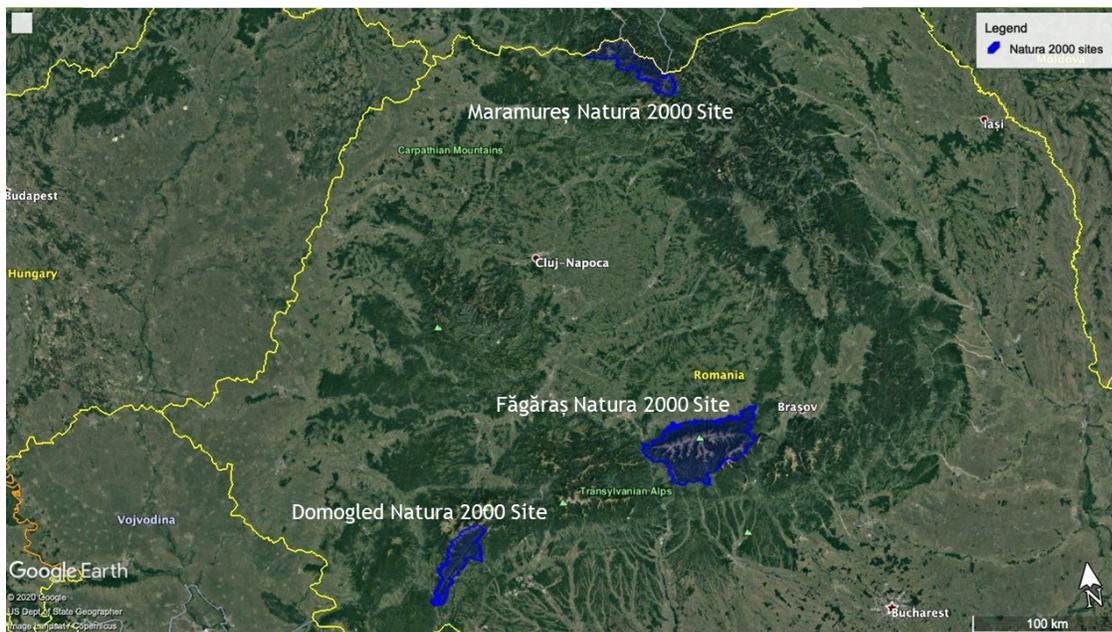


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Media Briefing

Effects of illegal logging on species and habitats in natural forests in the Romanian Natura 2000 sites Făgăraş, Maramures and Domogled



1. Făgăraş: Munţii Făgăraş (ROSCI0122¹) and Piemontul Făgăraş (ROSPA0098)

Effects: priority species no longer present or at critically low levels

The Făgăraş Mountains are home to some of the most unique primary and old growth forests in Europe and are represented by two Natura 2000 sites, one Site of Community Importance (SCI) and one Special Protected Area (SPA). Unfortunately, however, they also host some of the most threatened habitats in Romania. This is partly because, unlike other protected areas, they do not benefit from any additional national protection - they are neither designated as a natural park or a national park. This means that, despite being home to many valuable forests and habitats in a good conservation status, they do not contain any core or non-intervention zones.

As per Forestry Plans, logging is allowed in many of the habitats, including in priority habitats, rare and isolated habitats and habitats that are already in an unfavourable/inadequate conservation status. Only

¹ Each Natura 2000 site is given a unique code for identification purposes. These codes consist of a state code (for example RO for Romania) and another alphanumeric code defined by the national authorities. In Romania either SCI (Sites of Community Importance) under the Habitat Directive or a SPA (Special Protection Areas) under the Birds Directive is added, followed by a number.

in some small patches of virgin forests that were mapped for Romania's National Catalog or where private owners have insisted on non-intervention is logging not prohibited.

Munții Făgăraș (ROSCI0122) was designated in 2007 for the conservation of 33 protected species of fauna and flora². Worryingly, more than 50% of the priority species are either no longer present (10 species) or at critically low levels (7 species), as detailed in the 2016 Management Plan.

Piemontul Făgăraș (ROSPA0098) was designated in 2007 for the conservation of 25 species of birds³. However, almost half of these species (12 priority bird species) have critically low population levels below or around 50 individuals.

For both Munții Făgăraș and Piemontul Făgăraș, out of 58 priority species in total for which these sites were designated, 50% (29 species) are either no longer present or at such critically low levels that their survival on site is uncertain in the near future.

While logging is recognized by the Management Plan as one of the main threats to the majority of priority species, at no point does this Management Plan suggest a significant reduction or a prohibition of logging activities in vulnerable habitats as a viable conservation measure.

As hundreds of individual Forestry Plans in the area only use the data mentioned in the Management Plan and do not have the means to conduct their own biodiversity surveys, some population might be under-estimated in certain areas which can also have strong negative effects on the overall biodiversity of Făgăraș Mountains.

2. Maramureș: Munții Maramureșului (ROSCI0124) and Munții Maramureșului (ROSPA0131)

Effects: Worst impacted by clear-cuts, affecting priority species such as wolves, lynx or capercaillie

Maramureș Natural Park (133,354 hectares) is the worst impacted by clear-cuts in Romania. This can be seen easily from a quick search on Google Earth. It also hosts two Natura 2000 sites, one SCI (106867.90 ha)⁴ and one SPA (71047.5 ha)⁵.

