

Nature protection

Overview

Access to information regarding the state and protection of nature remains limited, while dialogue and cooperation between public administration bodies and citizens' associations are almost non-existent.

For the first time since the establishment of Coalition 27 and the inclusion of civil society organizations in activities related to Chapter 27, the field of nature protection has been the focus of heated daily politics. This has heavily influenced how these issues are discussed and decided upon. Numerous events organized in protected areas have served to promote partisan agendas, which negatively affects transparency, good governance and the financing of nature protection. Bearing in mind global crises, pressures on natural resources in Serbia, and capacity gaps in the sector, this management style poses a serious threat to the conservation, protection and restoration of nature.

While work regarding strategic documents and regulations intensified during the reporting period, the adopted and drafted documents still fail to establish sufficiently clear objectives, measurable indicators, or mechanisms for the effective enforcement of nature protection policies.

Despite years of work on transposing the EU Birds Directive and Habitats Directive, full integration into national legislation remains incomplete, and no by-laws have been adopted.

Work on the Draft Law on Nature Protection is underway, however, information regarding the working group's activities is not publicly available.

The process of declaring new protected areas is slow, yet progress is being made; however, the management of these areas remains centralized and lacks sufficient efficiency. On the other hand, setting up Stakeholder Councils in protected areas is moving at a faster pace. By May 2026, according to publicly

available data, Stakeholder Councils have been formed in the national parks of Đerdap, Tara and Fruška gora, nature parks of Golija, Radan and Veliki Jastrebac, as well as in the special nature reserves of Mojstirsko-Draške Mountains and Kraljevac.

No progress was made during the reporting period on establishing the European ecological network Natura 2000 in Serbia.

Strategic and Legislative Framework

In August 2025, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the Amendments to the National Program for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA) for 2024–2027.[111]

The draft amendments have been prepared using data entered by relevant institutions into the NPAA electronic monitoring system, with the aim of aligning with the Plan for Fulfilling Key Obligations in the EU Accession Process of the Republic of Serbia by the end of 2026. The necessary alignment of timeframes for legislative, institutional, and administrative measures set out in the NPAA 2024–2027 has been completed.

For the year 2026, the following nature protection regulations are scheduled to be adopted: Regulation on Appropriate Assessment; Regulation on the Ecological Network; Rulebook on Amendments to the Rulebook on the Criteria for the Separation of Habitat Types, Types of Habitat, on Vulnerable, Endangered, Rare and Priority Protection Habitat Types and the Protection Measures for the Conservation of Habitat Types; Rulebook on Cross-Border Movement and Trade in Protected Species; Rulebook on Amendments to the Rulebook on Declaration and Protection of Strictly Protected Wild Species of Plants, Animals, Fungi and Mushrooms; Rulebook on Amendments to the Rulebook on Conditions of Keeping, Manner of Marking and Recording

111 https://www.mei.gov.rs/srl/dokumenta/nacionalna-dokumenta/npaa

Wild Animals in Captivity; Rulebook on Compliance Measures for Users of the Nagoya Protocol; Rulebook on the Prevention and Management of the Introduction and Spread of Invasive Alien Species.

The Law on Nature Protection is listed in the NPAA with an adoption deadline in the fourth quarter of 2025. The CELEX identifiers indicated next to this piece of legislation show the intention to align it with the following EU regulations: Regulation 511/2014 – Nagoya Protocol on Genetic Resources; Regulation 1007/2009 – Trade in Seal Products; Directive 2009/147/EC – Birds Directive; Regulation 338/97 – CITES requirements in the EU; Regulation 3254/91 – Leghold Trap Ban; Directive 83/129/EEC – Seal Pups Directive; Directive 92/43/EEC – Habitats Directive.

In June 2025, the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, in cooperation with the Ministry of Environmental Protection, announced a public call for civil society organizations to propose candidates to take part in the work of the Working Group for Drafting the Law on Nature Protection. Coalition 27, alongside a large number of other civil society organizations with established experience in environmental protection, nature conservation and biodiversity, did not apply, believing that the socio-political circumstances fail to ensure a transparent, inclusive, and fair law-making process. Only two organizations submitted applications to join the Working Group for Drafting the Law on Nature Protection: the Serbian Association of Employers and the Center for Inclusion and Sustainable Development. The Commission proposed representatives from these two organizations as members of the Working Group. Coalition 27 analyzed the compliance with the criteria, as well as the work of said organizations, following which, with the support of twenty-six civil society organizations, it raised concerns over irregularities in the selection process for the Working Group members, calling upon the Ministry of Environmental Protection to reconsider the Commission's proposal. Through the inconsistent application of selection procedures and criteria, the Ministry sent a message that the involvement of civil society in decision-making is viewed as a mere checkbox exercise, lacking any genuine intention to effectively include organizations in the process.

