also discusses other measures, as referred to below, which are not directly related to the forming of habitats but nevertheless significantly contribute to attaining favourable status for species and habitat types.

A vast and relatively well-preserved natural area with many interesting species and habitats provides opportunities for experiencing and learning about plant and animal species and natural processes. Slovenia sees high volume of tourist and recreational visits to areas important for nature conservation, including in relation to cultural heritage. The Management Programme also includes measures related to the marketing of biodiversity on or near Natura 2000 sites with a view to mitigating any negative impacts of tourism and recreation as much as possible.

Many conservation measures are implemented by drawing up and adopting legal instruments or other documents or issuing approvals and permits, and are associated with the administrative costs of public administration. There are also many conservation measures that envisage carrying out specific conservation activities on site, aimed at attaining or maintaining a favourable status for a habitat or habitat type.

The **measures** to achieve the detailed conservation objectives for the programme period are set out in **Annex B** and in principle relate to **a particular species or habitat type within a Natura 2000 site** (a line in the table in Annex B applies to one measure for one species on one Natura 2000 site).

The column **Type of conservation measure** in Annex B indicates the group of measures to achieve conservation objectives in accordance with Article 12 of the Natura 2000 Decree. These are usually nature conservation measures, measures for the adapted use of natural values (forestry, game management, fisheries), measures for adapted agricultural practices and water management measures. In some cases they include spatial management measures, measures to protect cultural heritage and other measures.

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<sup>67</sup> Commission note on establishing conservation measures for Natura 2000 sites.

<sup>68</sup> Commission notice C(2018) 7621 final, Brussels, 21 November 2018, Managing...

To facilitate the organisation of measure implementation and, in particular, to establish a more appropriate system for monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of measures, this Management Programme divides measures in four categories. In the column **Group of measures** (Annex B) are:

- **On-site measures** – measures that envisage activities to be carried out on site. These measures directly contribute to improving species or habitat status. The results of such measures are noticeable and measurable in the field. This also includes certain measures that are systemically implemented through sectoral planning but require a precisely measurable effect in the field (selected sectoral measures).
- **Sectoral planning** – primarily measures that through the IRSNC guidelines or opinions ensure that the activities carried out within different sectors significantly contribute to the conservation of species and habitat types and the improvement of their status.
- **Parallel measures** – the measures that provide legal basis and guidelines or set up systemic procedures that make the conservation of species or habitat types possible. Supervision and measures to direct visitors or tourist, recreational and other uses on site are also considered as parallel measures.
- **Communication measures** – the measures focused on other stakeholders or users of the sites so that they carry out their activities in a manner that does not harm the species and habitat types, or adapt their activities so that they help improve the condition (e.g. in agriculture). These measures can be implemented through direct communication or through various information media, including outside Natura 2000 sites.

In addition to the measures (the column **Conservation measures**), Annex B also includes **Detailed conservation guidelines** for measure implementation, which define the measures in more detail. **Sectoral measures** are included to facilitate the implementation of conservation measures. For this purpose, the measures for the conservation of species and habitat types are "translated" into a systemic sectoral measure in accordance with the sector-specific legislation. Conservation measures are always linked to the detailed conservation objectives for the programme period, the Natura 2000 site and the species or habitat type, as set out in Annex A (to ensure the clarity/comprehensiveness of the measure, this content of Annex A is repeated in Annex B). **The specific value of a detailed conservation objective for the programme period is achieved through all the measures applying to this objective.** Several measures can apply to the same objective. In such case, each measure contributes its part to this objective's achievement. If the measures are implemented in full, the objective should be achieved. The measures are not intended to individually achieve the objective's target value. This value will be achieved by the sum of all activities implementing all measures set for the same objective.

The area where each of the measures or guidelines will be implemented is the zone or a part of the zone of the species or habitat type (see Section 2.1 Species and habitat type zones), which in accordance with the Natura 2000 Decree determine the parts of the Natura 2000 site that are essential parts of habitats of particular plant and animal species and of particular habitat types for which the Natura 2000 site was designated.

Annex B also includes **Entities responsible** for the implementation of measures. These are public entities, which either already implement the measure within their regular work or must include it in their regular work. Certain measures that are more demanding in terms of content or finances are not part of the regular work of the entity responsible. However, this entity is responsible for setting up an appropriate mechanism or acquiring additional funds and capacities for implementing the measure. More than one institution can be listed in the Entity responsible column. The one listed first is the entity responsible. The other entities listed make important contribution or their participation is essential to the measure's implementation. The institution listed first is also responsible for reporting on the measure's implementation.

Some conservation measures can be financed as part of the regular work of the entities responsible, while others require additional resources from various other funds or projects. Financing resources for the implementation of conservation measures are diverse. In Annex B, they are mostly defined as regular work, other budget funds, municipal budget funds or project (the column **Source of financing**). Regular work is considered to be the regular work of the employees of the entity responsible that performs one of its regular functions, i.e. the work of public entities. The measures not planned to be financed from the government budget will be implemented through projects. For such measures, the source of financing is indicated as other budget funds or project. Other budget funds include all national funds (Forest Fund, Water Fund, Climate Change

Fund, and funds intended for research) and, in part, also EU funds (EU cohesion funds (ECPP, ERDF, ESF), common agricultural policy funds (EAFRD, EAGF), EMFAF) and other earmarked funds, e.g. earmarked funds for land purchase, compensation, public works and other things. The method of absorbing these funds is determined by the fund's absorption rules, as laid down in the relevant legislation. Broadly speaking, absorption takes place as the allocation of funds on request (e.g. the AECP within the CAP), as a direct confirmation (e.g. funds for certain priority investments in ECPP or funds from national funds), or as a public call for applications (e.g. Interreg funds, EIP within CAP). In many cases a project must be prepared for the absorption of these funds, which is then submitted under the appropriate call for applications issued by institutions or funds, such as calls for applications by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency, LIFE programme, Horizon Europe, Just Transition Fund (JTF), Interreg, Swiss contribution, Norwegian Financial Mechanism, EEA Financial Mechanism, and in part also European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) – EIP, Leader projects, etc. In general, the applicant submitting a project is determined by the project partnership, so this programme does not state the entity responsible for such measures. The ongoing projects<sup>69</sup> are not the subject of financing.

Annex B also includes information on the urgency of each conservation measure (the column **Urgency of action**). There are two levels of priority:

- **Priority 1** – the conservation measure must be implemented immediately at the beginning of the programme period (in the first two years), otherwise the conservation status of the species or habitat type will deteriorate substantially and rapidly. The implementation can last more than two years.
- **Priority 2** – the conservation measure must be implemented in the programme period (2023–2028), which will prevent the deterioration of the conservation status or maintain the favourable status of the species or habitat type. A conservation measure's implementation can commence in the first year of the programme period and continue throughout the period, or a measure is only implemented once (depending on the nature of the measure).

The urgency of action is not indicated for the measure group "sectoral planning", as the sectoral planning is carried out in accordance with the timetable for activities within different sectors, over which this Management Programme has no influence.

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<sup>69</sup> Natura 2000 projects – NATURA2000 (gov.si).

### **3.1 Nature conservation measures**

Nature conservation measures are carried out by the State to achieve the detailed conservation objectives in Natura 2000 sites. They are systemically regulated by the Nature Conservation Act (contractual protection and stewardship, temporary protection, protection by establishing a protected area, restoration, on-site signage, and viewing and visiting restrictions) and the Decree on protected wild animal species (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 46/04, 109/04, 84/05, 115/07, 32/08 – Dec. of the CC, 96/08, 36/09, 102/11, 15/14, 64/16 and 62/19) – restrictions on activities threatening protected animal species. In Annex B, nature conservation measures are indicated in the column "Type of conservation measure" as "*nature conservation*" and cover the nature conservation sector, to a small extent also municipal public services and veterinary services.

The basic guideline in choosing the **type of measure** to achieve a detailed conservation objective were appropriate legal measures that already contribute to the achievement of the objective or provide an appropriate foundation for such achievement.

The key entities responsible for implementing nature conservation measures and guidelines are the Ministry of Natural Resources and Spatial Planning, the IRSNC and public institutes that manage protected areas. A part of the tasks also falls under the responsibility of municipalities, the Slovenia Forest Service and the Fisheries Research Institute of Slovenia.

The public institutes that manage the protected areas collaborate with the responsible entities on implementing measures in other sectors, even if they are not listed in Annex B as the entities responsible, as far as these measures apply, in terms of content and location, to the protected area that they manage.

#### **3.1.1 Protection and temporary protection**

Within Natura 2000 sites or parts thereof that are also protected areas, the provisions of the instrument on protection apply. A manager of the protected area is established or designated by a concession contract to protect certain areas. The manager's tasks include managing the protected area, implementing conservation measures therein, purchasing and/or restoring land, entering contracts on protection and stewardship, communicating, and setting up and maintaining infrastructure for visitors to the protected area. A public institute may manage more than one protected area.

The Nature Conservation Act or the instrument on protection also requires the adoption of a plan for managing the protected area. This is a measure that contributes significantly to the achievement of detailed conservation objectives. In such cases, the conservation measure in Annex B includes a basis that is included in the preparation of the management plan as a conservation measure for the Natura 2000 site.

The entity responsible for submitting a plan for managing protected areas established by the State to the Government is the Ministry of Natural Resources and Spatial Planning. The Nature Conservation Act imposes the drafting of such plans on the manager, with the expert support of the IRSNC, which also designates the entity responsible for designing the measures under this programme.

For Natura 2000 sites that are also protected areas with a manager, measures to be implemented on site are included (e.g. maintain and restore saltpans, maintain pollard willows, restore old and set up new spawning grounds for amphibians, clean polluted caves, remove woody overgrowth, mow, direct visits, maintain openings for bats in churches, adjust the existing public lighting), which are carried out by managers as part of their duties.

#### **3.1.2 Contractual protection and stewardship**

The next set of nature conservation measures comprises contractual protection and stewardship. A protection contract is a contract with the owner of the land within a Natura 2000 site where there are habitats of

Natura 2000 species or Natura 2000 habitat types. In accordance with the Nature Conservation Act, the contract lays down, in particular:

- the activities that the owner must discontinue or perform to achieve the purpose of natural values protection, and
- the amount of funds for the performance or discontinuation of activities referred to in the preceding indent.

Very similar or the same elements are also included in contracts that constitute measures under other regulations, in particular the implementation of agri-environment-climate payments (AECF, Section 3.3), which are also financed from the public funds.

The entity responsible for implementing the measure of contractual protection or stewardship is the Ministry of Natural Resources and Spatial Planning, except in protected areas that have managers, where this is the manager's duty (this is indicated specifically in Annex B). The Nature Conservation Act imposes the preparation of an expert proposal for implementing this measure in special areas of protection on the IRSNC. The stewardship is granted by a stewardship contract with a person that is not the owner of the land or other real estate concerned, when the public notice of the intention to grant a stewardship ends and the conditions concerning the stewardship qualifications are met. In Annex B, stewardship is indicated as contractual protection measure. In relation to the implementation of agri-environment-climate payments, the entities responsible are described in Section 3.3 Adapted agricultural practices.

