

Beautiful Europe

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Summary of NatureNet Europe's Beautiful Europe initiative

Never before was there such consensus in European nature conservation as during the 'European Nature Conference' (September 2005), which brought together 650 people and all of the leading European nature conservation organizations. This consensus was on the course to adopt in future. The appeal was 'Connect!' Connect nature with nature. Connect man and nature. And connect nature conservation organizations and practice.

NatureNet Europe was founded in 2004 in order to implement an innovative, joint European approach. We are dedicated to a Beautiful Europe, for nature and man. We are breaking new ground; our cooperation is far-reaching. There is widespread European support for our initiative. NatureNet Europe brings together three established European nature conservation organizations - ECNC, EUCC-The Coastal Union and Eurosite – with their combined European network of thousands of members and partners in many European countries. We wish to link nature in Europe via a European ecological network. However, in order to achieve this, nature conservation organizations must also be better connected with each other. Cooperation between nature organizations is still too limited, especially at the European level and in Eastern and Central Europe. Yet many opportunities for cooperation exist.

NatureNet Europe's mission is based on a clear vision. We think that the time is ripe for cooperation and innovation. Political Europe has decided to halt the decline of Europe's nature by 2010. However, this very ambitious goal exists more on paper than in practice. It is up to nature conservation organizations to launch a strong offensive in support of this ambitious goal. The countdown to 2010 has begun. But we want to do more than counting down and fighting defensive actions to halt the decline of nature. Nature must again become a living and essential part of our European society. Many places in Europe are still beautiful, and must stay that way. Therefore, we must bring nature conservation to the heart of politics, civil society, and economic and land-use sectors. NatureNet Europe seeks to invest in consensus on a new approach to nature conservation in the 21st century: nature as an essential cornerstone of sustainable development.

We know that there are going to be a lot of changes in Europe: the Central and Eastern European countries want to improve their economies. The European market of people and goods is becoming a growing reality. A silent landscape revolution is underway which is drastically changing the ancient face of Europe. Many rural areas are becoming depopulated, millions of hectares of agricultural ground are lying fallow, many villages have been or are being abandoned. On top of this, there are the effects of climate change. In future we will encounter more "exotic" species in our gardens and nature areas. Species and ecosystems are migrating northwards, thereby running into urban areas and areas of intensive agriculture. Many species are in danger of getting into trouble because of this rapid shift. In particular, nature in European seas and coastal zones will change as a result of rising sea levels.

European society still does not know what to do about this. There are no passionate European debates about the changes, no clear offensive of united nature conservationists. NatureNet Europe and its wide network of members and partners want to make a concrete contribution to solutions. We must untie our 'European shoelaces', creative solutions are urgently needed. We must forge new bonds in order to increase the resilience of European nature and landscapes. In the coming years major efforts will be needed for the concrete realization and safeguarding of the European ecological network, especially in Eastern and Central Europe, where there is an exceptional amount of valuable nature but relatively little manpower and money for nature conservation.

In order to give our splendid European pearls of nature and world famous European landscapes sustainable chances of survival, we want to see the world through the eyes of the European citizen, as inhabitant, consumer and tourist. Through the Beautiful Europe initiative, NatureNet Europe aims to impart a great impulse to cooperation towards a resilient European nature. On the basis of three themes – Connect!, the 100 European Pearls of Nature, and the Face of Europe – NatureNet Europe aims to have achieved the following by 2010:

1. A functional European ecological network of important nature areas, landscapes and marine areas, central to which will be approximately 100 important nature areas with touristic qualities. The national and regional ecological networks will be linked to the European ecological network;
2. A Europe that is cherished as a continent with a fantastic number of beautiful holiday destinations;
3. A population, politicians, and nature conservation that are proud of European nature and landscapes. The often-heard story of ‘dramatic decline’ in nature will be a thing of the past;
4. Nature conservation will be associated with the processes and decisions which have direct consequences for the conservation and management of landscape qualities of the countryside, such as the policy and actions of financial institutions and land-users groups;
5. Various European countries will have introduced lotteries that support Good Causes (like the Dutch Postal Code Lottery), which are an important supplementary financing mechanism for safeguarding and managing the European ecological network, and financial institutions will also be investing in nature;
6. New forms of cooperation, partnerships whose focal point is not institutions, but the joint achievement of concrete goals and interests of consumers, farmers, tourists, fishermen, government, conservationists and others;
7. Nature conservation will bring Europe and the citizen closer together. Beautiful Europe will build bridges between Europe and the citizen’s daily life.

NatureNet Europe together with its members and partners will be carrying out many concrete activities in the coming years in order to fulfil these ambitions, ranging from safeguarding and management activities, migration corridors for climate change, to the active preparation of the population and site managers for new approaches and European challenges. NatureNet Europe is working on new partnerships with land users and umbrella organizations in the tourism sector. NatureNet Europe is mobilizing new and innovative financing possibilities to implement and manage the European ecological network. We are endeavouring to link the European nature network to European Green investment funds of national and international banks and we are helping to establish Good Cause lotteries in various European countries. The Beautiful Europe communication plan supports the concrete activities through intensive information and awareness-raising activities, focusing on the 100 European Pearls of Nature.

The founders of NatureNet Europe are contributing to the implementation of the Beautiful Europe ambitions with means acquired by members, partners and governments. NatureNet Europe and sponsors can become partners to take on European challenges together. The time is right for this.

Cooperation with NatureNet Europe means profit. Profit for nature in Europe, which will gain in resilience. And last but not least, it also means profit for the European citizen, who will have more opportunities to continue to enjoy and appreciate our common Beautiful Europe.