In August 2025, the Ministry of Environmental Protection published a notice on the initiation of drafting the Law on Nature Protection with the starting points. Interested public was invited to provide written proposals and suggestions regarding the regulation of the specified areas to be covered by the Draft Law on Nature Protection. Coalition 27, in cooperation with other organizations, submitted comments, proposals and suggestions.

The Ministry provided no response to written proposals and suggestions, and no further publicly available information regarding the drafting process existed up to the time of compiling this report.

Following a multi-year drafting process, the Nature Protection Program of the Republic of Serbia 2026–2031 has been unveiled to the public. Between late March and early April 2026, the Ministry of Environmental Protection called upon business representatives, institutions, the scientific and expert communities, and other stakeholders to submit proposals and suggestions on the Draft Program text. A public consultation, regarding the said Draft Nature Protection Program and its accompanying action plan was held just one month later.

Several civil society organizations, as well as citizens, submitted dozens of comments and suggestions. Based on the public consultation report,[112] it can be concluded that there was no willingness to thoroughly review these inputs, nor to find a way to incorporate some of the proposals into the Program.

Although Coalition 27, through the participation of the Young Researchers of Serbia, had its representative in the Working Group for Drafting the Nature Protection Program, a review of the document that underwent public consultation revealed a number of shortcomings. The Program lacks ambition and activities related to modern trends – from digitalization and the responsible AI use in nature conservation to innovative conservation approaches. Too much focus is placed on procedural activities, nature restoration measures and actions are missing, funding is heavily donor-dependent, clear and robust

112 https://www.ekologija.gov.rs/informacije-od-javnog-znacaja/izvestaji-sa-javnih-rasprava/izvestaj-o-sprovedenoj-javnoj-raspravi-o-predlogu-programa-zastite-prirode-republike-srbije-za-period-2026-2031-godine-sa-akcionim-planom

mechanisms to curb sectoral pressures are absent, while the ability to measure actual effects on biodiversity remains constrained. Deadlines for key systemic measures are set too late, precise indicators and a clear division of responsibilities are missing in many cases, while the financial framework appears inadequate given the needs and scope of work.

The Nature Protection Program should also be aligned with the Working Version of the Environmental Protection Strategy of the Republic of Serbia, specifically Pillar IV titled Protection and Investment in Biodiversity and Ecosystems, which – despite consultations and a public hearing held in October 2024 – has not yet been adopted.

In April 2026, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management formed a Working Group to prepare the Draft Law on Amendments to the Law on Game and Hunting, appointing representatives of all relevant institutions and stakeholders from the hunting sector in the Republic of Serbia. The Working Group[113] is tasked with drawing up the text of the Draft Law and submitting it to the Ministry's Department for Normative Affairs and Harmonization of Regulations, with the deadline for completing the task being October 30, 2026. Looking at the composition of the Working Group, it can be observed that its members are exclusively focused on hunting, even though drafting this law requires a transparent process based on scientific knowledge, with the participation of experts in ecology, biology and nature conservation. It is necessary to ensure conditions for the full alignment of this law with the Birds Directive, the Habitats Directive, and other international obligations of the Republic of Serbia. For many years, the Bird Protection and Study Society of Serbia has insisted on removing certain bird species from the list of game species and placing them under permanent protection (closed season).

The Law on Fees for the Use of Public Goods (Official Gazette of RS, nos. 95/2018, 49/2019, 92/2023, 109/2025 and 35/2026) has once again been amended. In April 2026, following a proposal submitted by the Ministry of Environmental Protection, the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia

113 https://lovackisavezsrbije.rs/formirana-radna-grupa-za-pripremu-teksta-nacrta-zakona-o-izmenama-i-dopunama-zakona-o-divljaci-i-lovstvu/

adopted amendments to the said Law. Under the new rules, citizens residing in local self-government units where protected areas are located, as well as those from neighboring municipalities, are exempt from paying the fees.[114]

The Regulation on the Ecological Network has not yet been adopted, even though work on it has been ongoing since 2023. The representative of the Young Researchers of Serbia has been a member of the Working Group for Preparing the Draft Regulation on the Ecological Network since its inception. No activities related to the drafting of this document took place during the reporting period, as the last meeting of the Working Group was held in March 2024.