Financing for contractual conservation measures can be obtained by submitting and implementing an appropriate LIFE project or from the funds under the European cohesion policy (ECPP, ERDF, ESF). Slovenia is also eligible for funds donated by some highly developed countries (Swiss contribution, Norwegian Financial Mechanism, EEA Financial Mechanism). The measures can be financed by way of submitting and implementing projects, similarly to the LIFE mechanism with more or less the same restrictions as apply to the LIFE mechanism.

### **3.1.3 On-site signage**

The measure of on-site signage can be used where a detailed conservation objective can be achieved by installing signs on site and redirecting visitors. The effectiveness of such redirection can be improved by appropriate communication and control when the signs are introduced. Pursuant to regulations, the entity responsible for the signage is the IRSNC, except in protected areas that have managers, where this is the manager's duty. Such measures are not planned in the Management Programme but the need for them may arise later.

### **3.1.4 Restrictions on viewing and visiting and on activities threatening protected species**

A restriction may be needed if the increased presence of a large number of people puts the attainment of a favourable status of species and habitat types at risk. Generally, the reason for restrictions is adverse impact on the species that are not accustomed to human presence. This mostly occurs when human presence increases due to tourism or recreation (mountain climbing, sport climbing, hiking, water sports, free flying, visiting caves, etc.) or there is an increased interest in research or photography. In Annex B, the measures of restricting viewing and visiting or activities that threaten protected animal species are included, in particular, for those parts of sites where the presence of large numbers of people could have a significant adverse impact on the attainment of conservation objectives. The measure is introduced by adopting an appropriate regulation, which for protected areas can be the instrument on protection. Entities responsible for drawing up such instruments are laid down in the nature conservation regulations and are not listed herein.

### **3.1.5 Restoration**

The measure of restoring a part of a Natura 2000 site (the measures for the conservation of natural values also protect Natura 2000 sites) is determined by this Management Programme. This is set out in detail in Annex B. A minor restoration measure may be decided on by the ministry instead of the Government. In this case, the obligation to carry out the measure is arranged with the provider of public nature conservation service, so that it is included in its annual work programme. The entities responsible for restoration within protected areas are the managers of protected areas. Outside protected areas, the entity responsible for restoration is primarily the IRSNC, and in part the Ministry of Natural Resources and Spatial Planning and municipal public services. Responsible entities have not been determined for a significant amount of the content; a project must be prepared for measure implementation (partner consortium), so that additional staff and resources can be provided.

### **3.1.6 Other measures**

In addition to the aforementioned measures, other measures are envisaged to protect nature, which can be roughly divided into the following four groups:

- legislative amendments, strategic documents (measures that envisage various legislative amendments and the preparation of other documents, such as strategies, action plans and expert bases);
- the management of protected areas and concessions (in the majority of protected areas the conservation measures are carried out as part of area management, including concessions and the inclusion of conservation objectives in the plans for managing protected areas and annual work programmes of protected area managers);
- communication measures (measures aimed at visitors to Natura 2000 sites, directing them to activities that do not have an adverse impact on species and habitat types; this includes communication with other stakeholders that co-shape the site);
- other measures.

### 3.2 Measures for the adapted use of natural resources

Key sectors where the adapted use of natural resources facilitates the attainment of the Management Programme's conservation objectives are forestry, game management, fisheries, and in part also the use of mineral resources.

In these sectors, the conservation objectives are pursued by including the detailed conservation objectives and guidelines listed in Annex A in sectoral management plans, which, pursuant to point 3 of paragraph four of Article 98 of the Nature Conservation Act, is carried out based on nature conservation guidelines issued by the IRSNC. These nature conservation guidelines determine in detail specific conservation guidelines, starting points and conditions, which are then included in the plan for the use of a natural resource, in accordance with Article 97 of the Nature Conservation Act. In the plan for the use of a natural resource, the nature conservation guidelines are integrated into the measures envisaged in the plan, in accordance with the regulations governing these sectors. The regulations also determine the producers of particular plans (e.g. forest management plans or fisheries plans), which the Management Programme designates as the entities implementing measures within Natura 2000 sites (Annex B, column Entities responsible).

Plans for the sustainable management of natural resources set out in Annex D can be directly linked to or required for conservation of protected areas. The first paragraph of Article 101 of the Nature Conservation Act lays down that an appropriate assessment is not required for such plans, while paragraph two of Article 101a of the Nature Conservation Act provides that these plans can be determined in the procedure for strategic environmental impact assessments. Paragraph two of Article 7 of the Rules on the appropriate assessment of impacts caused by implementing plans and activities affecting nature in protected areas (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 130/04, 53/06, 38/10 and 3/11) provides that these plans are to be defined in a Natura 2000 management programme. This Management Programme provides starting points for the formulation of such plans and Annex D contains a detailed list of plans.

It should be noted that, regardless of their inclusion in Annex D and the aforementioned provision of the Rules, the content of each plan referred to in Annex D must be examined to determine whether an appropriate assessment or strategic environmental impact assessment is required.

Table 3: The overview of plans important for the adapted use of natural resources.

	<b>10-year FMP FMU</b>	<b>10-year FMP FMR</b>	<b>10-year GMP GMR</b>	<b>Fishery management plans</b>
<b>Number</b>	<b>223*</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>67*</b>

\* Plans are set out in Annex D: List of Plans Required for the Conservation of Natura 2000 Sites.

#### 3.2.1 Measures in forestry

In forestry, Natura 2000 sites are mostly managed on the basis of forest management plans (FMP) that determine the implementation of measures for the adapted use of natural resources. The framework for measures is provided in the Forest Act (ZG; Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 30/93, 56/99 – ZON, 67/02, 110/02 – ZGO-1, 115/06 – ORZG40, 110/07, 106/10, 63/13, 101/13 – ZDavNepr, 17/14, 22/14 – Dec. of the CC, 24/15, 9/16 – ZGGLRS, 77/16 and 78/23 – ZUNPEOVE), which stipulates the planning of measures to maintain the favourable status of special areas of protection designated under the regulations governing nature conservation. The Forest Act also provides that habitats of native plant and animal species are preserved or restored in accordance with forest management plans. The detailed conservation objectives for the adapted use of forests (natural resources) are listed by sites in Annex A, and measures and guidelines in Annex B. In Annex B, they are indicated in the column "Type of conservation measure" as "*adapted use of forests*". Plans determining the implementation of these measures are forest management plans (in accordance with the Forest Act). The requirements of species and habitat types from

the Management Programme related to Natura 2000 sites are included in the forest management plans based on the nature conservation guidelines.

At the highest level are forest management plans for forest management regions (FMP FMR), which are adopted for 10-year periods. There are 14 such plans, which include objectives, strategies, guidelines and measures for managing forests and woodlands. Currently, the forest management plans for forest management regions for the period 2021–2030 are in the process of adoption. They have already undergone strategic environmental impact assessment. The key operative guidelines for achieving the objectives and the measures and methods of their implementation by basic planning woodland units are set out in forest management plans for forest management units (FMP FMU), which ensure forests' ecological, social and production functions. Forest management plans for forest management units must contain specific guidelines and measures provided in the IRSNC's nature conservation guidelines.

Entities responsible for drawing up forest management plans for forest management units referred to in Annex D are determined by the Forest Act, while the Management Programme provides that the entity responsible is also responsible for including objectives from Annex A and guidelines and measures from Annex B in forest management plans. The costs of elaboration of management plans are borne by the competent public services. The elaboration of forest management plans and nature conservation guidelines is financed from the state budget for all forests, regardless of ownership.

In formulating nature conservation guidelines, the conservation objectives for different species and habitat types on a site are harmonised so that they are not in conflict.

To facilitate the achievement of objectives for species and habitat types in forests, certain measures are defined in more detail in Annex B in the column Sectoral measures. Sectoral measures that contribute to the conservation of species or habitat types include setting up ecocells with or without interventions, leaving standing biomass (habitat trees) and dead biomass in the forest, providing and maintaining water sources in the forest, carrying out regeneration, care and protection measures, maintaining the forest edge, and removing alien species.

One of the sectoral measures referred to in Annex B is also *amend the Rules on forest protection*, which mainly applies to certain bird species. The first task for the programme period 2023–2028 is to draft expert bases for restricting the time of felling based on the ecology (reproduction) of species and coordinate them with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food. The ministry will then update the Rules in accordance with the coordinated expert bases.

A few of the measures for adapted forest use are related to maintaining or expanding reserve areas. The entities responsible for these measures are the Ministry of Natural Resources and Spatial Planning and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food. These are the functions performed under other regulations, while this Management Programme only provides detailed substantive guidelines for the performance of these functions. The key document for this is the Resolution on the National Forest Programme (ReNFP), which in:

- "Section 5.3 – Objectives, guidelines and indicators for sustainable forest management" under "Objective 2 – Preserve the natural environment and ecological balance" lists "Guideline 4: Ensure that enough forests are left to their natural development (forest reserves, ecocells)", and in
- "Section 6.3.1.1 – Importance of forests for biodiversity" under "Objective 1 – Preserve biodiversity of forests at the ecosystem level" lists "Guideline 5: Maintain and suitably expand the network of forest reserves".

The Resolution is the basis for the Operational Programme for the Implementation of the National Forest Programme 2022–2026, which envisages an expansion of forest reserves by one fourth by 2026 (by 2,400 ha or to 11,800 ha). It states that new areas excluded from management must be designated, in particular, around both forest reserves with world heritage status (*Krokar* and *Snežnik–Ždrocle* primeval forests), around forest reserves with the aim of contributing to the achievement of Natura 2000 objectives referred to in the Management Programme, in protective forests important for biodiversity, and in areas with higher density of ecocells without intervention. The establishment of reserves in accordance with the Nature Conservation Act (e.g. in order to actively manage world natural heritage) can also contribute to the achievement of the Management Programme objectives concerning the adapted forest management in areas, where this is appropriate.



Article 7 of the Management of State Forests Act (ZGGLRS; Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 9/16, 36/21 – ZZIRDKG and 140/22 – ZSDH-1A) provides that the management of State forests must contribute to the achievement of nature conservation objectives, in particular the objectives of Natura 2000 sites and protected areas. Article 33 of the same Act provides that part of the funds from the budgetary Forest Fund are to be allocated to the financing of Natura 2000 measures in private forests. The Forest Fund will thus be the first source of financing for a major part of the forestry-specific measures referred to in the Management Programme in private forests. In the forests owned by the State, the measures falling within the regular management of Slovenski državni gozdovi, d. o. o. will be carried out pursuant to the forest management plans, in accordance with Article 7 of the Management of State Forests Act.

### **3.2.2 Measures in game management**

In the game management sector, the objectives are achieved with the adapted use of game as a natural resource (in the column "Type of conservation measure" in Annex B: adapted use of game), in accordance with the Game and Hunting Act (ZDLov-1; Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 16/04, 120/06 – Dec. of the CC, 17/08, 46/14 – ZON-C, 31/18, 65/20, 97/20 – corr., 44/22 and 158/22). In accordance with the regulations on hunting, the plans that may lay down measures for adapted game use are hunting management plans for hunting management regions (HMP HMRs), which are adopted every 10 years. Currently, the hunting management plans for hunting management regions for the period 2021–2030 are in the adoption process.

