

About the network

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Definition of Natura 2000 sites and network characteristics

Natura 2000 is the most recent nature conservation form introduced in Poland in 2004 as a one of the responsibilities concerning our accession to European Union. Natura 2000 sites are established in all Member States creating the European Ecological Network Natura 2000.

The main aim of the European Ecological Network Natura 2000 is preserving particular types of natural habitats and species which are considered valuable and endangered in Europe. Another aim of Natura 2000 is a protection of biological diversity.

The legal basis for Natura 2000 is formed by two EU directives: Birds and Habitats Directives:

- **Birds Directive** (*Council Directive 2009/147/EC of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds - formerly Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds*) - it specifies the criteria to designate and manage special protection areas for endangered bird species,
- **Habitats Directive** (*Habitats Directive - Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora*) - it sets out the rules of protection of animal species other than birds and plant species as well as natural habitats and the procedures of protection of particularly important sites.

According to the aforementioned laws, each of the EU Member States is obliged to provide protection to natural habitats and species listed in the appendixes to Habitats and Birds Directives and/or ensure the restoration of their proper status through designation and taking under protection the areas where the habitats or species exist.

The Directives designate two types of protected areas:

- Special Protection Areas (SPA),
- Sites of Community Importance (SCI)/Special Areas of Conservation (SAC).

Special Protection Areas are designated for the conservation of wildlife birds of one or more species. Each of the Member States designates the area individually - European Commission controls only whether the domestic network covers all important bird refuges in the state and the designated areas form a coherent unity.

In the case of Special Areas of Conservation, each Member State prepares and presents the European Commission with a list of the areas on the territory of the country which are most valuable environmentally and meet the requirements concerning species and habitats set out in the Habitats Directive. After presenting the list, the areas are given importance and then selected. Next, the European Commission designates by its decision the areas as **Sites of Community Importance (SCI)**. According to Polish law with this decision, the area receives the status of the Natura 2000 site.

The most important criterion of Natura 2000 sites designation are ecological values of the given area. Social and economic situation is analysed and considered in the process of the management plans establishment. For each Natura 2000 site documentation is prepared:

- Standard Data Form (SDF) - it contains inter alia the most important information on the location and the surface area of the site, the types of habitats and Annexes' species, their population and representation on the state level, environmental value and threats,
- digital map represented in vector form.

SDF and maps are updated in keeping with the development of knowledge about the existence of Natura 2000 sites (inventories, nature monitoring), in accordance with procedures set out by the European Commission.

Natura 2000 site can cover part or the whole area already protected by other forms of nature conservation. The key element of Natura 2000 sites designation is a biogeographical seminar during which it is assessed whether the network is complete for each species and habitat being under protection.

The establishing of Natura 2000 network, which is a worldwide phenomenon in the field of international and regional environmental protection, confirms that conservation of endangered European biodiversity is one of the European Union's policy priorities.