Declared protected areas (2025–2026)

During the reporting period, several regulations on the declaration of protected areas were adopted.

Protected areas			
Name of the area	Surface area/ha	Date of protection declaration	Status
Mount Jelica Area of Outstanding Characteristics	6,196	July 2025	New area
Zlatar Special Nature Reserve	7,865	November 2025	New area
Šalinac Grove Natural Monument	19	December 2025	Revision (minor decrease in surface area)
Prebreza – Paleontological Site Natural Monument	0.92	December 2025	Revision (minor increase in surface area)
Bosut Forests Special Nature Reserve	17,618	March 2026	New area
Tufa Accumulation near Tumane Monastery Nature Park	56	February 2026	Revision (an increase from 8.5 ha)
Areas for which a draft regulation on declaration has been prepared and a public hearing conducted			
Povlen and Sušica Canyon Area of Outstanding Characteristics	4,117	Public consultation held in November 2025	New area

114 https://www.parlament.gov.rs/upload/archive/files/lat/pdf/zakoni/14_saziv/153-26-lat..pdf

Areas for which the protection procedure has been initiated			
Gradac Area of Outstanding Characteristics	3,403	Procedure published in February 2026	Revision (an increase from 1,268 ha and an upgrade from category II to category I)
Veliki Rzav Special Nature Reserve	4,858	Procedure published in February 2026	New area (procedure was published also in August 2024)
Gornjak Gorge Area of Outstanding Characteristics	1,718	Procedure published in August 2025	New area
Vršac Mountains Area of Outstanding Characteristics	5,329	Procedure published in July 2025	Revision (modification of protection regime)

Table 1: Declared protected areas and areas for which a draft regulation on declaration has been prepared and a public consultation conducted in the period from May 2025 to May 2026

The Law on Placing Timber and Timber Products on the Market[115] (Official Gazette of RS, no. 96/2025) is important for nature protection as it transposes the EUTR (Regulation no. 995/2010 of the European Parliament and the Council laying down the obligations of operators who place timber and timber products on the market) and partially incorporates the latest EUDR elements (Regulation (EU) 2023/1115 of the European Parliament and the Council of May 31, 2023 on making available on the Union market and the export from the Union of certain commodities and products associated with deforestation and forest degradation and repealing Regulation (EU) No. 995/2010.).

By adopting this law, Serbia aligns its legislation also with EU regulations regarding the fight against illegal logging and illegal trade in timber and timber products, under Chapter 27. This also means that the forestry and wood industry sectors are required to prove, in addition to monitoring the legality of harvesting, that the timber does not originate from areas where deforestation has taken place. A by-law has also been adopted prescribing the form for the declaration of timber origin for all legal entities trading in timber and timber products in Serbia. In this way, the due diligence system under the EUTR has been implemented. Nevertheless, the form lacks geolocation data

115 https://pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/eli/rep/sgrs/skupstina/zakon/2025/96/5/reg

(GPS coordinates) showing where the timber was harvested, as mandated by the new EUDR regulation.

The Rulebook on Amendments to the Rulebook on Declaring Closed Hunting Season of the Protected Wild Game Species[116] (Official Gazette of RS, no. 9 of February 5, 2012, no. 31 of April 5, 2013, no. 55 of June 25, 2015, no. 67 of July 29, 2015, no. 75 of September 7, 2016, no. 92 of September 22, 2021, no. 6 of January 23, 2026) was jointly adopted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, and the Ministry of Environmental Protection following the harmonization of requests and proposals, with the aim of sustainable use and protection of game, conservation of biodiversity, and balanced management of hunting grounds in compliance with national and international standards. Hunting of grey partridge is suspended until October 14, 2027, and hunting of the European turtle dove until August 14, 2027. Exceptions are possible only in cases of prevention and suppression of infectious diseases, care or treatment of sick or injured wildlife, scientific research, or activities contributing to the conservation and replenishment of the population.

The Bird Protection and Study Society of Serbia views this as a positive yet temporary measure. The hunting of turtle doves and quail should be banned entirely and permanently, as populations of these birds in Serbia are in steady decline, and unregulated hunting – often using illegal methods and exceeding legal quotas – is widespread.

The Regulation on Benchmarks and Criteria for the Allocation of Incentive Funds for the Conservation and Protection of Biological, Landscape and Geological Diversity in 2026[117] (Official Gazette of RS, no. 6/2026) was adopted in January 2026, based on which a public call was announced for local self-government units on whose territory national parks and protected areas declared by an act of the Government are located.