Pursuant to the Game and Hunting Act, the entities responsible for drawing up the hunting management plans for hunting management regions is the Slovenia Forest Service, which under the Management Programme is also responsible for including the guidelines and measures from Annex B in these plans. The Slovenia Forest Service must also include the guidelines from Annexes A and B in the relevant subordinate game management plans, which are adopted every two years.

Most of the measures related to the adapted use of game constitute the inclusion of a conservation objective in the hunting management plan for the hunting management region with planned sectoral measures, which is carried out based on the nature conservation guidelines for the hunting management plan for the hunting management region. Most of the objectives (Annex A) related to game management are closely connected to forestry due to the important ecosystem role of game species. The measures mostly involve restricting game feeding, maintaining population density of herbivorous, ungulates appropriate to the environment (prey for wolf and lynx, rejuvenation of native tree species), and restricting hunting in areas important for endangered bird species (ensuring peace and quiet). The entity responsible for these measures is the Slovenia Forest Service. The Management Programme also includes communication measures to encourage hunters only to use unleaded ammunition when hunting in two raptor species' zones and areas of influence (Annex B). This is the only measure for which the entity responsible is the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food.

### **3.2.3 Measures in fisheries**

Planning fish management in inland waters is regulated by the Freshwater Fishery Act (ZSRib; Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, [*Uradni list RS*], No 61/06). The currently applicable Programme for the management of fish in inland waters<sup>70</sup> sets out long-term guidelines and measures for fish management. In Slovenia, inland waters are divided into 12 fishery areas. A fishery management plan is produced for each fishery area (at the river basin level). These plans are the basis for fishery management plans for fishery regions, 67 in total. In accordance with fisheries legislation, in fishery regions, on-site measures are carried out by 64 fishing societies that were granted relevant concessions. The fishery management plans for fishery regions only include a presentation of waters of special importance and do not set measures for them. A plan

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<sup>70</sup> Programme for Fish Management in Inland Waters in Slovenia until 2021, 2015.

of measures for fishery management in waters of special importance is being drafted for this purpose. In the 9 waters of special importance, the management is carried out by the Fisheries Research Institute of Slovenia.

Pursuant to the Freshwater Fishery Act, the producer of fishery management plans for fishery areas and regions referred to in Annex D is the Fisheries Research Institute of Slovenia. Under the Management Programme, the Fisheries Research Institute of Slovenia is also the entity responsible for including in the plans for Natura 2000 sites those measures referred to in Annex B.

Based on the fish management programme, a fishery management plan is produced for each of the 12 fishery areas in Slovenia, which serves as an expert basis for a comprehensive fishery management of the fishery area and must reflect specific ecosystem characteristics thereof. Currently applicable plans are the plans for the period 2017–2022. The IRSNC designed nature conservation guidelines for fishery management plans for fishery areas and regions, which include conservation objectives and measures referred to in Annexes A and B. The fishery management plans for fishery regions that may lay down measures to meet the conservation objectives are listed in Annex D.

Marine fisheries refer to marine commercial and non-commercial fishing (fishing for scientific, research and educational purposes, and sport and recreational fishing). Pursuant to Marine Fisheries Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 115/06, 76/15, 69/17 in 44/22), the Plan for the management of marine commercial fisheries in the territorial and internal waters of the Republic of Slovenia<sup>71</sup> was adopted in 2021, which determines fishing species, methods and means, as well as the areas where fishing is restricted. The aim of marine commercial fishing is to place fisheries products on the market. Mariculture is carried out for the same purpose. Marine commercial fishing and mariculture fall within the framework of the common fisheries policy of the EU<sup>72</sup>. The majority of mariculture and marine commercial fishing takes place outside the Natura 2000 network. Wherever mariculture is carried out within a Natura 2000 site, it must be ensured that it does not have an adverse impact on the status of species and habitat types. The Operational programme for the implementation of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund in the Republic of Slovenia for the period 2014–2020<sup>73</sup> allows for the funds from the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (hereinafter: EMFF) to also be absorbed to finance the monitoring of species and habitat type status at sea. The funds were allocated to measures that promote environmentally sustainable fishery and aquaculture and accelerate the implementation of the common fisheries policy and the integrated maritime policy. The absorption of funds from the EMFAF is also planned for the period 2021–2027<sup>74</sup> for the measures for the protection and restoration of aquatic biodiversity and ecosystems. Measures related to sea referred to Annex B are indicative of the content that should be financed under the EMFAF operational programme.

### 3.2.4 Measures in the use of mineral resources

With regard to the use of mineral resources (in the column "Type of conservation measure" in Annex B: *adapted use of mineral resources*), the Management Programme envisages the inclusion of conservation objectives in concessions to exploit mineral resources. This is done through the nature conservation guidelines for granting a concession. This measure is only implemented within five Natura 2000 sites. It is primarily related to attaining or maintaining the favourable status of selected bird species that nest in the areas where mineral resources are extracted. The entity responsible for this measure is the competent ministry.

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MKGP/PODROCJA/RIBISTVO/Morski-ribolov/NUR/Nacrt-upravljanja-morskega-gospodarskega-ribistva-v-teritorialnih-in-notranjih-vodah-Republike-Slovenije.pdf>.

<sup>72</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy, amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1954/2003 and (EC) No 1224/2009 and repealing Council Regulations (EC) No 2371/2002 and (EC) No 639/2004 and Council Decision 2004/585/EC.

<sup>73</sup> <https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MKGP/PODROCJA/RIBISTVO/Operativni-program-za-izvajanje-Evropskega-sklada-za-pomorstvo-in-ribistvo-v-Republiki-Sloveniji-za-obdobje-2014-2020.pdf>.

<sup>74</sup> EMFAF 2021–2027 – Fisheries Fund ([ribiski-sklad.si](http://ribiski-sklad.si)).

### **3.3 Measures for adapted agricultural practices**

In many Natura 2000 sites, appropriate agricultural activity is a prerequisite for maintaining the conservation status of certain species, their habitats and habitat types. At the EU level, the agricultural policy is directed by regulations that lay down rules for direct payments and enhanced conditionality or establish the framework for all other measures of the common agricultural policy, thus indirectly influencing the use of agricultural land. Since 2023, these regulations have governed some additional practices, compared to the agricultural policy 2015–2020, which contribute to the achievement of the conservation objectives for the species and habitat types in Natura 2000 sites. These are, in particular, the requirements of mandatory conditionality (the enhanced and expanded elements of cross compliance and the green component requirements), the agri-environment-climate payments (AECP), the schemes for the environment and climate (eco-schemes), the inclusion of non-productive landscape characteristics in the definition of an eligible hectare, the inclusion of non-productive investments that support the objectives of nature conservation actions, and the testing of nature conservation measures in protected areas.

A key document for implementing the common agricultural policy in the period 2023–2027 (hereinafter: CAP) is Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 December 2021 establishing rules on support for strategic plans to be drawn up by Member States under the common agricultural policy (CAP Strategic Plans) and financed by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1305/2013 and (EU) No 1307/2013<sup>75</sup>. The regulation lays down rules for drawing up strategic plans for the CAP. The strategic plans are drawn up by the Member States and coordinated with the European Commission.

Another key document is the horizontal CAP regulation: Regulation (EU) 2021/2116 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 December 2021 on the financing, management and monitoring of the common agricultural policy and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013<sup>76</sup>. In addition to financial provisions, this regulation also includes provisions on general principles concerning checks and penalties, conditionality checks and detailed procedures related to the integrated administration and control system (IACS). The regulation thus lays down the rules on financing, administrative and control systems, clearance procedures (the annual clearance of accounts and annual performance clearance) and rules on conformity clearance procedure.

The Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan 2023–2027 for Slovenia (hereinafter: CAP Strategic Plan) and the implementing decrees based thereon provide a range of measures (interventions) to implement nine specific objectives of the EU CAP and the horizontal objective of disseminating knowledge, innovation and digitalization (Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System – AKIS). The CAP Strategic Plan follows all three of the CAP's general objectives: the competitiveness and resilience of the agricultural sector, the protection of the environment and climate (specific objectives 4, 5 and 6), and balanced rural development. The most relevant for this Management Programme is specific objective 6: to contribute to halting and reversing biodiversity loss, strengthen ecosystem services and preserve habitats and landscapes.

Nature conservation measures are carried out through agricultural measures at a variety of levels. The most basic one is enhanced conditionality, which constitutes a standard that must be ensured. Above conditionality are voluntary one-year schemes for the environment and climate (eco-schemes) within the measures of the first pillar, as well as the voluntary five-year AECP intervention – biodiversity and landscape (AECP BL) and other payments per area within the measures of the second pillar (e.g. non-productive investments, the testing of nature conservation measures in protected areas, organic farming).

The key element of greater environmental and climate ambitions is the merging of the existing cross compliance of the current perspective and the requirements of the green component from the direct payments into the system of **enhanced conditionality**<sup>77</sup>. Enhanced conditionality is the starting point for the entire green architecture and the foundation consisting of a set of mandatory rules and standards that all eligible persons under the CAP must fulfil to receive direct payments from the first pillar or CAP payments related to areas and

<sup>75</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:aa85fa9a-65a0-11e8-ab9c-01aa75ed71a1.0012.02/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:aa85fa9a-65a0-11e8-ab9c-01aa75ed71a1.0012.02/DOC_1&format=PDF).

<sup>76</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/SL/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R2115>.

<sup>77</sup> Decree on the rules of conditionality (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 166/22 and 34/23).

animals. These standards are related to environmental protection, human and animal health, and well-being of animals, which include statutory management requirements (hereinafter: SMR) and good agricultural and environmental conditions (hereinafter: GAEC), i.e. standards for maintaining a good agricultural and environmental status of land. The following GAEC and SMR, in particular, are of key importance for biodiversity conservation:

- GAEC 1: Maintenance of permanent grasslands based on a share of permanent grasslands in relation to agricultural areas at the national level (contribution to the preservation of basic functions of permanent meadows, which include maintaining carbon stock in the soil).
- GAEC 2: Protection of wetlands and peatlands (contribution to the preservation of carbon content in the soil, the conservation of very sensitive habitats of endangered plant and bird species, the conservation of drinking water and the mitigation of human impact on climate).
- GAEC 3: Ban on burning arable stubbles, except for plant health reasons (contribution to the maintenance and increase of carbon stock in the soil and the conservation of biodiversity).
- GAEC 4: Establishment of buffer strips along watercourses (contribution to the reduction of watercourse pollution; better water quality contributes to biodiversity. Buffer strips are the habitats of plant and animal species).
- GAEC 8: Minimum share of non-productive areas, retention of landscape features, restrictions on cutting hedges, restrictions on invasive alien plant species (contribution to the preservation of agricultural landscape, the improvement of farmland biodiversity; fallows have a positive effect on soil structure; restrictions on the use of plant protection products and fertilisers have a positive impact on leaching and soil and water pollution). Non-productive features include landscape features, small water bodies, terraces, dry stone walls, fallows, catch crops, nitrogen-fixing plants, vehicle turning areas and ditches that are part of the graphical agricultural unit of a farm holding. It should be noted that areas with non-productive features are determined as eligible areas for CAP funds.
- GAEC 9: Ban on converting or ploughing permanent grasslands designated as environmentally-sensitive permanent grasslands in Natura 2000 sites (contribution to the preservation of basic functions of permanent meadows, in particular conserving meadow habitats, and also maintaining carbon stock in the soil). This means that grasslands in sensitive areas within Natura 2000 network (species-rich grasslands with poor conservation status) must not be ploughed or otherwise changed. Such sensitive areas are designated by the State.
- SMR 3: Conservation of wild birds (Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds (OJ L 20, 26.1.2010, p. 7): Article 3(1), Article 3(2), point (b), Article 4(1), (2) and (4)).
- SMR 4: Conservation of natural habitats and wild plant and animal species (Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild flora and fauna (OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p. 7): Article 6(1) and (2)).

