



MESSAGE TO SYDNEY

MITTERSILL, AUSTRIA, 3 OCTOBER 2014 – The European Wilderness Academy brought together attendees from 22 countries across the globe, who represented various sectors from government agencies through scientists to NGOs. The attendees shared the interest of preserving Europe's last great places of wilderness and restoring wilderness attributes across the continent in order to **leave more wilderness in Europe for future generations**.

Although the understanding of the imperative for wilderness in Europe increases, species and natural ecosystems are still rapidly disappearing through urbanisation, infrastructure development, industrialisation of agriculture, forestry, fishery, and other extractive and unsustainable uses. In addition there is a growing pressure being exerted on the EU Directives to ensure minimisation of obstacles to economic recovery that, together with budgetary constraints, is downgrading the priority given to wilderness by European government and major NGOs.

If wilderness is to continue to exist in Europe it needs to be defined and given protection on a legal basis.

IUCN defines wilderness as "A large area of unmodified or slightly modified land, and/or sea, retaining its natural character and influence, without permanent or significant habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural condition." However one of the outcomes of the European Parliament's resolution on wilderness adopted in February 2009, and a recommendation of the Conference on Wilderness and Large Natural Habitats in Prague in 2009 was to develop this definition further in order to specify it to European conditions. The 2-year process led to the following widely agreed definition of wilderness:

"A wilderness is an area governed by natural processes. It is composed of native habitats and species, and large enough for the effective ecological functioning of natural processes. It is unmodified or only slightly modified and without intrusive or extractive human activity, settlements, infrastructure or visual disturbance."

Based on this definition the European Wilderness Society developed the European Wilderness Quality Standard and Audit System, which can widely be used as a basis for effective wilderness protection, designation, restoration, and promotion initiatives across a range of geographic and cultural circumstances in all European countries.

With reference to the points above and recognising the importance of the upcoming IUCN World Parks Congress in Sydney, the attendees of the Wilderness Academy¹ send this Message to Sydney as a call to improve the protection and promotion of Europe's wilderness areas. We call the attendees of the World Parks Congress and IUCN:

- To recognise the European definitions for wilderness and wild land and the European Wilderness Quality Standard and Audit System;

¹ <http://wilderness.academy/>



- To encourage certification of the effectiveness to manage our protected areas with special attention to wilderness areas, which can help European countries to fulfil their commitment to the CBD Aichi Target 11 about protected areas²;
- To support the effort of European NGOs to follow up the Resolution 17³ of the 10th World Wilderness Congress to develop a European Wilderness Convention;
- To promote the use of the European Commission's Guidelines on Wilderness in Natura 2000 sites among IUCN's government members in Europe;
- To ask its European members for legislative enforcement of existing laws for improved wilderness protection including but not limited to the implementation of EC policies;
- To encourage European IUCN members recognising the essential role played by untrammelled natural habitats in maintaining biological diversity and halting its loss in Europe;
- To initiate a process in Europe which will help European countries to catch up with the global approach, where conservation is intrinsically linked to wilderness protection;
- To state that National Parks, World Heritage areas and wilderness areas are special places that require the highest level of support and protection, including through policy and legislation, that countries can provide;
- To acknowledge with great concern the statement made by the Australian Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, in a speech to the logging industry, that he believes there are too many national parks in Australia;
- To note with great concern the recent attempts by the Australian government to de-list areas of Tasmanian native forests from the World Heritage List;
- To urge the Australian Government to reconsider and reverse its opposition to new national parks and to recommit its support to the conservation goals of national parks, World Heritage Areas and wilderness areas;
- To further urge the Australian Government to not hand control of commonwealth environment protection oversight and approval powers to the Australian states

Finally the attendees of the Wilderness Academy, highlights that the importance of wilderness and wild areas in Europe is increasingly appreciated, in particular as noted by the Report of the European Parliament on Wilderness in Europe, adopted by a margin of 538 votes to 19 in February 2009, that calls for improved protection for wilderness areas through appropriate measures including mapping, research and awareness raising together with provision of adequate funding to achieve this. Therefore IUCN's and particularly its European members actions are required to guarantee that future generations will have the possibility and right to access wilderness in Europe.

² <http://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/rationale/target-11/>

³ http://resolutions.wild10.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/res17_wilderness-convention-europe_final.pdf