

PRESS RELEASE

Europe's Regional Nature Parks for Biological Diversity and Sustainable Rural Development

Regional Nature Park representatives from 20 European states sign Declaration in Brussels

Brussels/Bonn, 21 June 2017. A joint Declaration entitled "Regional Nature Parks – Working for Europe" was signed today at the First European Summit of Regional Nature Parks in Brussels by representatives of Regional Nature Parks from 20 European states. Some 100 people from several countries attended the event, held in the Representation of the State of North-Rhine-Westphalia to the European Union in Brussels.

In the Declaration, representatives from Regional Nature Parks call on the European Union and its Member States to make greater use of Regional Nature Parks in implementing an integrated, far-sighted approach for a sustainable rural Europe. It pays off to strengthen Regional Nature Parks because they are in a position to help ensure an even better on-the-ground implementation of the Nature Directives of the European Union, such as the Habitats Directive, the Birds Directive and the Water Framework Directive. They also support the European Union and its Member States in achieving their political goals, such as the Biodiversity Strategy and the Green Infrastructure Strategy.

Regional Nature Parks are model regions for the innovative and sustainable development of rural areas. Owing to the nature of their work and their considerable experience, they are important partners in the area of sustainable agriculture, and should therefore be involved more closely in future regional development programmes. They also play a guiding role in Education for Sustainable Development, acting as strong partners for schools and other public educational institutions.

These were just some of the topics discussed in a panel with Nicola Notaro, Head of Unit for Nature Protection at the DG Environment, European Commission, Martin Scheele, Head of Unit for Conception and Consistency of Rural Development at the DG Agriculture and Rural Development, European Commission, and Ignace Schops, President of EUROPARC Federation, the umbrella organisation of European protected areas.

At the event, the Association of German Nature Parks teamed up with EUROPARC Federation to present their book entitled "Living Landscapes", which provides information about Europe's Regional Nature Parks and the results of the first comprehensive study on these parks. Europe has almost 900 Regional Nature Parks in 20 Member States of the European Union plus Switzerland and Norway, covering 8% of the total surface area of the EU-28.

The study was supported by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation with funding from the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety. In her welcome address, Dr. Christiane Paulus, Deputy Director General for Nature Conservation of the German Environment Ministry, praised the ground-breaking work of the project. She commended the idea of cooperating on the parks' regional functions at European level because this opens opportunities for transnational exchange. Dr. Paulus remarked, "It also supports the ideal of a united, common Europe, an important symbol in the current times." The Declaration conveys Regional Nature Parks' commitment to joint action and, simultaneously, communicates their legitimate desire for support from the European Union and its member countries.

An English and German version of this press release, the book "Living Landscapes" and the Declaration can be downloaded at the following link:

<https://www.naturparke.de/service/presse/pressemitteilungen/nachricht/first-european-summit-of-regional-nature-parks.html>

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