The number of requirements to be met by the eligible person with regard to SMR 4 has been increased from two to six for the new programme period. Some of these requirements are very important for Natura 2000, such as the ban on planting energy crops within Natura 2000 sites and the ban on the use of digestate (from biogas plants).

A new environmentally oriented direct-aid payment was introduced under the title **Schemes for the environment and climate (eco-schemes)**<sup>78</sup>, which must account for at least 25% of the national envelope for direct payments. The eco-schemes support farmers in the voluntary adoption of annual agricultural practices that exceed the conditionality requirements and have a favourable impact on the environment and climate. If farmers want to enter an eco-scheme, they must actively commit to and implement the selected eco-scheme. Particularly important schemes for this Management Programme are *Patches of unsown land for skylark* and *Protection of northern lapwing*, which are specifically intended for the conservation of endangered farmland birds. Entering an eco-scheme is voluntary; however, the obligation to implement the chosen scheme applies for one year.

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<sup>78</sup> Decree on direct payments under the Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan 2023–2027 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [Uradni list RS], Nos 17/23 and 63/23).

An instrument for directing agricultural use that exceeds the enhanced conditionality and the eco-schemes are **agri-environment-climate payments for biodiversity and landscape (AECP\_BL)**<sup>79</sup>, which support agriculture in its environmental functions and promote above-standard sustainable agricultural practices directed towards the conservation of biodiversity and landscapes. This is still the most important method of directing agricultural activities towards sustainable forms of agriculture. Financial incentives within the AECP are granted in accordance with the farmers' voluntary decision to assume the obligations of particular operations. The obligation to implement the chosen operations applies for at least five years. In terms of nature conservation measures, this obligation for farmers meets the conditions for contractual conservation measures under other (agriculture) regulations. The CAP upgrade for 2023–2027 also involves the inclusion of new AECP for management-and-result-based schemes (Habitats of birds of humid extensive meadows) or solely result-based schemes (Conservation of dry grasslands), where the payments are differentiated according to the achieved result in terms of the conservation status of the habitat or the presence of the qualifying species that is protected. In the programme period 2023–2027, the AECP includes several operations:

**AECP\_BL Operations with prescribed management practices:**

- **BL.1 Special grassland habitats:** conserving Natura 2000 qualifying meadow habitat types and qualifying species dependent on meadows (key species and habitat types targeted by the operation): false ringlet (*Coenonympha oedippus*) – populations in dry grasslands, large copper (*Lycaena dispar*), marsh fritillary (*Euphydryas aurinia*), lesser grey shrike (*Lanius minor*), wood lark (*Lullula arborea*), skylark (*Alauda arvensis*), quail (*Coturnix coturnix*), whinchat (*Saxicola rubetra*), red-backed shrike (*Lanius collurio*), hoopoe (*Upupa epops*), Eurasian scops owl (*Otus scops*), corn bunting (*Miliaria calandra*), Eurasian curlew (*Numenius arquata*), ortolan bunting (*Emberiza hortulana*), Adriatic lizard orchid (*Himantoglossum adriaticum*), a saw-wort species (*Serratula lycopifolia*), greater pasqueflower (*Pulsatilla grandis*), and mountain hay meadows, lowland hay meadows (*Alopecurus pratensis*, *Sanguisorba officinalis*), semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*) (\*important orchid sites), species-rich *Nardus* grasslands on siliceous substrates in mountain areas (and sub-mountainous areas in Continental Europe) and eastern sub-Mediterranean dry grasslands (*Scorzoneretalia villosae*).

This operation has a significant impact on the conservation of species-diverse meadows, including the conservation of some other Natura 2000 species with wider habitats, or habitat types dependent on certain use of land in their vicinity: olm (*Proteus anguinus*), yellow-bellied toad (*Bombina variegata*), fire-bellied toad (*Bombina bombina*), Italian crested newt (*Triturus carnifex*), large white-faced darter (*Leucorrhinia pectoralis*), ornate bluet (*Coenagrion ornatum*), varnished hook-moss (*Drepanocladus vernicosus*), scarce fritillary (*Euphydryas maturna*), four-lined snake (*Elaphe quatuorlineata*), sedge warbler (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*), spotted crake (*Porzana porzana*), grasshopper warbler (*Locustella naevia*), common snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*), little crake (*Porzana parva*), Eurasian nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*), common redshank (*Tringa totanus*), European honey buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*), wryneck (*Jynx torquilla*), fen orchid (*Liparis loeselii*), Marchesett's eyebright (*Euphrasia marchesettii*), marsh gladiolus (*Gladiolus palustris*), amethyst meadow squill (*Scilla litardierei*), and alkaline fens, common juniper (*Juniperus communis*) formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands, and rupicolous calcareous or basophilic grasslands of the *Alyso-Sedion albi*.

- **BL.2 Grassland habitats of butterflies:** promoting agricultural practices adapted to ecological requirements of two very endangered Natura 2000 qualifying butterfly species: scarce large blue (*Maculinea teleius*) and dusky large blue (*Maculinea nausithous*).
- **BL.3 Litter meadows:** conserving litter meadows, i.e. meadows mowed late in summer that are the habitats of the rarest protected meadow species: false ringlet (*Coenonympha oedippus*) – populations in humid meadows. This is one of the most endangered species in Natura 2000

<sup>79</sup> Decree on payments for environmental and climate obligations, natural and other restrictions, and Natura 2000 under the Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan 2023–2027 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [Uradni list RS], No 34/23).

network. Other Natura 2000 species with slightly less strict requirements (e.g. large copper (*Lycaena dispar*) and corn crake (*Crex crex*)) also live in the areas where this measure is carried out.

- **BL.4 Wet grassland habitats:** primarily conserving the qualifying habitat type (Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (*Molinion caeruleae*), and Natura 2000 qualifying species dependent on wet meadows (fen orchid (*Liparis loeselii*) and varnished hook-moss (*Drepanocladus vernicosus*)).
- **BL.5 Conservation of wetlands and marshes:** conserving wetlands and marshes, which contributes to the conservation of two habitat types: transition mires and quaking bogs, and Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (*Molinion caeruleae*), as well as two species: false ringlet (*Coenonympha oedippus*) and fen orchid (*Liparis loeselii*).
- **BL.6 Dry karst meadows and pastures:** conserving Natura 2000 qualifying meadow habitat types and qualifying species dependent on karst meadows and pastures, such as: eastern sub-Mediterranean dry grasslands (*Scorzoneretalia villosae*), rupicolous calcareous or basophilic grasslands (*Alyso-Sedion albi*), and false ringlet (*Coenonympha oedippus*) – populations in dry meadows, marsh fritillary (*Euphydryas aurinia*), wood lark (*Lullula arborea*), short-toed eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*), rock partridge (*Alectoris graeca*), skylark (*Alauda arvensis*), whinchat (*Saxicola rubetra*), tawny pipit (*Anthus campestris*), red-backed shrike (*Lanius collurio*), hoopoe (*Upupa epops*), Eurasian scops owl (*Otus scops*), corn bunting (*Miliaria calandra*), Adriatic lizard orchid (*Himantoglossum adriaticum*) and a saw-wort species (*Serratula lycopifolia*).

Dry karst meadows and pastures have an indirect positive impact on some other Natura 2000 species and habitat types, such as: yellow-bellied toad (*Bombina variegata*), four-lined snake (*Elaphe quatuorlineata*), lesser grey shrike (*Lanius minor*), golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), Eurasian nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*), European honey buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*), eagle owl (*Bubo bubo*), wryneck (*Jynx torquilla*), and common juniper (*Juniperus communis*) formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands, mountain hay meadows, and species-rich Nardus grasslands on siliceous substrates in mountain areas (and sub-mountainous areas in Continental Europe).

- **BL.7 Traditional high trunk meadow orchards:** conserving high trunk meadow orchards and thus their characteristic wild plant and animal species and landscape features. Traditional high trunk meadow orchards are primarily important for certain farmland birds: Eurasian scops owl (*Otus scops*), European roller (*Coracias garrulus*), hoopoe (*Upupa epops*), wryneck (*Jynx torquilla*), grey-headed woodpecker (*Picus canus*), tawny pipit (*Anthus campestris*), common redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*), red-backed shrike (*Lanius collurio*), lesser grey shrike (*Lanius minor*) and corn bunting (*Miliaria calandra*).
- **BL.9 Hummocky meadows:** conserving hummocky meadows, the typical landscape, special natural features and habitats for plant and animal species.
- **BL.10 Conservation of hedges:** conserving biological and landscape diversity, providing corridors and refuge for farmland species.
- **BL.11 Control of invasive alien plant species:** preventing the spreading of invasive alien plant species.
- **BL.12 Coexistence with large carnivores:** ensuring the coexistence of pasture animals and large carnivores and maintaining the favourable status of large carnivore populations (brown bear and wolf), and indirectly, due to maintaining agricultural use, also the favourable status of qualifying meadow habitat types and species within Natura 2000 sites.
- **BL.13 Mountain pasture:** maintaining mountain pastures – characteristic landscape and high-altitude grasslands – to conserve, in particular, the habitat types alpine and subalpine calcareous grasslands, alpine and boreal heaths and mountain hay meadows, and species, such as rock ptarmigan (*Lagopus muta*), Lorkovic's brassy ringlet (*Erebia calcaria*), alpine sea holly (*Eryngium*

*alpinum*) and rock thrush (*Monticola saxatilis*). Mountain pasture indirectly contributes to the conservation of Eurasian griffon vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) and golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*).

**Management-and-result-oriented operation:**

- **BL.14 Habitats of birds of humid extensive meadows:** protecting meadow bird species, e.g. corn crake (*Crex crex*) and whinchat (*Saxicola rubetra*), and indirectly also many other less demanding species that in areas where this measure's key two species do not occur are protected within the special grassland habitats measure.

**Result-oriented operation:**

- **BL.15 Conservation of dry grasslands:** establishing and maintaining a favourable conservation status of dry grasslands (semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*) (important orchid sites)), and the wild plant and animal species dependent thereon.

In addition to the AECF\_BL, the **operation AECF for natural resources (AECF\_NR)** also indirectly contributes to biodiversity conservation:

- **NR.1 Water sources:** preserving and improving the quality of water sources and preserving and improving soil properties and fertility. This operation only applies to fields and indirectly contributes to reduced pollution of surface and underground waters by plant protection products, which can have a positive impact on certain species and habitat types.

