
Quality Criteria for the Selection of 'Large Wilderness Areas in Germany for the purpose of attaining the 2 % target set in the National Strategy on Biological Diversity'

BMU/BfN¹ Policy Paper
agreed with the technical authorities for nature conservation of the *German federal states (Länder)*
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¹ BMU = German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety; BfN = German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation

In its National Strategy on Biological Diversity (NBS), the Federal Government has set itself the following target: 'By the year 2020, Mother Nature is again able to develop according to her own laws throughout at least 2 % of Germany's national territory.' A significant proportion of wilderness areas of relevance in this context should be large in scale. According to Finck et al. (2013)², for the purpose of the NBS, wilderness areas are 'sufficiently large, (predominantly) non-fragmented areas free of intrusive or extractive human activity. They serve to permanently provide for the ecological functioning of natural processes without human interference'. In addition to this definition of wilderness areas, others exist, such as the Wild Europe Initiative definition at the European level³. For the purpose of the NBS, the BMU and BfN do not intend to establish **a new category of protected area** but to enable wilderness areas to achieve an additional rating or form of recognition.

In moving towards the 2 % wilderness target set in the NBS, it is also essential to ensure linkage with the wilderness policies and strategies adopted by the German federal states (*Bundesländer*).

The following set of criteria relates solely to **large wilderness areas** as a contribution to the realisation of the 2 % target defined in the NBS. It presents the BMU/BfN interpretation as a basis for further dialogue on ways of achieving the NBS target. Smaller areas also make a valuable contribution to meeting key NBS wilderness goals, particularly the 5 % target on natural forest development; they also enhance the system of large wilderness areas by facilitating habitat connectivity.

² Finck, P., Klein, M. u. Riecken, U. (2013): Wildnisgebiete in Deutschland – von der Vision zur Umsetzung. *Natur und Landschaft* 88 (8): 342-346.

³ Wild Europe (2013): A Working Definition of European Wilderness Areas and Wild Areas. Updated 10.09.2013. 20 pages.

Vision

The starting point for this set of criteria is a shared **vision**. A vision for wilderness areas in Germany has already been defined in the NBS and is adopted here:

‘Germany again boasts fascinating areas of wilderness (e.g. in national parks) which are left to develop naturally and undisturbed.’ (BMUB 2007)

Wherever possible, the public should be able to experience wilderness areas, thus helping to foster their appreciation of wild and unspoilt nature.

Selection criteria for Wilderness Areas for the purpose of attaining the 2 % target set in the National Strategy on Biological Diversity

The basic criteria outlined below should be met by any site which offers potential for classification as a large wilderness area for the purpose of the NBS. These criteria are key determinants in the selection of wilderness areas. Irrespective of the criteria, all core areas of national parks as well as large-scale continuous core areas of biosphere reserves are classified as wilderness areas for the purpose of the NBS.

Action area 1: General conditions

Criterion 1.1: Legal status

The wilderness area is permanently protected by means of a statutory instrument adopted by the competent nature conservation authorities or by legislation at federal state level; such protection may also be achieved by another legal mechanism (e.g. designation as a protected area under forest law, entry in the land registry).

Criterion 1.2: Wilderness for conservation purposes

‘Wilderness’ for conservation purposes or for the protection of natural processes must be defined in the legal basis. Insofar as this serves the conservation purpose in the specific case at hand, further goals such as the wilderness experience, education, and monitoring and research may be set.

Criterion 1.3: Specialist competence and legal supervision

The competent nature conservation authorities/forest administrations should exercise legal supervision over the wilderness area’s governance body, unless they manage the site themselves. They ensure that the site is managed in compliance with the conservation goals set and, as far as possible; they execute all duties pertaining to the wilderness area under public law.

Criterion 1.4: Ownership

Priority should be given to the establishment of wilderness areas on sites which are in public ownership or are owned by nature conservation foundations established under public or private law and/or which form part of the National Natural Heritage (*Nationales Naturerbe*). In addition, at the owner's initiative, other sites may be declared to be wilderness areas if there is certainty that the conservation goals set for 'wilderness' can be fulfilled on a permanent basis.

Criterion 1.5: Size

'Large wilderness areas for the purpose of the National Strategy on Biological Diversity', should preferably cover at least 1,000 ha; alluvial forests, fens and coastal sites should cover a minimum area of 500 ha. For physiogeographic reasons, or on account of property law or site-specific factors (e.g. core areas in national parks), woodlands, former military sites or post-mining landscapes between 500 and 1,000 ha in size may also be classified as 'wilderness areas for the purpose of the NBS'. Through their contribution to habitat connectivity, smaller wilderness areas also support the attainment of other wilderness goals defined in the NBS. Particularly large wilderness sites, corresponding to 'wilderness areas' as defined by the Wild Europe Initiative (WEI)⁴, should cover at least 3,000 ha, as recommended by the WEI.