116 https://minpolj.gov.rs/%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%B5-%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B5-%D0%B8-%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BF%D1%83%D0%BD%D0%B5-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%B8%D0%BB%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0-%D0%BE-%D0%BF%D1%80/

117 https://pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/uredba/2024/16/3/reg

Implementation of Regulations

The 2025 Report of the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection does not show complaints related to access to nature protection information as a separate category.

In September 2025, the Bird Protection and Study Society of Serbia requested information from relevant institutions regarding specific criminal activities targeting wild birds or wild animals. A total of 61 requests for access to information of public importance were sent to all appellate public prosecutor's offices, basic public prosecutor's offices, the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia and the Provincial Institute for Nature Conservation, and every relevant institution responded. However, the information received indicates that basic public prosecutor's offices keep inadequate records of cases involving wild birds or wild animals, resulting in certain cases being omitted.

The implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) follows already established rules and procedures. During the reporting period, there were publicly confirmed cases involving attempts to smuggle protected species across the Horgos[118] border crossing. The Bird Protection and Study Society of Serbia has filed reports regarding six cases involving CITES-listed species. The reports refer to attempts to sell African elephant tusks (Loxodonta africana), grizzly bear fur (Ursus americanus), brown bear fur (Ursus arctous), a snowy owl taxidermized specimen (Bubo scandiacus), several live individual snakes, and similar items.

Some progress has been achieved through Article 7 of the Law on Placing Timber and Timber Products on the Market, which stipulates that "Timber and timber products for the harvesting of which the state has issued a FLEGT or CITES permit, respectively, shall be considered legally harvested within the meaning of this law".

118 https://vojvodinauzivo.rs/na-horgosu-sprecen-pokusaj-krijumcarenja-zasticenih-ptica/

There are problems and challenges in implementing FLEGT (Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade), such as the administrative burden on small businesses and enterprises. Additionally, FLEGT requires digital transformation and the use of advanced tools in forestry for real-time data tracking, which currently faces technical hurdles in Serbia. Part of the problem also lies in imported timber and raw materials, as supply chain control and the verification of foreign licenses at the border require training of customs and inspection personnel.

The implementation of the Law on Nature Protection, in the part related to the drafting of the State of Nature Report, is not fully transparent and participatory. In February 2026, the Ministry of Environmental Protection reported[119] that the Government adopted the State of Nature Report for Serbia for the period from 2021 to 2023, and that this report confirms progress in improving the condition of protected areas, expanding surface areas under protection, and preserving biological, geological and landscape diversity.

This report is not publicly available, nor is it known whether it was drawn up by the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia in cooperation with the Provincial Institute for Nature Conservation and other expert and scientific institutions, as required by the Law on Nature Protection. Furthermore, it remains unknown whether the Autonomous Province and local self-government units have prepared the state of nature reports for their respective areas (Article 114 of the Law on Nature Protection).

According to publicly available data, no concrete activities were undertaken regarding the establishment of the European ecological network Natura 2000 in Serbia during the reporting period. Public access to information and involvement of the expert community in this process remain limited.

The introduction of alien wild species into a natural environment and the unintentional introduction of alien wild species and their hybrids into the natural environment across the territory of the country is governed by Articles 82 and

119 https://www.ekologija.gov.rs/saopstenja/vesti/izvestaj-o-stanju-prirode-u-srbiji-potvrdio-napredak-u-zastiti-i-unapredjenju-prirodnih-vrednosti

83 of the Law on Nature Protection. These provisions set out a mechanism for declaring invasive species on the territory of the Republic of Serbia, drawing upon recognized international criteria, scientific knowledge, and obligations arising from international treaties and documents.

Although the Republic of Serbia formally follows European guidelines on invasive species management, serious challenges remain: insufficient funding, poor inter-institutional coordination, a lack of field monitoring, the absence of a single national database, and reactive rather than proactive responses once the species has already spread.

In May 2025, the Ministry of Environmental Protection formed a Working Group for Preparing the Draft Order on Measures to Destroy or Prevent Further Spread of the Introduced Alien Wild Species Heracleum Sosnowski. The Order was adopted and entered into force in July 2025, nine years after the first record of the species' presence in Serbia.[120] The Order outlines measures to eradicate and stop the further spread of this species, recognized as one of the most dangerous alien plant species due to its invasive nature and the threat it poses to biodiversity and human health. This example is a good, but unfortunately, rare case of tackling the issue of invasive alien species seriously in Serbia.