Farmers enter the AECF voluntarily. They are guided and advised by the public farm advisory service of the Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry of Slovenia (CAFS) on the measures that are most suitable for them. One of this service's duties is to encourage farmers to enter the AECF or other CAP interventions that are the most suitable for the Natura 2000 site and the farm concerned, and contribute to the conservation of species and habitat types.

For the first time, an important measure was designed for the conservation of species and habitat types, i.e. **Non-productive investments related to the implementation of nature conservation sub-interventions under the Strategic Plan 2023–2027**. This intervention supports the environmental function of agriculture and promotes sustainable agricultural practices aimed at conserving biological and landscape diversity, appropriately managing water and soil, and reducing adverse impacts of agriculture on the environment. Under the new arrangement, the eligible areas also include non-productive areas used to achieve the minimum share of arable land devoted to non-productive elements and features to which a duration requirement applies (GAEC 8).

Similarly, the CAP 2023–2027 sub-intervention **Investments in agricultural machinery and equipment for managing grassland habitats** can also indirectly contribute to nature conservation. Sub-interventions applying to investments will be available to agricultural holdings participating in the implementation of nature conservation sub-interventions under the SP 2023–2027, which can additionally encourage farmers to participate in nature conservation operations.

An important new element of the 2023–2027 CAP is the intervention **Testing nature conservation measures in protected areas**. Due to the importance of protected areas for nature conservation, it is reasonable to devote special attention to testing voluntary measures or practices carried out on agricultural land that supplement the existing AECF operations, have higher requirements and are more demanding than the AECF measures. Landowners can, assisted by the managers of protected areas that are leading partners in the partnership, with less burden test voluntary measures on their land. The range of measures and objectives developed within this intervention is set out in Annexes A and B. The eligible persons are the managers of large-scale protected areas, which enter into individual contracts/agreements with the owners or managers of agricultural land. Entry in such interventions is voluntary, while the obligation applies for at least five years.

There are other measures available under the CAP 2023–2027, which help achieve the Management Programme's conservation objectives in grasslands. **Payments for less-favoured agricultural area (LFA)** and **organic farming** can also facilitate the achievement of objectives in Natura 2000 sites by contributing to the cultivation of the land and prevention of meadows becoming overgrown within Natura 2000 sites. The two measures are not designed so as to require target values, as their impact on species and habitat types is

indirect. Another intervention significantly contributing to the conservation of species and habitat types in grasslands is **Support for the European innovation partnership (EIP) projects** as one of the methods of putting new knowledge, practices, technologies, processes and digitalisation into practice. Support for the EIP projects related to the environment and climate change will facilitate the reduction in the adverse impacts of agriculture on the environment, the environmentally effective production in protected areas (Natura 2000 sites, water conservation areas), and the conservation and promotion of biodiversity.

Measures related to hydrological improvement systems (primarily, adapted cleaning of ditches and canals) are carried out pursuant to the Agricultural Land Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 71/11 – official consolidated version, 58/12, 27/16, 27/17 – ZKme-1D, 79/17, 44/22 and 78/23 – ZUNPEOVE), which provides that the owners of agricultural land are responsible for maintaining small hydrological improvement systems. The maintenance of large hydrological improvement systems is the responsibility of the Farmland and Forest Fund of the Republic of Slovenia, which, together with the concessionaries, determines the scope of maintenance works. In the appropriate assessment procedure, the scope and course of work that will not cause a deterioration in the status of Natura 2000 species and habitat types are determined. The Act also established a systemic financing source for these activities in the form of a fee for the management and maintenance of hydrological improvement systems.

The Management Programme also provides that conservation objectives for species and habitat types on agricultural land are to be included, as appropriate, in lease contracts, both for new contracts and for existing contracts when they are extended. This is also the responsibility of the Farmland and Forest Fund, which must obtain a relevant opinion from the competent regional unit of the IRSNC.

In the Management Programme, the measures related to adapted agricultural practices, which ensure a good conservation status of species and habitat types and are the subject of inclusion in the aforementioned interventions or measures of the agricultural sector, are set out for particular sites in Annex B, in the column "Type of conservation measure" as "*adapted agricultural practice*". Various conservation measures are set out that are linked to the CAP 2023–2027 by the column Sectoral measures.

The area where each of these requirements is implemented is the inner zone of the species or habitat type, or a part thereof. The AECF and other operations under the CAP 2023–2027 are used for the proposed measures related to agriculture. Due to the aggregation and overlapping of sites, target values are listed in a separate Annex E: Target AECF areas for biodiversity conservation. In this Annex, the target values of the entry in the chosen voluntary nature conservation AECF measures are adjusted to the site concerned (where possible) and may be set lower than in the objectives for the species or habitat type in Annex A, or higher than in the CAP Strategic Plan. The adjustments take into account social factors, on the one hand they consider the voluntary nature of measures (not all farmers will participate), and on the other hand they encourage the achievement of more ambitious targets. More ambitious targets are supported by implementing projects that provide additional information, education, individual work with farmers and additional financial incentives for farmers. The abbreviations used in Annexes refer to the aforementioned CAP interventions and requirement sets.



### 3.4 Water-management measures

Despite only a small share of Natura 2000 area being covered by water (1%), there are as many as 135 qualifying species and habitat types dependant on water. This includes species that live a part of their annual or life cycle in or near water due to reproduction, feeding or hibernation, and habitat types that require the constant presence of water (underground or surface waters). The method of water management is therefore key to their conservation. The conservation objectives related to water management are listed by Natura 2000 sites in Annex A, and measures and guidelines for their achievement in Annex B, in the column "Type of conservation measure" as "*water management*".

Since the adoption of Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy (OJ L 327, 22.12.2000) – the Water Directive<sup>80</sup> and its transposition into Slovenian legislation by the Waters Act (ZV-1)<sup>81</sup>, the sectoral planning of water management has come closer to comprehensive water management that takes into account natural processes and water dynamics, and the interconnectedness and interdependence of water and riparian ecosystems in catchment areas. Pursuant to the Waters Act, the objectives of water management are to achieve a good status of waters and other water-related ecosystems, to ensure protection against the harmful effects of waters, to preserve and balance water quantities, and to promote sustainable water use that provides for various types of water use, taking into account the long-term protection of available water resources and their quality. The Act also provides that the use of and other activities carried out on waters, water land and waterside land must be designed, planned and carried out so as to avoid the deterioration of water status, to ensure protection against the harmful effects of waters, the maintenance of natural processes and of the natural balance of aquatic and riparian ecosystems, and the conservation of natural values and the areas protected under nature conservation regulations<sup>82</sup>.

Pursuant to the Waters Act, the Government adopts a water management plan with the programme of measures, which is the umbrella water management document. In 2011, the first water management plan and programme of measures were adopted, which applied to the period 2010–2015. They introduced a new, ecosystemic approach to water management in Slovenia, which sets the attainment of a good ecological status or potential of waters (and not only the good chemical status of waters) as the water management objective. By preserving the structures and functions of aquatic ecosystems, this type of management contributes substantially to the conservation of Natura 2000 species and habitat types. Important documents for the appropriate management of water-dependent species and habitat types are the Flood Risk Reduction Plan 2023–2027 (NZPO SI II)<sup>83</sup> and the Marine Environment Management Plan 2022–2027<sup>84</sup>. The water management plan and programme of measures for the third period, i.e. 2022–2027, are in the adoption procedure. The IRSNC has already issued nature conservation guidelines for these documents, including conservation objectives and measures referred to in Annexes A and B. Nature conservation guidelines determine a range of conservation measures by catchment areas, setting out common guidelines for all watercourses in a catchment area and more detailed guidelines for individual watercourses of a catchment area (management zones). The guidelines are based on the ecological requirements of species and habitat types and threats in the watercourse concerned. They primarily apply to maintenance works: the removal of overgrowing riparian and aquatic vegetation, the maintenance of existing and construction of new riparian protections, the continuity of water flow and the time when the works are to be carried out.

The Management Programme determines measures by sectors to achieve a favourable status of species and habitat types. They are set out in detail in Annex B for all Natura 2000 sites by species and habitat type. The majority of water management measures are related to the inclusion or consideration of conservation objectives referred to in Annex A in drafting water management plans, programmes of works on watercourses, or to the implementation of interventions, annual maintenance programmes, instruments granting water rights

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<sup>80</sup> Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy (OJ L 327, 22.12.2000, p. 1).

<sup>81</sup> Waters Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [Uradni list RS], Nos 67/02, 2/04 – ZZdl-A, 41/04 – ZVO-1, 57/08, 57/12, 100/13, 40/14, 56/15, 65/20, 35/23 – Dec. of the CC and 78/23 – ZUNPEOVE).

<sup>82</sup> Article 5 of the Waters Act.

<sup>83</sup> Flood Risk Reduction Plan 2023–2027 (NZPO SI II).

<sup>84</sup> Decree on the Marine Environment Management Plan for the Period 2022–2027 (pisrs.si).

or concession contracts and instruments on navigation. The Management Programme designates the producers of plans, programmes and legal instruments determined by water management regulations as the entities responsible for including the objectives referred to in Annex A and guidelines and measures referred to in Annex B. This is carried out, in particular, by obtaining nature conservation guidelines and opinions from the IRSNC.

#### **3.4.1 Measures for the inclusion of conservation objectives in water management plans, in the programmes of works on watercourses and in interventions**

These measures mostly include preserving or improving hydromorphological structures and processes, ensuring watercourse passability and maintaining riparian and aquatic vegetation. In some cases, more detailed conservation guidelines are set out, which determine the method of achieving the conservation objectives, which is coordinated during the drafting of the management programme. Restoration/renaturation is envisaged in some cases (under sectoral measures). Some of these measures can be implemented above standard with regard to the obligations under the water management legislation and depend on the financial resources available, which must be provided in the budget or within projects (determined under sources of financing).

Within some sites, measures to reduce water runoff are envisaged. They are planned in connection with the measures to improve the state of waters and non-construction measures to reduce flood risk, such as setting up, identifying and maintaining floodplains where high water can overflow and the adaptation of land use in river basins. The State policy is to seek synergies in these areas between establishing the favourable status of wetlands, wet meadows and other important habitats and species, and reducing flood risk.

For some Natura 2000 sites, the measures envisaged depend on the purchase of certain land plots and can only be implemented once such a purchase proves successful. Under this Management Programme, the source of land purchase financing is the project.

#### **3.4.2 Measures for managing urban wastewater**

In accordance with the requirements of EU Directive on urban wastewater treatment<sup>85</sup>, Slovenia had to ensure that by 31 December 2015 appropriate systems for collection and treatment of urban wastewater were in place in all settlement areas with total population equivalent (PE) of 2000 or more, and in areas with total PE below 2000 where urban wastewater is already discharged into a public sewerage network. By 31 December 2027, appropriate systems for the collection and treatment of urban wastewater must also be provided in settlement areas with total PE below 2000 where urban wastewater is not yet discharged into a public sewerage network.

