For more than 20 years, the Carpathian Mountains have been a global conservation priority for WWF. Set up in 2003 to promote the protection and sustainable development of the Carpathian Mountains, the Carpathian Convention has served as a key framework for environmental action in this important hotspot for European nature. Through policy agreements and joint action, the Convention has promoted expansion, consolidation and improved management of the protected area network while also promoting sustainable forest management, protection of old growth forests as well as solutions for integrating biodiversity in planning for transportation infrastructure.

**CARPATHIAN TREASURES**

Archieing across seven countries, from the Czech Republic, across Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine and Hungary, and down to Romania and the tip of Serbia, the Carpathians are among Europe’s last great wilderness areas – a stronghold for large carnivores, with up to 40% of the continent’s populations of bears, wolves and European lynx, and home to the greatest remaining reserve of old growth forests outside of Russia and northern Scandinavia.

Covering an area of 209,256 km² – larger than the Alps – the Carpathian Mountains are home to 18 million people. Many depend on the natural resources of the region for their livelihoods and well-being. Forestry, tourism and agriculture are important for local economies. More significantly perhaps the region and its natural resources provide a host of ecosystem services, including climate regulation and water management.

WWF recognizes the Convention for the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathian Mountains as a Gift to the Earth – WWF’s highest award – in recognition of the important role the Convention has played in facilitating action by its seven member states and relevant stakeholders to preserve the exceptional natural values and promote sustainable development in the region as well as serving as a model for cross-border cooperation.

**FACTSHEET 2018**

**WWF GIFT TO THE EARTH AWARD:**

The Carpathian Convention

**IMPORTANT ROLE**

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THE CARPATHIANS

The Carpathians are home to primeval beech forests stretching across Eastern Slovakia, Western Ukraine and Romania that belong to the UNESCO list of world heritage sites.

40% THE CARPATHIANS ARE HOME TO 40% OF THE EUROPEAN POPULATION OF BROWN BEARS

THREATS AND CHALLENGES

Unsustainable development increasingly threatens the Carpathians’ exceptional natural treasures:

• Demand for biomass drives harvesting of the region’s forests, both legally and illegally. Particularly at risk are old growth forests. Less than 230,000 hectares of old growth forests are now thought to exist in the region. Illegal logging is estimated to be as high as 40% of production in some countries.

• Infrastructure development, including for transportation, energy and tourism, is reducing and fragmenting once intact habitats and threatening the species they support.

• Bears and other large carnivores suffer from illegal hunting, but arguably a greater, longer-term threat lies in the fragmentation and degradation of their habitats e.g. from infrastructure construction.

• Traditional, extensive land use, including agriculture and pastoralism, is declining, leading to significant loss of biological diversity. Additional pressures come from the intensification of agricultural practices and urbanisation.

A CONVENTION FOR THE CARPATHIANS

The Convention for the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathian Mountains ("Carpathian Convention") was adopted and signed by the seven Parties (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Ukraine) in May 2003 in Kyiv, Ukraine, and entered into force in January 2006. It is the only multi-level governance mechanism covering the whole Carpathian area, and is an outstanding example for the world of a treaty-based regime for the protection and sustainable development of a mountain region.

A CRITICAL SUPPORT FOR THE CARPATHIANS

The opportunity for the Carpathian Mountains is to find ways to maintain their natural capital and promote sustainable use. But the sheer scope and diversity of the region poses a major challenge that can only be tackled by working across borders and involving relevant stakeholders.

The Carpathian Convention has facilitated this cooperation, playing a key role in leading and coordinating action by its member countries and relevant stakeholders in addressing a host of environmental challenges across the very diverse Carpathian Mountains, and also in identifying and promoting opportunities for sustainable local development.

The Carpathian Convention has served as a framework and platform to promote:

• Action to preserve biological diversity and achieve good management of protected areas, e.g. through the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas, which brings together 36 national parks, 51 nature parks and protected landscape areas, 19 biosphere reserves and 200 other protected areas.

• Protection and sustainable management of forests. The countries are on track toward identifying and protecting some 230,000 hectares of old growth forests and are taking steps to address illegal logging. Approximately 7.5 million hectares, or over half the forest area in the region, are certified according to the standards of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

• Solutions for integrating environment in transportation, agriculture, tourism and local development.

• Measures to adapt to the impacts of climate change

The Convention has also facilitated and supported practical actions for implementation of its protocols and action plans, including for example the ongoing EU-funded TRANSGREEN project, led by WWF within the framework of the Convention, which brings together authorities and stakeholders from transport and environment to identify and develop best practice solutions to addressing conflicts between linear infrastructure and ecological corridors.

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