Official documents show more than half a million cubic metres (580,546) of wood were confirmed as being illegally logged between 2012 and 2019. An additional volume of 273,000 cubic metres is suspected of being removed via illegal operations. A total of 219 criminal complaints were filed to the Police and Anti-Corruption authorities between 2012 and 2019 by the Forestry Guard.

Clear-cuts are the most destructive form of logging in the park and over 10,000 hectares affected by this aggressive form of logging were documented for the complaint. The southeastern part of the park and Natura 2000 site contains the largest single clear-cut in Romania of over 3,000 hectares.

² Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora

³ Council Directive 2009/147/EC on the conservation of wild birds

⁴ <http://natura2000.eea.europa.eu/Natura2000/SDF.aspx?site=ROSCI0124>

⁵ <http://natura2000.eea.europa.eu/Natura2000/SDF.aspx?site=ROSPA0131>

In contrast with the large amounts of logging, only 13% of the park's total area (at 17,619 ha) is in the Integral Protection/Non-Intervention zone. Of this, 4,114 hectares are mostly alpine meadows. Forested areas in full protection are therefore only around 13,505 hectares - only 10% of the park's total area.

The most affected habitat is Acidophilous Picea forests of the montane to alpine levels (Vaccinio Piceetea, Natura 2000 code 9410⁶): this habitat has been heavily affected by logging as spruce is the target species for most logging operations. The most affected priority habitat is Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (Alno-Padion, *Alnion incanae*, *Salicion albae*, Natura 2000 code 91E0^{*}): this priority habitat has also been severely affected by the clear-cuts leading to neighbouring habitat 9410 and fragmented by logging and forestry roads.

Some of the priority species affected by clear-cuts and largescale logging are: *Rosalia alpina*, *Carabus hampei*, *Carabus zawadzki*, *Canis lupus*, *Lynx lynx*, *Tetrao urogallus*, *Tetrao tetrax*, *Circaetus gallicus* and *Bubo bubo*. Additionally, 7 species declared in the Natura 2000 standard forms are missing from the Management Plan and 8 species are at critically low levels, representing more than 25% of declared priority species.

Despite extensive logging Maramures Natural Park still contains many thousands of hectares of Primofaro ([Primofaro study 2019](#)) potential primary and old growth forests. However, less than half of these old growth forests are inside the non-intervention Zone, meaning that most of these forests are still available for exploitation.

3. Domogled: Domogled - Valea Cernei (ROSCI0069 and ROSPA0035)

Effects: UNESCO World Heritage Site in danger because of illegal and progressive logging

Domogled - Valea Cernei National Park hosts two Natura 2000 sites. One of them is an SCI (62121.30 ha)⁷ and one a SPA (66734.00 ha)⁸ which overlap 100% with the park's surface. Forests in non-intervention zone occupy about 20,000 hectares or around 30% of the park.

The worst examples of the failure to protect valuable forest habitats are in the northern sections of the park, where the non-intervention zone is restricted mostly to alpine areas (areas that are almost empty of vegetation) and not to the old growth forests below these alpine areas, where logging is allowed.

Progressive and conservation logging is taking place in old growth forest stands in close vicinity to core areas of the UNESCO World Heritage Site "Primeval and old growth beech forests of the Carpathians and other regions of Europe". Romsilva, the national forestry management agency, seems not yet to have considered specific forest protection measures within buffer zones of the UNESCO World Heritage Site. The forestry practices in the buffer zones do not seem to differ from industrial logging sites outside the

⁶ Natura 2000 codes, an asterisk (*) indicates a priority habitat:

https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/habitatsdirective/docs/Int_Manual_EU28.pdf

⁷ <http://natura2000.eea.europa.eu/Natura2000/SDF.aspx?site=ROSCI0069>

⁸ <http://natura2000.eea.europa.eu/Natura2000/SDF.aspx?site=ROSPA0035>

park. These forms of industrial forest management do not comply with the primary conservation objectives of national parks or with Natura 2000 Directives.

In the upper part of the Park, over 25,000 hectares are presented in the Management Plan of the Natura 2000 site as just one habitat type: Illyrian *Fagus sylvatica* forests (*Aremonio-Fagion*, Natura 2000 code 91K0). The cause for this is uncertain as the terrain and vegetation varies greatly in this area, from steep ravines, to high hills and large mountains, all containing site specific vegetation. It is therefore highly unlikely that this large area contains only one habitat type. The data in the Management Plan seems clearly deficient.

One type of especially degrading forestry works is progressive logging, approved and executed in virgin forests and old growth forests. Through this type of logging, large volumes of wood are removed from the forest for commercial purposes over a period of time. Usually, up to a third of the total volume of wood from a parcel is removed at each stage of a progressive logging plan. Once virgin forest has been logged the damage is permanent. At the end of progressive logging the old growth forest is completely removed in a time span of only 10-20 years. The forest is then slowly usually regenerated and replaced by bushes and small saplings from both planted and natural processes. Complete removal of standing trees clearly affects habitats and species, especially those species living in dead and rotten wood. The logging thus also affects the food chain of other dependent species.