The 2025 Report on the Work of Environmental Protection Inspectorate[121] shows that the inspection of legal entities continued throughout that year, bringing their operations to a high level of compliance with the law via administrative measures. The report notes that entities frequently reached out to inspectors for guidance regarding any uncertainties in their operations with a view to rectifying potential oversights and aligning their work with nature protection regulations. Nine national environmental protection inspectors took part in carrying out the 2025 Inspection Supervision Plan in the field of nature protection.

120 https://doiserbia.nb.rs/img/doi/0353-4537/2017/0353-45371716215S.pdf

121 https://www.ekologija.gov.rs/sites/default/files/inline-files/Godisnji%20Izvestaj%20o%20radu%20Inspekcije%20za%20zzs%20za%202025.pdf

In the course of 2025, inspectors from the Department for Soil Protection, Non-Ionizing Radiation and Biodiversity filed a total of 367 misdemeanor reports, one economic offense report, gave two testimonies, and 137 judgments were rendered.

Throughout 2025, as part of its inspections, the Environmental Protection Inspectorate in the field of nature protection temporarily confiscated strictly protected wild bird species from keepers who were found to be in violation of the law (birds in captivity). Depending on their health and physical condition, and based on expert assessment by the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia, the birds were released back to the wild.

Over the reporting period, the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia carried out multiple expert inspections. For instance, within the Vlasina Area of Outstanding Characteristics (AOC), special attention was paid to the most endangered sites around the Vlasina Rid settlement, where a large number of newly built and installed prefabricated holiday structures were observed. Experts have recorded serious environmental degradation caused by illegal road carving and pathways cutting, as well as damage to slopes driven by changes in terrain morphology. Ditches, gullies, and illegally installed water supply and electrical grid infrastructure were also observed, which further disrupted the natural appearance and ecosystem functions of this protected area.[122]

A joint inspection and expert supervision determined that the municipality of Surdulica, in its capacity of the manager of the Vlasina AOC, acted in line with its powers concerning detected irregularities involving site users. Between January and November 2025, the manager filed 46 requests for the initiation of misdemeanor proceedings, predominantly due to site users carrying out works without a decision on nature protection conditions.

Data from the inspection and expert supervision at the Vlasina AOC illustrate the complexity of managing protected areas in the Republic of Serbia and the challenges encountered by area managers.

122 https://www.piovlasina.org/Lat/Newsview.asp?ID=662

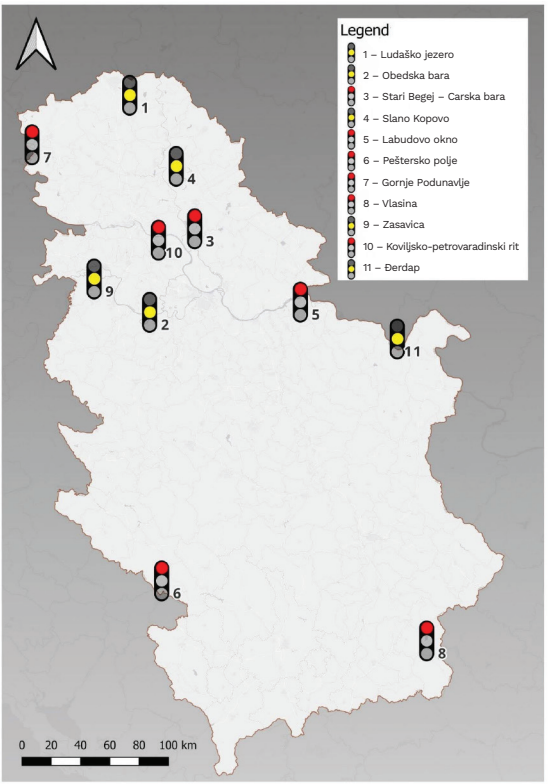
Certain wind farm construction projects also pose a major pressure on nature conservation, because decisions - such as the relocation of the meteorological radar to Gudurički vrh, the highest peak of the Vršac Mountains AOC, are made without full enforcement of the law and without taking into account the opinions of experts.[123]

During the reporting period, several protected area managers changed their legal form. These include Fruška gora National Park, Đerdap National Park, and Srbijašume, which are no longer pubic enterprises but limited liability companies.

While Coalition 27 lacks sufficient data to evaluate the impact of this transformation, it views the change as worthy of attention. For instance, Srbijašume manages 892,707 hectares of state forests and forest land, provides expert and advisory services across 1,221,265 hectares of privately-owned forests, manages 56 protected areas spanning 418,185 hectares, and operates 27 hunting grounds totaling 272,070 hectares. They also in charge of managing the Belgrade, Danube and Mlava fishing and protected areas.

