

## CONFERENCE DECLARATION

### CONNECTGREEN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE “Protected areas, cornerstones of ecological connectivity in the Carpathians and beyond”

**28-30 September 2021 in Visegrád, Hungary and online**

The CONNECTGREEN<sup>1</sup> International Conference, organized in Visegrád and online on the 28th-30th of September 2021 with the support of UNEP - Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA) Steering Committee, WWF, CEEweb for Biodiversity, and Eurac Research (Lead Partner of the Interreg Central Europe Centralparks project), brought together key stakeholders working in and around protected areas at different levels to gain a common understanding, knowledge and share experiences on ecological connectivity in the Carpathians. They are united by the common goal to raise awareness on the need for cross-sectoral approaches and cooperation for the identification, conservation and restoration of ecological connectivity in the Carpathians and beyond. The Conference concluded that avoiding/minimising habitat fragmentation, maintaining and restoring ecological connectivity between Natura 2000 sites and other protected and conserved areas in the region is of high importance, and only possible if a science-based and proactive cross-sectoral approach is applied at the local, national, regional and EU level.

We, the conference participants, accepting that habitat fragmentation influences biodiversity and ecological integrity in a significant way, herewith call on the European Commission, the European Parliament and the national governments of the Danube-Carpathian region to drive the efficient management of ecological corridors, avoid further deterioration, restore their functionality and reverse habitat fragmentation, and to

- Acknowledge that a closer cooperation between the European Protected Areas networks shall facilitate joint activities for the protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecological connectivity in the Carpathian region in the future.
- Provide and activate adequate financial resources and transboundary consultations for implementation of integrative spatial planning and green infrastructure development. Public investment policies, including the EU structural funds, have to prioritise sectorally and regionally integrated approaches, aiming at harmonising the interests of environmental protection and economic development.
- Foster design and finance capacity building measures to empower stakeholders to participate effectively in spatial planning processes, including how to properly design

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<sup>1</sup> Interreg DTP ConnectGREEN “Restoring and managing ecological corridors in mountains as the green infrastructure in the Danube” (2018-2021)

the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the environmental impact assessments, supervise their development and conclude on results such as adapting the siting and design of infrastructures.

- Underline that adjustments of national legislative tools may be necessary to avoid/minimise habitat fragmentation, maintain the functionality of ecological corridors and efficiently manage Natura 2000 sites and other protected and conserved areas, in tune with recommendations developed within the ConnectGREEN project together with spatial planners.
- Encourage integration of ecological corridors into spatial planning in order to find best solutions for the harmonization of development needs with biodiversity conservation on the level of spatial and urban planning, construction, operation and maintenance.
- Emphasize the need for enabling sustainable spatial planning by amending, where necessary, relevant policies, strategies and laws, in particular those related to biodiversity conservation and spatial planning, e.g. on identifying, managing, monitoring and ensuring the functionality of ecological corridors.
- Support a cross-sectorally based and internationally harmonized framework that can bring a solid basis for long-term efficient and functioning ecological networks in the Carpathian region, a prerequisite for viable large carnivore populations.
- Draw attention to the need to invest in the restoration of ecological corridors, the maintaining of their functionality, and the maintenance of mitigation measures, to ensure their coherence and integrity long after the implementation of different infrastructure or other development projects.
- We welcome the results of related projects such as “D2C - Dare to connect”, “AlpBioNet2030”, “Dinalpconnect”, “Centralparks”, “LIFE Green-Go! Carpathians”, “TRANSGREEN” and “SaveGREEN”, including synergies and connections, while analysing gaps and divergences, and ways to address them through strong transnational cooperation on the topic of connectivity. We express our willingness to sustain and apply the findings of those projects.
- Recognizing that the Carpathians are a major element of the EU’s ecological network, encourage the EU to accede to the Carpathian Convention as a holistic instrument to foster ecological connectivity.