The analysis of the status of Natura 2000 species and habitat types within certain Natura 2000 sites showed that water quality does not yet meet the ecological requirements of these species and habitat types. Therefore, the Management Programme includes two types of measures. In one group are the measures to check whether the required connections to the system are in place and the collection and treatment of urban wastewater is appropriate. The entity responsible for these measures is the competent inspection service. The other group includes measures to ensure the collection and treatment of wastewater in catchment areas. The entities responsible for these measures are the municipalities concerned. The first group of measures applies to cases where the collection and treatment of wastewater is in place but there are still some wastewater discharges into the environment, and the second to cases where collection and treatment still needs to be set up.

There are some cases where due to the more stringent ecological requirements of certain Natura 2000 species the level of wastewater treatment in the catchment area must be additionally adapted to the requirements for reducing the level of nutrients in the groundwater, or suitable wastewater collection and treatment systems

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<sup>85</sup> Council Directive 91/271/EEC of 21 May 1991 concerning urban waste-water treatment (OJ L 135, 30.5.1991, p. 40–52).

must be provided in settlement areas with PE below 2000. Considering the above, regulations must be drafted that will spatially define such areas and determine measures (regime) to reduce pollution and introduce stricter quality standards for water in the Karst region.

### **3.4.3 Measures for including conservation objectives in instruments granting water rights**

These measures mostly include the adaptation of special water uses. In accordance with Article 109 of the Waters Act, a special use may be prohibited, restricted or subject to special conditions if it might adversely affect or threaten areas protected under nature conservation regulations. The purpose of these measures is to include the Management Programme conservation objectives in the relevant documents when granting new or extending existing water rights. If it is established that during the period of this Management Programme an existing right must urgently be adapted due to the deteriorating status of species or habitat types, appropriate expert grounds will be prepared, taking into account the legislation on water management and environmental protection, which will serve as the basis for adapting the special use of water, in accordance with Article 112 of the Waters Act. In issuing nature conservation guidelines for granting a water right, the parts of conservation measures applying to the parameters of the water right being granted must be appropriately taken into account. The inclusion of conservation objectives set out in nature conservation guidelines under the nature conservation regulations in the instruments granting water right is financed from the funds allocated to regular work, while the performance of adapted activities is the responsibility of the holders of water rights, in accordance with the conditions of the water right granted.

Within Natura 2000 sites, some impoundments, mainly small to medium-sized ponds, are important habitats of Natura 2000 species, in particular dragonflies and amphibians. Inadequate maintenance or management of these standing waters important for biodiversity can lead to the loss of Natura 2000 species' habitats. Small impoundments result from water infrastructure managed by the State and special use facilities managed by the holder of the water right. Managing impoundments resulting from water infrastructure is the responsibility of the competent State service of general economic interest and is financed from the Waters Fund. If the impoundment is managed by the water right holder, management costs are covered by private funds, except when the management is included in projects that are co-financed by public funds.

### **3.4.4 Other measures in water management**

The Management Programme (Annex B) also includes other measures, which target regulation, the harmonisation of boundaries of water land with the state on site, the drafting of a multi-year action plan for the management of the Drava River, and the comprehensive management of the bed-load discharge of the Mura River.

### **3.4.5 Implementation of measures in water management**

A range of water management measures related to the maintenance of water and riparian land will be carried out by the mandatory state service of general economic interest for water management, whose duties are determined by the Waters Act (Article 161). The operation of the state service of general economic interest for water management is laid down by the Decree on the provision of obligatory state services of general economic interest for water management and on concessions for these public services (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 109/10, 98/11, 102/12, 89/14 and 47/17) and the Rules on the types and extent of the tasks of obligatory state services of general economic interest for water management (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], Nos 57/06, 60/16, 82/20 – ZON-E and 91/20). Under the Rules (Articles 24 and 26), the maintenance of water and riparian land includes the greatest possible conservation of natural values, the preservation of favourable status of endangered and protected plant and animal species and habitat types whose favourable conservation status is maintained as a priority, and the

preservation of areas protected under nature conservation regulations. Financial resources for this service are provided from the state budget and other resources.

In planning any investment measures to reduce flood risk that will be carried out within a Natura 2000 site, the objectives and measures referred to in the Management Programme should be taken into account to the greatest possible extent. If the Management Programme measures aim for synergy with flood protection measures, the necessary resources are provided from the Waters Fund or EU financial mechanisms. Where activities under natural disaster recovery programmes are carried out within Natura 2000 sites, the funds are provided from the integral budget, taking into account the relevant legislation.

If natural disaster recovery activities are carried out under a programme adopted by the Government to prevent direct threat to life or health of people or to property or to rescue people and property, the provisions of the Nature Conservation Act concerning the obligation to conserve biodiversity and consequently the measures to achieve the objectives of this programme do not apply, in accordance with Article 10 of the Nature Conservation Act. The Nature Conservation Act provides that, in such cases, measures that cause the least damage to nature while achieving the same effects are to be selected. It is reasonable to include experts in planning and implementing such measures. Past experience shows that the most technically suitable solution for achieving the objectives of Natura 2000 sites is to bring water facilities to a state that serves the purpose and objectives of flood risk reduction and not to the original/designed state (examples of such measures are a sustainable redesign of water facilities and the exchange/purchase of land near watercourses where infrastructure is not at risk). When it is not necessary to restore water facilities to their original state to achieve the objectives of flood risk reduction, this is also a suitable solution for achieving the objectives of Natura 2000.

In the EU Financial Perspective 2021–2027, investments in green infrastructure will be supported, where priority will be given to synergy with flood conservation measures and measures aimed at improving the hydromorphological status of waters. If necessary and where essential and justified, financial support will also be given to the purchase of property important for nature conservation in order to conserve and restore ecosystems providing key ecosystem services, as part of the comprehensive measures within Natura 2000 sites. The national Recovery and Resilience Plan envisages investments and reforms within the green transition component "Clean and safe environment". As part of the investment in flood risk reduction, flood risk prevention projects will be implemented, including water retention systems and the expansion of existing floodplains. The projects will focus on green infrastructure solutions. One of the project selection criteria will be whether a solution is nature-based. The reform for strengthening flood prevention will also promote future investments in nature-based solutions and green infrastructure. In addition, an investment in the construction of additional front-to-end wastewater systems is envisaged within this component. The projects to be implemented by the municipalities selected through the call for proposals will focus on wastewater systems contributing to Natura 2000 sites and water protection areas.

## 3.5 Other measures

### 3.5.1 Protection of cultural heritage

Cultural heritage buildings and areas protected under the regulations on cultural heritage protection – cultural monuments and their areas of influence, heritage protection areas and registered cultural heritage (hereinafter: protected cultural heritage areas)<sup>86 87</sup> – form an important part of some animal species' habitats. Heritage buildings and architectural protection areas are particularly important for bats; in Slovenia, 23 bat species have been found in cultural heritage buildings, of which 10 have vital maternity roosts in such buildings. The analysis of data gathered up to 2021 showed that bats were found in 82% of 1,710 examined cultural heritage buildings, while in 37% of the buildings 780 maternity roosts of various bat species were identified<sup>88</sup>. Therefore, the way the cultural heritage is protected is also important for attaining a favourable conservation status of Natura 2000 sites. In general, the measures to protect cultural heritage and the measures to achieve Natura 2000 objectives are compatible or even complement each other.

Protected cultural heritage areas and Natura 2000 sites often overlap, which is an excellent basis for joint investments in wider education, interpretation, promotion, and tourist products, including investments in infrastructure. A comprehensively and sustainably designed management of joint protected areas is important for achieving positive synergistic effects and providing a broad range of products for satisfied users of both, cultural heritage and Natura 2000 sites.

Any monument protected under international treaties to which the Slovenia is a signatory, and any listed site must have a manager that performs its functions based on a management plan drafted pursuant to the Cultural Heritage Protection Act. Such management may be entrusted to the manager of a protected nature area if so, provided by the instrument on the protection and if the manager is qualified to manage the listed site. The management plan drafted by the manager with the assistance of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia (hereinafter: IPCHS) determines strategic and implementation guidelines for a comprehensive protection of a monument or listed site and the method thereof. If a listed site overlaps with an area protected under the nature conservation regulations, the management plan is drafted in cooperation with the IRSNC and adopted in agreement with the ministry responsible for nature conservation.

The Cultural Heritage Protection Act also provides that a cultural protection consent is required for any works on, or research and removal of cultural heritage, i.e.:

- a cultural protection consent by the ministry responsible for culture for research and removal of archaeological remains and cultural monuments and registered heritage if the spatial planning document provides that a cultural protection approval is required for works on such heritage;
- a cultural protection consent by the IPCHS for works referred to in Article 28 of the Cultural Heritage Protection Act.

Before a cultural protection consent can be issued, cultural protection conditions must be obtained from the IPCHS. These are the conditions that must be met by the project design documents required to obtain the necessary opinions and a building permit or by any other project documentation necessary for carrying out the works, and the requirements regarding the professional qualifications of persons carrying out specialised works. Prior research or a conservation plan can also be set as a condition for obtaining a cultural protection consent. A conservation plan is a part of the project documentation. It defines the monument's components that are to be preserved, and the guidelines for the monument's conservation and protection. A conservation plan is always required for any works on the monument's structural elements.

A cultural protection consent is obtained for works that do not require a building permit. For works for which a building permit is required under the Building Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [Uradni list RS],

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<sup>86</sup> Decree on heritage protection areas (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [Uradni list RS], No 69/22).

<sup>87</sup> Cultural Heritage Protection Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [Uradni list RS], Nos 16/08, 123/08, 8/11 – ORZVKD39, 90/12, 111/13, 32/16, 21/18 – ZNOrg and 78/23 – ZUNPEOVE).

<sup>88</sup> Presetnik in Zamolo, 2022: Varstvo netopirjev v stavbah kulturne dediščine – zmanjševanje obremenjenosti z netopirskim gvanom. Center za kartografijo favne in flore, Miklavž na Dravskem polju, p. 16.

Nos 199/21 and 105/22 – ZZNŠPP; GZ-1) and the Decree on the classification of structures<sup>89</sup>, a cultural protection consent is issued in the form of an opinion, in accordance with the Building Act. Cultural protection conditions must also be obtained in such cases. When a detailed municipal spatial plan includes a comprehensive renovation in a heritage area or a part thereof, it is mandatory to make a conservation plan for such renovation, which includes proposals for determining the borders of spatial management areas and planned use areas, proposals for conditions for development and restrictions in terms of protection by spatial management units. If a conservation plan for renovation is drawn up for a cultural landscape area, the nature conservation requirements must be considered.

Included in the drafting of aforementioned plans are measures for attaining a favourable conservation status for species, in particular bats, that are dependent on such areas. When maintenance is needed to preserve a building in an appropriate state, it must be ensured that this is carried out in such a way that it also helps to preserve a favourable conservation status of the species and/or its habitat. In addition to the method, the time of maintenance work is also important. In protected cultural heritage areas that are located within Natura 2000 sites, conditions for regular maintenance and restoration works must be provided in accordance with the cultural heritage protection measures, which are normally carried out from April to October. This might be in conflict with the ecological requirements of some animal species. For example, bat maternity roosts may be present in cultural heritage buildings in this period. If works on cultural heritage are not urgently needed, it is not allowed to carry out renovation during breeding periods when animal species are present. When it is considered that the works are urgent is laid down in indent one of point 2 of Article 28 of the Cultural Heritage Protection Act. Regardless of the urgency of the works, in issuing opinions, the competent authorities agree on the method of work that will least threaten the attainment of a favourable status of the animal species and its habitat, while enabling the protection of cultural heritage. In Annex B, the conservation measures related to this topic are indicated in the column "Type of conservation measure" as "*cultural heritage protection*". In most cases, it is stated that the conservation objective must be included in spatial plans and construction works. This is done through nature conservation guidelines and opinions, and through cultural protection conditions.

