

## ROADLESS AREAS NEED PROTECTION

*You cannot get further than 1 km from a road in some European countries. In others, about one fourth of the country surface is ecologically affected by roads.*



*Roadless areas render invaluable services to society. Bialowieza Forest, Poland-Belarus. Photo by N. Selva*

Areas without roads or with low traffic can bring much more benefits to modern societies than one may imagine. A recent publication by members of the Policy Committee of the Europe section of the Society for Conservation Biology in the journal *Environmental Management* highlights the importance of roadless and low-traffic areas. Large patches of unfragmented areas represent relatively undisturbed and functioning ecosystems that render important services to society: clean water, clean air, control of soil erosion, protection against invasive species, pests and diseases, pollination services. More generally, they support biodiversity, a basic element for ecosystems to function. Roadless areas are especially important for buffering the effects of climate change, as they mitigate climate extremes, protect against fires, landslides, hurricanes or floods. They also facilitate the movements of plants and animals, induced by warmer

temperature, drier conditions or extreme weather events. Some countries, like the USA, have recognized the importance of roadless areas and given them legal protection.

The few roadless areas still left in Europe are mostly unprotected by law, the study shows. In Germany, 75% of them lie outside the Natura 2000 network of protected areas. Europe continues to cut and fragment its landscape at a high pace, and the rate of road construction has reached unprecedented levels. Roads bring pollution, noise, change of water flows, animals killed by collisions; they also enhance the spread of invasive species, cause habitat loss and fragmentation. Roads also promote human access to previously undisturbed areas, together with urbanization and land use changes, resulting in major disturbance and degradation of ecosystems. With roads, some ecosystem services, so vital for human societies, may vanish. The study urges to consider these areas in future landscape and transport planning and to avoid further road development in these still unfragmented areas. The authors also recommend legal protection for the remaining European roadless areas as means to ensure that the Natura 2000 network of protected areas can function more effectively and coherently in the face of climate change.

### **Link to the article**

<http://www.springerlink.com/content/60v27n8501822247/fulltext.pdf>

### **Contact to authors:**

Nuria Selva (Poland, Spain; first author) [nuriselva@gmail.com](mailto:nuriselva@gmail.com) (+48-600135676)

Pierre L. Ibisch (Germany; coordinator of German working group and also leading further research on road impacts) [Pierre.Ibisch@hnee.de](mailto:Pierre.Ibisch@hnee.de)

Vassiliki Kati (Greece) [info@cbcd.eu](mailto:info@cbcd.eu) (+30-6944842873)

Bengt-Gunnar Jonsson (Sweden) [Bengt-gunnar.Jonsson@miun.se](mailto:Bengt-gunnar.Jonsson@miun.se)

Barbara Mihok (Hungary) [barbaramihok@gmail.com](mailto:barbaramihok@gmail.com)



*Carpathian mountains in Ukraine comprise some of the most significant roadless areas in Europe. Photo by P. Ibisch.*

*(Photographs available for publication).*