The implementation of the Law on Nature Protection, with respect to drafting protected area management plans, has seen some progress. Throughout 2025 and 2026, management plans were drawn up for the Rajac Area of Outstanding Characteristics and the Ritovi donjeg Potisja Special Nature Reserve using a new methodology and a participatory approach. The IUCN and The Nature Conservancy, in cooperation with the Ministry of Environmental Protection, supported the managers of these two areas in the drafting process. This launched an initiative for the systemic improvement of the management plan quality, which was previously recognized as a major deficiency across the entire protected area management system. The main novelties in the new approach to drafting plans include a clearer structure of the plan's content, better definition of goals, activities and indicators with clear interrelations, and active stakeholder involvement through at least two consultative workshops.

123 https://staniste.org.rs/gradnja-radara-na-vrsackim-planinama-je-protivzakonita/



Map 1: Ramsar sites in the Republic of Serbia with threat factors

Over the course of 2025 and 2026, the Ministry of Environmental Protection announced public calls for the legal harvesting of protected species of flora, fauna, and fungi, with permits granted exclusively to registered gatherers and legal entities with no prior nature protection violations. The enforcement of regulations was carried out by the environmental protection inspectors, border control and customs authorities, the police, and the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia. Illegal harvesting of certain species and unauthorized trade remain problematic. For instance, Serbia has only a handful of registered businesses that gather and sell truffles and truffle-based products, yet an estimated 3,000 to 5,000 people actively hunt and gather truffles. Estimates by the Mycological Association of Serbia indicate that as much as 70% of the truffle trade takes place in the grey economy.[124]

124 https://simptom.rs/forbs-srbija-siva-ekonomija-i-nezakonit-sistem-sakupljanja-tartufa-u-srbiji/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

The implementation of the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance – the Ramsar Convention – faces a series of challenges. The Bird Protection and Study Society of Serbia analyzed all eleven Ramsar sites in the Republic of Serbia, based on eight criteria: legal protection, poaching, illegal fishing, urbanization, pollution, climate change impact, overgrowth and habitat destruction. The results show that no area is color-coded green, which would indicate the presence of only one threat factor. Areas with two or three threat factors are marked in yellow, while areas with four or more threat factors are marked in red. Of particular concern is the fact that six Ramsar sites exhibit more than four threat factors.

These findings point to the deteriorating state of wetlands in Serbia, where conservation efforts remain ineffective and yield poor results, with estimates suggesting that these ecosystems could face irreversible destruction in just a few years.

A positive example – law enforcement and cooperation between organizations and institutions in cases of wildlife poisoning

In May 2026, a case of poisoning involving a strictly protected cinereous vulture (Aegypius monachus) - a specimen included in the international program for the return of this species to the Balkans - was documented near Svrljig.

Following a swift response by ornithologists from the Bird Protection and Study Society of Serbia, and excellent cooperation with the police and the prosecutor's office, the suspect was identified, an attempt to destroy evidence was foiled, and the perpetrator was arrested. The arrested person faces three criminal charges, and the dead bird specimens were sent to the Institute of Forensic Medicine in Niš for analysis.

This case demonstrates that effective cooperation between civil society organizations and relevant institutions is one of the prerequisites for successfully combatting illegal activities targeting strictly protected species.

During the reporting period, the state of twenty fish ponds within twelve Internationally Important Bird Areas (IBA) was analyzed. These fish ponds are part of the national ecological network and are planned to be included in the European Natura 2000 ecological network. Out of the total number, only twelve fish ponds remain active, mostly operating at a reduced capacity. Production has been completely wiped out in as many as eight large fish ponds, resulting in the loss of 5,267 hectares of prime habitat for wild birds and other important species. Furthermore, at least 3,000 hectares of lake areas are not currently used for fish farming because they are dry or plowed over.

The management of strictly protected species has been improved through the implementation of the Brown Bear (Ursus arctos L.) Population Management Plan in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2025 to 2033. For the purpose of implementing this plan, a Working Group, i.e., an Expert Commission, was established. In September 2025, the Ministry of Environmental Protection issued a Decision Appointing a Special Team of Expert Natural and/or Legal Persons for Interventions Involving Live Brown Bear Specimens in the Wild or in Captivity.