In order to ensure that nature conservation guidelines and opinions are obtained and taken into account when animal species are present in cultural heritage buildings, the wording "that the proposer of works has the relevant permits, consents or opinions required under nature conservation legislation, if necessary" should be added to the general statement in public calls for proposals that involve financing works on immovable heritage, in particular on churches or castles.

### 3.5.2 Spatial planning mechanism

The purpose of spatial planning is to achieve sustainable spatial development by comprehensively consider, coordinate, and manage its social, environmental, and economic aspects. This is one of the mechanisms for ensuring a sustainable spatial development, which enables nature conservation, the protection of natural resources, cultural heritage, and other qualities of the natural and cultural environment with spatial and urban planning methods. This mechanism is important for achieving the conservation objectives of Natura 2000, as the adopted spatial planning documents are the basis of spatial development and allow the preservation of open and green (unbuilt) areas that must remain such (unbuilt). Due to the different terminology in various regulations and the uniform consideration of the subject in this Management Programme, the term *spatial planning* is used in the column Sector in Annex B for the spatial planning mechanism. In Annex B, conservation measures related to this Section are indicated in the column "Type of conservation measure" as "*spatial planning*".

The procedures for drafting and adopting spatial planning and implementing documents at the municipal and State levels are also important for achieving Natura 2000 objectives. In spatial planning, decisions consider the principles of sustainable spatial development and are based on the assessment of their impact on the economy, society, and the environment. Impacts are assessed at the drafting stage of the spatial planning document when different solutions are still possible and the one that is commonly acceptable and favourably assessed can be chosen. The assessment of impacts also includes an analysis and evaluation of impacts on

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<sup>89</sup> Decree on the classification of structures (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [*Uradni list RS*], No 96/22).

environmental protection and nature conservation, which also includes the conservation objectives and integrity of Natura 2000 sites and the connection of the European Natura 2000 network. A strategic environmental impact assessment is carried out for strategic spatial planning documents. Before a strategic spatial planning document is adopted, its producer must obtain a decision of the ministry responsible for strategic environmental impact assessments that the impacts on the environment are acceptable.

The purpose of appropriate assessment is to assess the impact of an activity on the conservation objectives of the Natura 2000 site concerned, which are defined in detail in the Management Programme. The detailed conservation objectives referred to in the Management Programme are, therefore, the mandatory starting point for appropriate assessments. The impact on objectives must be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Such assessments consider conservation objectives for the species present in the area of the activity and the area of long-range impact, as well as the activity's effects and the situation on site (Klemenčič 2016). A conservation objective does not constitute an absolute prohibition. It should be assessed in each case whether the activity, for example the construction of infrastructure facilities, would harm the species for which the conservation objective was set. If the species concerned is not present in the area of the activity, the activity would not affect the achievement of the conservation objective. However, if the assessment shows that the area of planned activity is within a species zone for which a conservation objective was set, the impact of the activity could be significant. An assessment of the impact's actual significance where the species is present is made in (i) the specific procedure for assessing the acceptability of the planned activity; (ii) in the specific procedure for assessing acceptability that is part of the strategic appropriate assessment of the spatial planning document.

In producing spatial planning documents, environmental impacts are assessed pursuant to environmental protection regulations and the appropriate assessment of the planned activity for protected areas pursuant to nature conservation regulations. The two assessments constitute the evaluation of impacts in these two fields. In these procedures, potential significant adverse impacts of activities can often be mitigated with appropriate measures so that they become insignificant and the activity may be carried out. This also applies to infrastructure facilities. Activities with a significant adverse impact may be sited and carried out in some cases, for example in the event of other, overriding public interests, if relevant procedures are carried out and compensatory measures implemented. A decision that another public interest overrides the public interest of conserving nature is made by the Government in accordance with Article 101c of the Nature Conservation Act. The spatial planning document is then adopted by the competent authority (in the case of national spatial plans the competent authority is the Government).

In appropriate assessment procedures in which nature conservation guidelines have already been issued (or, where they are not required, an opinion on the acceptability of a plan or activity), the detailed conservation objectives of the Natura 2000 Management Programme 2015–2020<sup>90</sup> are used.

### 3.5.3 Supervision

Supervision of the implementation of measures to achieve a favourable status of species and habitat types is carried out pursuant to the Nature Conservation Act and implementing regulations based thereon, as direct supervision in nature and as inspection. The Management Programme provides that supervisory measures are carried out when the situation on site shows that there is a risk that a favourable status of species and habitat types will not be attained despite the statutory prohibitions and regimes. Enhanced supervision of the implementation of various regulations contributing to the conservation of species and habitat types is thus needed to ensure the achievement of detailed conservation objectives.

Conservation measures related to supervision are listed as parallel measures to be carried out to achieve detailed conservation objectives. They are defined in detail in Annex B, indicated in the column "Type of conservation measure" as "*supervision*". This includes, in particular: (i) to perform direct supervision and (ii) including the supervision of the achievement of conservation objectives in the work programme of inspection services. The first group of measures relates to direct supervision in nature, which is carried out by authorised nature conservation wardens and volunteer wardens of the managers of protected areas. There is also the

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<sup>90</sup> Natura 2000 Management Programme (2015–2020).

option of expanding supervision beyond protected areas in accordance with the National Nature conservation Programme (NNPP). The second group of measures is related to the work of competent inspection services. The measures are carried out by inspectors responsible for nature conservation and inspectors responsible for agriculture, forestry, hunting and fisheries.

Annex B focuses on the supervision of implementation of legislation on water management, agriculture, forestry, hunting, fisheries, nature conservation and cave protection.



### 3.6 Priority in the financing of measures

The Management Programme determines financing resources for the implementation of conservation measures (regular work, other budget funds, municipal budget or projects). Other budget funds include all national funds (Forest Fund, Water Fund, Climate Change Fund) and, in part, also EU funds (EU cohesion funds (ECPP, ERDF, ESF), common agricultural policy funds (EAFRD, EAGF, EMFAF) and other earmarked funds, e.g. earmarked funds for land purchase, compensation and public works. The national PAF<sup>91</sup> includes a cost estimate for the implementation of larger sets of measures. According to this estimate, EUR 58 million to 86 million per year and EUR 406 million to 601 million for the entire period (2021–2027) is needed for implementing the measures to conserve species and habitat types within Natura 2000 sites.

The Management Programme determines priority projects, i.e. mostly on-site measures that must be carried out as a matter of priority to improve the status of species or habitat types in particular Natura 2000 sites. These projects are listed in Annex C.

The criteria for identifying the species and habitat types for priority projects follow the global and European target that the status of the most endangered species must be improved. Therefore, they are based on the need to focus on the species and habitat types with poor status. The European Commission guides Member States towards a commitment to improving the conservation status of 30% of species and habitat types with poor status by 2030.

The European Cohesion Policy Programme 2021–2027 (ECPP) binds project applicants in Slovenia to ensure that the status of at least 75% of target species and habitat types in any project that will be on the list of priority projects is improved.<sup>92</sup> This should lead to improved conservation statuses of at least 50% of target species and habitat types that will be the subject of all projects in Slovenia. The applicants will have to improve the conservation status of species and habitat types on the list. Therefore, there must be the need and possibility for such improvement in this programme period. The list of priority projects with the list of species, habitat types and Natura 2000 sites (Annex C) includes species and habitat types with poor status, for which there is a need and potential for improvement in a specific area.

In addition to the species and habitat types from the list in Annex C, it will be possible to include other species and habitat types that do not have a favourable conservation status (with regard to birds, those that do not have both trends stable or growing) in the priority projects under the ECPP, which covers 25% of included species.

Annex C also determines priority projects for implementing the ECPP in other priority areas of nature conservation to improve the status of natural values that are overburdened due to increased interest and visits.

Annex C also lists priority cultural heritage structures within Natura 2000 sites that are financed from the ECPP funds, under specific objective 2.7. *Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution*, the measure to improve biodiversity status in the Natura 2000 network and other priority areas of nature conservation, from the funds of the Ministry of Culture as the intermediary. The Annex C also includes cultural heritage structures that should be given priority as sites for infrastructure for visits and for interpretation of biodiversity conservation in the Natura 2000 site concerned over the construction of new infrastructure.

In addition to the ECPP, LIFE is also important for project financing. This is the EU's financial mechanism intended for measures related to environmental protection, nature conservation, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and the transition to clean energy. In applying for LIFE funds for projects, it should be taken into account that the Management Programme only provides for the co-financing of activities listed in Annex B.

There is also the Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP), which includes investments in reforms that will support long-term sustainable growth in Slovenia and address the challenges of the green and digital transitions by

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<sup>91</sup> [https://natura2000.gov.si/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Dokumenti/LIFE\\_IP\\_NATURA\\_SI/Rezultati/C.3.4\\_IP\\_PAF\\_Slovenia\\_2021-2027\\_finalV2.pdf](https://natura2000.gov.si/fileadmin/user_upload/Dokumenti/LIFE_IP_NATURA_SI/Rezultati/C.3.4_IP_PAF_Slovenia_2021-2027_finalV2.pdf).

<sup>92</sup> [https://evroproskasredstva.si/app/uploads/2022/10/Program-EKP-21\\_27-koncna.pdf](https://evroproskasredstva.si/app/uploads/2022/10/Program-EKP-21_27-koncna.pdf) (str. 183).

2026. With regard to the Management Programme, the most important investments under the RRP are related to water management. In implementing measures and planning other on-site activities financed under the RRP, it is essential that the Management Programme objectives referred to in Annex A and measures referred to in Annex B are taken into account.

Annexes B, C and F also serve as a basis for priority allocation of resources to research programmes, research projects, targeted research projects, applied research and other relevant programmes.

## 4 INDICATORS

In accordance with the established indicator categories (e.g. those monitored by the European Environment Agency, for which data are contributed by Member States) to determine the effectiveness of measures and achievement of objectives (a favourable status of plant and animal species, their habitats and habitat types), there are several types of indicators (DPSIR methodology<sup>93</sup>). In this Management Programme, two types of indicators are used and monitored: status indicators (S) and response indicators (R).

This Management Programme determines the **indicators of the status of species and habitat types** with detailed conservation objectives, or the last established state referred to in Annex A. Wherever possible with regard to the level of knowledge, both long-term and programme-period detailed conservation objectives are expressed by a numerical value unique to the population or the area of habitat or habitat type. These values are calculated based on the data provided for determining the changes in the natural range and population dynamics of species or in the area covered by a habitat type. The provision of data is described in Section 4.1 Monitoring.

