



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Protecting Roadless Areas: Meeting the Nagoya targets in a cost efficient and effective way**

A cost efficient and effective solution in meeting the Aichi biodiversity protection targets is gaining momentum in the international debate. In times when funding for biodiversity conservation is scarce, the cost minimizing solution of protecting our world's remaining roadless areas arises as a way out from biodiversity protection deadlocks.

Areas which have remained roadless, despite not being officially protected, have achieved a high level of protection because of the reduced human pressure exerted on their resources. Avoiding the construction of roads in these areas is the most cost efficient and effective way for protecting biodiversity. Keeping areas roadless does not mean keeping them inaccessible and disconnected. Roadless areas may be accessed and connected through railways, river ways and airways, i.e. by transport means which exert far less human pressure on natural resources.

The issue was brought up in the COP 11 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), where an official side event was organised by the European Parliament's Rapporteur on Forests, MEP Kriton Arsenis, UNEP, IUCN, Conservation International (CI), the Society for Conservation Biology (SCB), and the Indigenous Peoples' International Centre for Policy Research and Education, Tebtebba, and which was supported by Google, the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the Global Canopy Programme (GCP).

During the side event, Google and the European Environment Agency presented the latest results of their ongoing project to prepare interactive maps of the world's remaining roadless areas. The objective of these maps is threefold: to generate incentives for the protection of such areas, to avoid the financing of destructive roads in threatened pockets of thriving life, and to provide international policy makers with a useful instrument for effective regulation towards biodiversity conservation.

The Google Earth maps of roadless areas can be found at:

<http://earthengine.google.org/#intro/Roadless10km>

<http://earthengine.google.org/#intro/Roadless1km>

EEA's Eye on Earth maps can be found at:

<http://eyeonearth.org/templates/EoEBasic/?webmap=c35a744a6f7348d38133e937f4c9aaad>

More material on the presentations and speeches can be found at:

<http://kritonarsenis.gr/actions/view/Roadlessness--way-to-protect-biodiversity>

The side event was entitled "**Roadless areas: The most cost efficient and effective way to protect biodiversity**" and the panel comprised of Mr. Trevor Sandwith (Director of Global Protected Areas Programme, IUCN), Mr. Russ Mittermeier (President of Conservation International, CI) and Mr. Thierry Lucas (Research Project Manager and Policy Advisor, UNEP).

In addition, Mrs. Jacqueline McGlade (Executive Director of the European Environment Agency, EEA) and Ms. Rebecca Moore (Engineering Manager for Google Earth Outreach and Google Earth Engine) participated through a televised message.

Following the event, **MEP Kriton Arsenis** made the following statement: "Only few millions of Euros/dollars are available for biodiversity protection. At the same time, numerous trillions are generated from and directed to activities with a negative impact on biodiversity. It is clear that we have to use these limited financial resources efficiently. My support for the roadless areas concept comes from the very fact that from an economic point of view it just makes sense to protect areas where biodiversity has remained intact and where there is no need to direct extra financial resources. All we have to do is merely avoid destructive investments on road construction."

**Mr. Mittermeier** from Conservation International, announced that "the Roadless Wilderness Initiative, led by Kriton Arsenis, is one of the most important conservation efforts in the world. If we are really serious about conserving biodiversity and maintaining at least a small portion of our natural world in its original condition, with fully intact faunal and floral assemblages, it will likely be in areas without roads. This initiative ties in very well with what we have been trying to achieve with our High Biodiversity Wilderness Areas in high priority tropical forest regions such as the Guiana Shield region of northern South America, but it also is applicable in the other biomes as well, especially in the far northern systems like the tundra and the boreal forests, in the desert regions of the world, and elsewhere. CI is pleased to be a partner in this endeavor."

On behalf of IUCN **Mr. Sandwith** proclaimed that "roadless areas coincide with some of the world's most important areas for conserving biodiversity and the associated cultures and lifestyles of indigenous peoples. Maintaining connectivity within systems of protected areas is essential for coping with climate change, and roadless areas will contribute significantly to allowing species to move in response to climate. Roadless areas can contribute to this as they can prevent the direct effects of roads on fragmentation. Key to this is the recognition of the fact that indigenous communities - through their conservation efforts - are ensuring the effective protection of many of these areas".

**Mr. Lucas** praised this initiative, and UNEP, with its cooperation with the European Environment Agency on Eye on Earth, looks forward to it coming to fruition. In this regard, the development of SDGs offer an opportunity, as roadless areas permit us to look into how the natural capital they provide for current and next generations can be valued and reflected in future SDGs.

**Mrs. McGlade** on behalf of EEA stated that "during the last century the world has faced more ecosystem destruction than at any other time in human history. In Europe, there has been more habitat fragmentation than on any other continent - yet there are still pockets of truly wild habitats, far away from roads, which can provide a refuge for some of our most threatened species. Mapping the course of fragmentation and the connectivity between natural areas by seeing where roads are being constructed and used will help us protect species, habitats, genetic resources and life on planet Earth in the coming centuries."

**Ms. Rebecca Moore** on behalf of Google stated that "Google Maps and Google Earth are used by more than a billion people each month to help them see and understand the world we live in. Just as it's important to map the roads and highways that can take people to their destinations, it's also crucial to accurately represent the roadless areas of our planet in order to protect biodiversity and enable conservation. We hope that these initial Global Roadless Area Maps we've created can help everyone easily comprehend how few large roadless areas still remain on earth, and convey the importance of this policy initiative."

**Mr. Mitchell** from the Global Canopy Programme stated that "roadless areas are one of the simplest means of identifying areas where the footprint of human impacts remains light. Such an indicator is needed because it can offer decision makers a clear delineation of pristine parts of our planet which can offer, especially in major tropical forested regions, ecosystem services worth US\$ trillions annually. Roads are often the vanguard of change in these areas, leading to destruction of natural capital on which future development and prosperity elsewhere, such as agriculture and hydropower depends. Roads across rainforests are a double-edged sword. For poor communities, they can offer real benefits by connecting their goods to market, but unwelcome guests often come the other way in the form of alien species of plants and diseases which invade and upset a former natural balance and worse, hordes of migrants, often with little knowledge of how to live in the forests, except by cutting them down, destroying the lives of the communities the roads are intended to improve."

**Mrs. Nuria Selva**, on behalf of the Society for Conservation Biology (SCB), expressed the following view: "Keeping areas road-free is key to maintain biodiversity and ecosystem services provided to societies; they are protected de facto. Roadless areas are especially relevant to conserve sensitive and endangered species, as well as species requiring large tracts of habitat, such as bears or elephants. They are well-known aquatic strongholds for salmonids and other fish species and a significant refuge for native wildlife and plants. Roadless areas serve also as a barrier against pests, diseases and invasive species. They are more resistant to catastrophic events, like floods or fires, and can support species and ecosystems to adapt to new conditions due to climate change. Experience shows that whenever new roads provide access to formerly remote or roadless areas, the pressure on the ecosystem is increasing rapidly. Even when accompanying conservation measures are taken, the negative impacts of roads cannot be effectively mitigated. Roads have what we call "contagion effect", which is especially virulent in developing countries. Roads are followed by human developments and pioneering colonies, produce changes in land-use and the local socioeconomic models, and have continuously accelerated deforestation and other forms of biodiversity degradation."

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