A positive step forward in protecting species from poisoning is the EU for Sustainable Plant Protection in Serbia project, implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), with financial support from the European Union. Its main goals are to strengthen the implementation of national legislation on pesticide management, upgrade registration and monitoring systems for plant protection products, build professional capacities at different levels, as well as raise public awareness of pesticide risks and eco-friendly alternatives in line with European Union standards. This project is part of a broader process of aligning national agricultural and environmental policies with the European Green Deal, the Farm to Fork Strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy, targeting a 50 percent reduction in the overall use and risk of pesticides.

In application of the Regulation on Benchmarks and Criteria for the Allocation of Incentive Funds for the Conservation and Protection of Biological, Landscape and Geological Diversity in 2026, the Ministry of Environmental Protection

has announced a public call for the allocation of incentive funds, totaling RSD 300,000,000.00, to finance works and other costs, stipulated by the Law on Nature Protection and this Regulation.

The Ministry of Environmental Protection received a total of 33 applications from local governments. Even though funds were designated exclusively for projects to be implemented in territories with national parks and protected areas of national interest, the City of Novi Sad received support for the construction of the main water supply pipeline in Veternik.[125] Total funds for the implementation of this project amount to RSD 229,817,239.00, of which RSD 183,853,791.20 is provided by the Ministry of Environmental Protection, and the remaining RSD 45,963,447.80 is covered from the budget of the City of Novi Sad. The project includes the construction of a water supply network in the settlement of Veternik, with a length of 13,210 m, featuring 712 planned household connections spanning a total length of 3,154.5 m. The objective is a continuous and safe public water supply.[126]

While not disputing the need to ensure a "continuous and safe public water supply", the question arises as to whether a fund intended for the conservation and protection of biological, landscape and geological diversity is the right source of financing for such a project? In addition, the Regulation stipulates: "Incentive funds are allocated to local governments based on submitted programs and projects in accordance with permitted works and activities defined by the Law on Nature Protection, the Law on National Parks, and the protected area declaration act."

Financing

Financing in the field of Nature Protection is covered in more detail in the chapter Financing in the Field of Environmental Protection and Climate Change.

125 List of approved projects

126 https://novisad.rs/lat/sredstvima-grada-novog-sada-i-ministarstva-zastite-zivotne-sredine-gradice-se-magistralni-vodovod-u

Recommendations

Strategic and Legislative Framework

1. Draft and adopt a new Law on Nature Protection in line with the EU legislation, ratified international agreements, good practices in the field, and the specific needs related to nature protection in Serbia, through a transparent and inclusive process. Regulate the appropriate assessment procedure for the ecological network, define biosphere reserve as a category of protected area, and prescribe competencies and key conditions for managing such areas through the said Law.
2. Permanently ban hunting of quail, turtle dove, and partridge. Permanently ban hunting of common pochard (Aythia ferina), garganey (Spatula querquedula), bean goose (Anser fabalis) and greater white-fronted goose (Anser albifrons). Permanently protect the northern goshawk (Accipiter gentilis).
3. Amend the Rulebook on the Declaration and Protection of Strictly Protected Wild Species of Plants, Animals, Fungi, and Mushrooms and the Rulebook on Declaring Closed Hunting Season for the Protected Wild Game Species in order fully transpose the provisions of the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive.
4. Draft and adopt a protocol to precisely determine the sequence and manner of action of competent authorities upon the discovery of cases of poisoning, as well as other cases of illegal activities against wild species. Establish an expert cross-sectoral working group to draw up a national action plan for the prevention of wildlife poisoning.
5. Form an inter-ministerial working group for protected areas and an ecological network to coordinate work on the development of planning documents, protection studies, management plans and area protection acts.
6. Adopt the Regulation on Appropriate Assessment and enable its proper implementation.

7. Align the Criminal Code with the Environmental Crime Directive in the section concerning wildlife trafficking.

Implementation of Regulations

8. Enhance the capacities of the nature protection sector within the Ministry of Environmental Protection and institutes for nature conservation (both at the provincial and national levels), by increasing the number of qualified personnel and technical resources.
9. Continue building the capacities of the police, inspectorates, prosecution and judiciary to enforce regulations related to protecting species and habitats, in cooperation with professional civil society organizations. Furthermore, strengthen the capacities of the Unit for the Suppression of Environmental Crime and Environmental Protection, and its coordination with other sectors.
10. Improve the planning and implementation of inspection supervision over protected areas, i.e., ecological network sites.
11. Provide free access to the online database comprising decisions on nature protection conditions issued by the Ministry of Environmental Protection of the Republic of Serbia and the institutes for nature conservation to all stakeholders.
12. Improve cooperation with stakeholders regarding the implementation of international agreements in the field of nature protection through regular information exchange and consultations.
13. Form a National Council for the Natura 2000 ecological network in order to ensure inter-sectoral cooperation and continuous institutional support.
14. Conduct a protected area management effectiveness assessment, establish mechanisms for monitoring management effectiveness, and ensure public access to reports.
15. Create appropriate, targeted guides for more detailed explanations of the appropriate assessment procedure and practical examples

from practice (preferably, illustrations of good and bad practices). Familiarize stakeholders with the appropriate assessment procedure using the guide and supporting materials.

