

November 5, 2025

Balancing Biodiversity Targets with Socio-Economic Needs Is Possible with Integrated Policy and Planning, New Study Finds

Key policies: *EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, Nature Restoration Regulation, Habitats Directive, Birds Directive, Natura 2000 Network, European Green Deal, EU Climate Law, EU Climate Adaptation Policy Framework, Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), EU Forestry Strategy for 2030*

Balancing Europe's ambitious **biodiversity restoration targets** with growing demands for **food, timber, bioenergy and carbon sequestration** is one of the EU's most complex policy challenges. A new scientific study concludes that this balance **can be achieved**, provided that **good policy design, integrated spatial planning and flexible burden-sharing between Member States** are put in place.

The findings are published in the peer-reviewed article *Meeting European Union biodiversity targets under future land-use demands* (2025) in *Nature Ecology & Evolution* and summarised through the **Science for Environment Policy** platform.

Ambitious biodiversity goals under pressure

Under the **EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030** and the **Nature Restoration Regulation**, the EU has committed to:

- Protecting **30% of EU land and sea areas**
- Restoring **20% of degraded land and sea ecosystems by 2030**

These goals must be achieved in a context where land is already heavily used:

- **38% of EU land** is used for agriculture
- **39%** is under forestry, largely for timber production

This creates unavoidable tensions between biodiversity conservation, climate mitigation and socio-economic needs.

A new integrated spatial planning approach

The study tested an **integrated spatial planning methodology** to identify where conservation, restoration and production should be prioritised across Europe.

Researchers combined:

- Distribution modelling of **729 species**, using data from the **Habitats Directive** and **Birds Directive**
- Land-use data from **CORINE Land Cover**, part of the **Copernicus Programme**
- Spatial data on **Natura 2000** protected areas
- Carbon stock and emissions data based on **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** methodologies

Species conservation targets were aligned with thresholds defined by the **International Union for Conservation of Nature**, ensuring populations reached “least concern” status.

Modelling land-use competition

To assess future pressures, the researchers applied:

- **GLOBIOM** and **G4M** models to simulate land-use competition in agriculture, forestry and bioenergy
- **12 land-allocation scenarios**, incorporating constraints from nature restoration legislation

These scenarios explored different approaches to sharing restoration responsibilities across EU countries.

Key findings: restoration without undermining production

The study concludes that **EU restoration targets can be met without jeopardising food production, energy crops or timber supply**, even with a projected **9–12% increase in land demand** for farming and forestry by 2030.

Key results include:

- A “**high-nature**” scenario, restoring up to **6% of EU land**, could improve the conservation status of up to **42% of species of concern**
- Strategic restoration could enhance biodiversity outcomes while **increasing land-based carbon sequestration**
- Without strong policy safeguards, intensification alone would worsen biodiversity loss, increasing unmet habitat needs for **7.3–8.5% of species**

Trade-offs require smart policy choices

The study emphasises that biodiversity gains require **carefully managed trade-offs**. One viable pathway is:

- **Targeted intensification** of agriculture and forestry in suitable areas
- **De-intensification and restoration** in others, enabling nature recovery and carbon storage

Crucially, intensification without robust biodiversity policy frameworks would likely cause net ecological harm.

The importance of burden-sharing between Member States

A major conclusion is that **flexible burden-sharing** delivers better outcomes than rigid national quotas.

Two approaches were tested:

- **Flexible burden-sharing**, allowing countries to exceed their restoration targets by up to 10%
- **Unconstrained burden-sharing**, enabling restoration wherever it delivers the highest benefits across the EU

The latter produced **greater gains for biodiversity and carbon sequestration**, highlighting the importance of EU-wide coordination.

Timely evidence for upcoming national plans

These findings are particularly relevant as Member States prepare their **National Restoration Plans**, with:

- Draft submissions due by **1 September 2026**
- Final plans expected in **2027**
- Revisions scheduled for **2032**

The **European Environment Agency** has repeatedly warned that while EU biodiversity policies are robust, **implementation gaps remain significant**, especially for forests and bird species.

Integrated planning as the way forward

The study aligns with broader policy analysis, including work by the **Bruegel Institute**, which stresses that **integrated land-use planning is essential** to reconcile biodiversity protection with food and energy security.

The authors caution that outcomes vary by scale and geography, underlining the need for:

- High-quality **local data**
- Robust **models and assumptions**
- Evidence-based governance at EU, national and regional levels

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that **biodiversity restoration and socio-economic resilience are not mutually exclusive**. With **strong policy frameworks, integrated spatial planning and flexible cooperation between Member States**, the EU can meet its biodiversity commitments while safeguarding food security, energy production and rural livelihoods.

Source: https://environment.ec.europa.eu/news/can-we-balance-biodiversity-targets-socio-economic-needs-good-policy-and-planning-its-possible-says-2025-11-06_en