Criterion 1.6: Delimitation and configuration

The wilderness area's boundaries should, as far as possible, be aligned with natural features. The wilderness area should be as compact and contiguous as possible and should be indicated down to the land parcel level on maps/nautical charts.

Action area 2: Wilderness development and protection of natural biological dynamics and diversity

Criterion 2.1: Protection of natural development

The wilderness area must satisfy the prerequisites so that the entire site will be governed by natural processes, in most cases within 10 years and in exceptional cases up to 30 years following classification, whereupon further human intervention to manage the site's development ceases.

External hazards should not pose a risk to the wilderness area or impede the realisation of conservation goals.

Action area 3: Management

Criterion 3.1: Vision

A vision is defined for each wilderness area. The vision is broadly compatible with IUCN Category Ib, the Wild Europe Initiative's definition of wilderness and the NBS definition of wilderness areas.

Criterion 3.2: Management plan

A management plan is available for the wilderness area. It is produced no more than five years after the establishment of the area, is valid for 10 years and is regularly updated. It

⁴ Wild Europe (2013): A Working Definition of European Wilderness Areas and Wild Areas. Updated 10.09.2013. 20 pages.

defines all the requisite strategies and measures for the fulfilment of conservation goals. Upon completion of any initial management measures which may be necessary, which must be completed within 10 years or, in exceptional cases, 30 years following the site's classification as a wilderness area (see Criterion 3.4), no further habitat management takes place on a regular basis. The management plan then deals primarily with other site-specific measures required for the attainment of the conservation goals for wilderness (e.g. visitor management) and with the implementation of legal obligations such as fire safety, any phytosanitary measures which may be needed, and issues relating to the management of non-native species (neobiota).

Timescales and indicators for individual targets are also defined in the management plan. If the wilderness area is located in a larger protected area, such as a national park, and this protected area has a management plan, the wilderness area should be integrated into the existing plan. This also applies to Habitats Directive management plans.

Criterion 3.3: Zonation

The wilderness area consists of a core zone, which is governed by undisturbed natural processes from the outset, and a buffer or transition zone, if appropriate. A buffer or transition zone may be designated in a wilderness area if this is necessary to implement initial management measures. Within 10 years and in exceptional cases up to 30 years following classification, this zone too will be left to be governed by natural processes. The management plan deals with the details of any management regimes that may be permissible and necessary in the existing zones of the wilderness area.

The zone with undisturbed natural development must be free of extractive human activity based on natural resources, living or non-living. Possible exemptions from this provision must be stipulated in the ordinance or management plan for the wilderness area.

Criterion 3.4: Initial management

During the maximum 10-year, and, in exceptional cases, 30-year transition period, existing user infrastructure which has a detrimental effect on natural development will gradually be removed and the area given over to natural processes in accordance with a clear agreed timeframe. During this period, initial management measures (e.g. forest conversion, renaturalisation) may continue to be implemented in exceptional cases. Any risks to human health and the environment emanating from the wilderness area and manifesting at a later date may also be remediated beyond this timeframe.

Criterion 3.5: Wildlife management

Conventional hunting is prohibited in the wilderness area. In respect of hoofed game (ungulates), wildlife management is permitted if this is necessary on nature conservation grounds or to avoid damage to adjacent agricultural land or forest. The specific need for wildlife management and the methods to be applied must be described in the management plan and are regularly reviewed to determine whether they are still necessary and effective.

Action area 4: Negative influences

Criterion 4.1: Settlement

No permanent human settlements or single residences may exist in the wilderness area. Existing catering and accommodation establishments should not be shown on maps of the

site. They retain their acquired rights to operate provided that use of these facilities does not conflict with conservation goals.

Temporary shelters are permitted solely for research and management purposes and are subject to approval.

Criterion 4.2: Infrastructure and fragmentation

The wilderness area must satisfy the prerequisites so that the site is free from permanent public transport infrastructure, pipelines or power lines which run overground or may cause some other form of disturbance and jeopardise the attainment of conservation goals, energy installations, resource extraction or shipping; in most cases, this must be achieved within 10 years and in exceptional cases up to 30 years following classification. Roads required for operational or safety reasons will be reduced to the absolute minimum required.

Criterion 4.3: Fishing

Fishing is not permitted in the wilderness area.