16. Provide public access to the electronic Central Register of Protected Natural Assets and develop its functionalities so that each protected area contains, inter alia, a ten-year management plan, annual management programs, and reports on the implementation of the annual management program.

17. Establish cooperation with the Ministry of Tourism and Youth to prevent foreign tourists from being misled regarding hunting opportunities in Serbia, as well as to improve the control of commercial hunting, especially in cases involving foreign hunters.

18. Accelerate the establishment of functional Stakeholder Councils in protected areas, and in addition to existing recommendations on Council composition, introduce a requirement for adequate representation of women and youth.

19. The Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office should issue a binding instruction to basic public prosecutor's offices prohibiting the application of the principle of opportunity (deferred prosecution) to wildlife-related criminal offenses, as frequent use of deferred prosecution has been observed even in cases where the perpetrator's guilt is clearly established, particularly regarding illegal wildlife hunting, trafficking and poisoning.

Financing

20. Continue regular financing of the activities aimed at establishing the ecological network of the Republic of Serbia and Natura 2000, with full and regular reporting on the activities carried out and the funds spent.

21. Provide greater financial resources from the Budget of the Republic of Serbia for managing protected areas, including constant and appropriate funds for hiring new wildlife rangers in protected areas, their training and procurement of necessary equipment.

NATURE PROTECTION

POISONING, POACHING AND ILLEGAL BIRD TRAPPING ARE WIDESPREAD PROBLEMS IN SERBIA

200 DISCOVERED CASES OF BIRD POISONING IN SERBIA

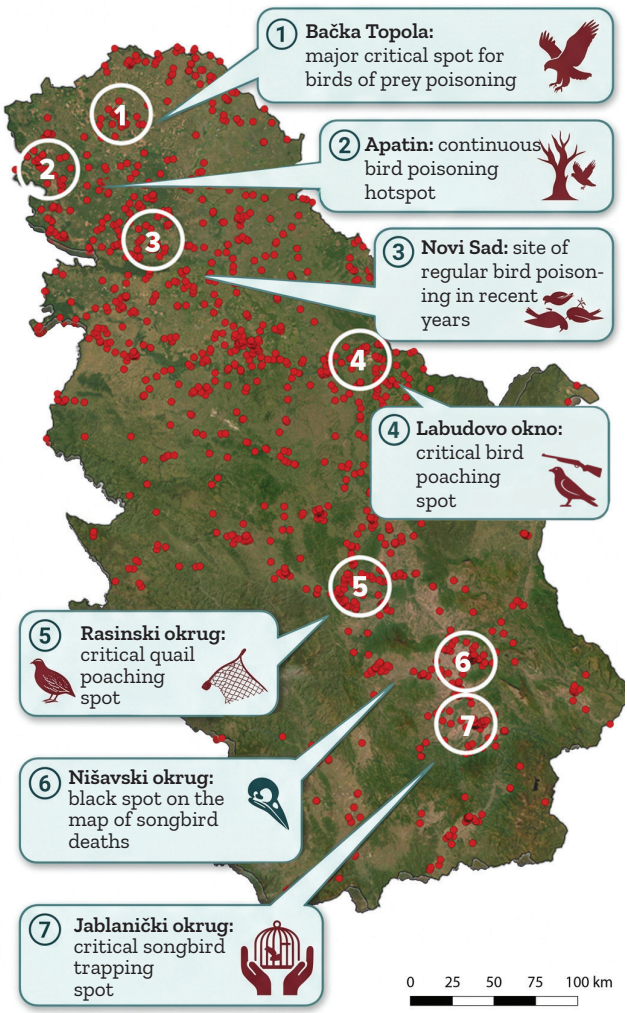
1,353 BIRD FATALITIES

779 DISCOVERED CASES OF BIRD POACHING IN SERBIA

1,548 BIRD FATALITIES

418 DISCOVERED CASES OF BIRD TRAPPING IN SERBIA

1,053 BIRD FATALITIES



Data from the Bird Protection and Study Society of Serbia – adapted for the report