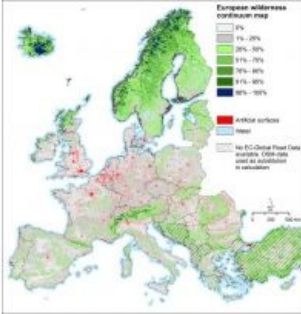


Detailed Mapping Reveals Europe's Wilder Side



The first comprehensive survey of Europe's remaining wilderness areas has been unveiled as part of a major project involving academics at the University of Leeds, UK. The resulting map and Wilderness Register for Europe, which sets out the quality of each area as well as existing levels of protection afforded to them, will shape European Union policy on these ecologically important sites for years to come.

Dr Steve Carver, Director of the Wildland Research Institute (WRI) at the University of Leeds, said that this is the first comprehensive survey and mapping of the remaining wilderness areas in Europe. He expects it will drive developing EU policy on wilderness and influence our thinking on areas as diverse as ecosystem services, human health and wellbeing, climate change, biodiversity, protected areas and the concept of re-wilding – the

return of habitats to their natural state.

Today, just 1-2% of the EU's land area is formally protected. Conservationists hope to increase this to 5% within the next 10-15 years.

Scandinavian countries and Iceland come out top when it comes to having the biggest proportions of Europe's wildest areas based on the project's criteria – which include naturalness of vegetation, remoteness from settlement and other human infrastructure, and remoteness from roads (mechanised access). Mountain areas further south – the Pyrenees, Alps, Carpathians – are also well represented.

England and Wales have no qualifying wildernesses according to the register, while north-west Scotland possesses some key areas.

The register was unveiled by Dr Steve Carver at WILD10 – the tenth World Wilderness Congress. The congress is the world's longest-running international conservation forum, held this year in Salamanca, Spain.

Dr Carver has worked with Alterra, part of Wageningen University in the Netherlands and lead partner in the project, as well as PAN Parks, the European wilderness protection organisation. The project is funded by the European Commission and European Environment Agency.

The register is a work in progress, with a final report to the EC and EEA due to be published next spring. All European Union states have cooperated.

Dr Carver and his colleagues at the WRI in Leeds have previously employed the latest data and Geographical Information System (GIS) mapping tools for Scottish Natural Heritage to detail Scotland's wild areas and guide planning authorities making development decisions.

Scotland was the first country in Europe to produce a national wilderness map at this level of detail.