The **indicators of measure implementation** are set out in Annex B. Wherever possible with regard to the level of knowledge, measures are defined so that they are quantifiable, i.e., include numerical values. They are calculated by comparing the measure as stated in Annex B against data on that measure's actual implementation. In drafting this Management Programme, special attention was devoted to harmonising the texts of measures with the method of gathering data on the implementation, in particular for sectoral measures.

The indicators of species and habitat type status are monitored by the IRSNC. Every six years, the IRSNC reports on these indicators to the European Commission (pursuant to Article 17 of the Habitats Directive and Article 12 of the Birds Directive) and to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Spatial Planning (pursuant to the Natura 2000 Decree).

Reporting on the implementation of Management Programme measures is laid down in the Natura 2000 Decree, which states that the Ministry of Natural Resources and Spatial Planning should report on the Management Programme's implementation to the Government every three years.<sup>94</sup> Data on measure implementation are prepared by the entities responsible, which annually report these data to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Spatial Planning.

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<sup>93</sup> <https://www.eea.europa.eu/help/glossary/eea-glossary/dpsir>.

<sup>94</sup> Article 13 of the Decree.

## 4.1 Monitoring

In order to monitor the indicators to report to the European Union and the bodies of international conventions and treaties, nature conservation status must be monitored at the national level, pursuant to Article 108 of the Nature Conservation Act (monitoring nature conservation status). This includes, among other things, monitoring the status of plant and animal species, their habitats, habitat types and special areas of protection.

**Annex F: List of Planned Monitoring and Research Activities** lists the species and habitat types subject to monitoring and the activities to be carried out. The type of monitoring is also indicated (the monitoring of habitats, populations, specific structures or processes). A certain number of species and habitat types are already monitored at the national level. Annex F envisages that this monitoring will continue. For other species and habitat types, the manner of monitoring development is indicated (setting-up a monitoring, upgrading monitoring criteria or method, developing a monitoring system). Where monitoring has not yet been set up, Annex F includes a baseline status inventory or habitat type mapping and the planned monitoring in the future. This part of the Annex is taken into account in designing the national monitoring scheme for priority species and habitat types. However, this document is not intended for immediate provision of financing for the aforementioned inventories, mapping and monitoring, which is carried out in accordance with the resources available. In carrying out the national monitoring, priority is given to the areas subject to national spatial planning procedures. All national spatial planning documents in the process of adoption are published in the Spatial Information System (PIS)<sup>95</sup>, under Section National spatial planning documents – National spatial plans in preparation.

Data gathered in the aforementioned monitoring, including the inventories and data on the status of particular Natura 2000 sites, are important for improving the management of these sites. Measures can have a greater effect when those implementing the measures on site have an opportunity to carry out special management measures, e.g. in protected areas on state-owned land. The results can also be used in planning future measures.

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<sup>95</sup> [http://storitve.pis.gov.si/pis-jv/informativni\\_vpogled.html](http://storitve.pis.gov.si/pis-jv/informativni_vpogled.html).

## 5 SUPPORT ACTIVITIES FOR EFFECTIVE NATURA 2000 MANAGEMENT

### 5.1 Research and technology development

To improve the application of knowledge in practice, this Management Programme also addresses research in basic and applicative sciences that should be carried out and financed as a priority, as it is urgently needed to improve knowledge about the ecology of Natura 2000 species and habitat types. This is the research aimed at improving the knowledge in the status of structures and characteristics of habitats and habitat types, the ecology of plant and animal species and habitat types, and the population parameters and taxonomy of species. The research also includes determining the endangerment of species, habitats and habitat types, and management methods that do not have an adverse impact on habitat types, species or their habitats. The expected result is the development of technologies (e.g. the use of natural resources) that conserve biodiversity, thereby making the same if not even more effective use of natural resources in the coming decades. Annex F contains a list of research subjects necessary for the more effective achievement of conservation objectives or better implementation of measures and management of Natura 2000 sites. In accordance with the applicable sectoral legislation, Annex F is considered in allocating resources to research programmes, research projects, targeted research projects, applied research and other relevant programmes. The national financial resources are essential due to these projects' predominantly national importance and financing needs.

To a limited extent, additional financial resources can be provided from the new EU framework programme for research and innovation for 2021–2027 (Horizon Europe). This is a centralised mechanism, which specifically includes biodiversity. Financing for biodiversity research is envisaged under Cluster 6, in particular under *Destination 1: Biodiversity and ecosystem services*, and through specific European co-financed research and innovation partnerships, such as the European Partnership for Rescuing biodiversity to safeguard life on Earth – Biodiversa+ and the Sustainable European partnership for Blue Economy, in which the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation participates as an active partner. Within the Horizon Europe, applicants submit applications for their research projects directly to the European Commission under the call topics published in accordance with the work programme. Within co-financed partnerships, the applicants submit their projects under the call for proposals of the partnership concerned. Regarding this financing resource, Annex F should be understood as a proposal to research organisations for research on the topics that the users need. Research can also be financed from other EU financial mechanisms (e.g. the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund for topics related to marine environment).

Research topics applicable to the conservation of Natura 2000 species and habitat types will also be supported by targeted research programmes. The ministry responsible for nature conservation has limited resources for commissioning special studies and small research projects and it is essential to increase these resources. Collaboration with other ministries is the key to ensuring the co-financing of joint targeted research programmes. It is equally important to include content vital for the conservation of Natura 2000 species and habitat types in the research programmes of other ministries, as is relevant regarding the programmes' subject matter.

## **5.2 Cohesion of the European ecological network**

The European Commission ensures the cohesion of the European ecological network, which includes adequate harmonisation of Slovenian Natura 2000 sites with the European Natura 2000 network. An established procedure for this were biogeographical seminars for biogeographical regions. At these seminars, additional obligations of Member States were determined in negotiations between the European Commission and the Member State concerned. Slovenia has mostly fulfilled its obligations determined at the seminars by adopting the Decree amending the Decree on special areas of protection (Natura 2000 sites) in April 2013. The European Commission verified the fulfilment of these obligations at a bilateral seminar. Based on the requirements set at the bilateral seminar, Slovenia adopted another amendment to the Decree in 2016.

### **5.3 Communication activities**

Managing Natura 2000 sites is a challenging task. One of the reasons for this is that many stakeholders are actively or passively involved in it – from institutions responsible for the management pursuant to regulations, scientists and other experts in nature conservation or species and habitats, to the existing users of the sites (land owners, fishers, hunters, local population, recreational athletes, visitors, nature lovers) and potential new users (investors in new land development projects on or near Natura 2000 sites, tourist service providers). In the plan of measures adopted when Natura 2000 sites were designated in 2013, the Government highlighted the information, communication and cooperation activities (collectively referred to as communication activities), which are also reflected in this programme. Communication activities, dialogue promotion and inclusion in decision-making reduce the risk of conflicts, increase support for measures and improve the quality and implementation of measures.

In the Management Programme, communication activities are often interconnected. Certain activities pursue objectives in more than one field. This involves agreements among project partners, and with stakeholders and the wider public. Activities targeted at site users encourage them to adapt their activities so that they do not harm species or habitat types, or even better that they contribute to improving their status. The main tools are direct personal communication, electronic messages, events, and publication in printed materials and on websites and social media.

Annex B of the Management Programme (as *communication measures* in the column *Group of measures*) sets out communication activities that enhance the implementation of the nature conservation measures "the adapted use of fish" and "the adapted use of game". They also target adapted agricultural use regarding sectoral CAP measures related to grasslands. The communication measures set out in Annex B primarily relate to the species and habitat types and the sites for which communication activities are of vital importance or are prerequisite for the implementation of other measures. This is mostly for content in relation to which communication activities can substantially contribute to a greater awareness and consequently change stakeholders' activities so that they are more nature friendly. Parallel communication measures are not envisaged for every measure referred to in Annex B, although communication activities can still be carried out as part of the measure.

In raising public awareness, communication activities target a variety of groups (in particular, young people, schoolchildren, interest groups, tourists/visitors, general public). Tools and activities include publication on websites and social media, as well as in the form of printed materials, exhibitions, infrastructure for visitors (nature paths, information centres), guided tours and lectures. To include the principles and some detailed conservation objectives of Natura 2000 in the teaching curricula of kindergartens and primary schools, appropriate simplified texts must be composed. Conditions must be provided for kindergartens and schools to obtain in-depth knowledge on protected areas near them and also those further away, the school network must be connected with the network of expert institutions involved in Natura 2000, and an environment fostering direct cooperation must be established as a basis and permanent opportunity for children to learn about professions and potentially choose their own in the future.

Comprehensive information activities increase the transparency of the public sector's work. To a certain extent, these communication and awareness-raising activities are part of the regular work of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Spatial Planning, the managers of protected areas and the public service providers operating in nature conservation and other sectors. This part is financed from the state budget within the financing of public services.

In the period 2021–2027, information and communication activities that contribute towards the objectives of the LIFE sub-programme Nature and biodiversity can be financed from the LIFE financial mechanism, as these activities are a mandatory component of any project. Such activities include providing information and communicating, including awareness campaigns, media relations, publications, information materials, translations, stakeholder consultations/inclusion, workshops, conferences, support for participatory schemes/activities, networking and best practice platforms.

Providing information on, raising awareness about and promoting nature as such are eligible activities under the CAP 2023–2027 in projects financed from the LEADER programme and in part from EIP projects, which

is part of the Rural Development Programme. The focus is on the link to the production of good-quality food, self-sufficiency, local products and short supply chains.

Education and training of young people has been financed from the Erasmus+<sup>96</sup> programme for 30 years. The programme also facilitates adult education. Adult education organisations and local and regional institutions operating in this field can apply for the funds from this programme. The programme facilitates cooperation among institutions providing education and training, from kindergartens to universities and adult education institutions. Other organisations (companies, associations, societies, etc.) that are in any way related to education and training can also participate in the projects. In these activities people acquire various personal and professional skills and competences, study or train abroad, expand their network of contacts and learn about education systems in different countries. Organisations also acquire new knowledge, as well as various work methods that improve the quality of their work and their ability for international cooperation. On the initiative of the European Commission, an electronic platform for adult learning (EPALE<sup>97</sup>) was established under the Erasmus+. This is an open-membership website intended for adult education professionals, where they can find topical content and an overview of developments in adult education in Europe or share their experience and good practices and form connections.

Communication activities are generally also an essential part of supranational cooperation (e.g. Interreg). Funds contributed by non-EU European countries, e.g. the Swiss financial contribution, the Norwegian Financial Mechanism and the EEA Financial Mechanism, are available for such activities.

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<sup>96</sup> For more about Erasmus+ see [here](#).

<sup>97</sup> EPALE | Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe.



## **6 ANNEXES**

**Annex A: Detailed Conservation Objectives of the Natura 2000 Management Programme for the Period 2023–2028**

**Annex B: Measures of the Natura 2000 Management Programme for the Period 2023–2028.**

**Annex C: Proposals for Priority Projects with the List of Sites, Habitat Types, Species and Priority Cultural Heritage Structures**

**Annex D: List of Plans Required for the Conservation of Natura 2000 Sites**

**Annex E: Target AECF Areas for Biodiversity Conservation**

**Annex F: List of Planned Monitoring and Research Activities**