

Finding space for strict protection in Europe

But first we need to discuss the meaning of “strict protection”!

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source: WWF, Matei Plesca

What does strict protection mean

An overview of different policy definitions in the USA and globally

USA	Wilderness Areas (NWPS) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large • preserve wilderness 	Regulation of human activities & general access
	National Parks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • protect critical habitats • preserve low-impact recreational opportunities 	

IUCN (global)	Ia Strict nature reserve Protect biodiversity, geological/ geomorphological features, conservation values	Regulation of activities and limited access  Regulated activities but compatible with spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational purposes Access: allowed
	Ib Wilderness area <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • large • unmodified or slightly modified areas • retaining their natural character and influence 	
	II National parks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • large • natural or near-natural areas, • protecting large-scale ecological processes with characteristic species + ecosystems 	

What does strict protection mean in the EU?

European Commission Staff Working Document Protected area designation & Strict protection

Focus:	Regulation:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Large area to support undisturbed natural processes and function• Areas of high biodiversity value or potential• Significant areas of other carbon-rich ecosystems, such as peatlands, grasslands, wetlands, mangroves and seagrass meadows• All primary and old growth forests• Species and habitats protected under the Nature Directives that benefit from wilderness management• Ecosystems that provide important ecosystem services or those that need increased resilience to adapt to climate change• Areas which are critical for certain habitats or species, such as relic sites or areas which are essential for the life or reproduction of endangered species	<p>Minimum disturbance, with some allowance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Activities necessary for the restoration of the natural values <p>Active management that sustains or enhances natural processes, such as semi-natural grasslands or some peatlands</p> <p>Limited and well-controlled activities that either do not interfere with natural processes or enhance them will be allowed.</p> <p>Such activities may, in many cases, include scientific research, natural disaster prevention (e.g. wildfires), invasive alien species control, non-intrusive activities and installations, non-intrusive and strictly controlled recreational activities, when such activities are compatible with the conservation objectives of the areas on the basis of a case-by-case assessment</p>

Conventional protection: Condition

All Natura 2000 sites are tied to a clear conservation objective with the aim to keep or restore good ecological condition

Strict protection:

Conservation that only works without making compromises

Room for interpretation: Conservation decisions are driven by values and assumptions

We want to protect what matters to us – but what is that exactly?

Species
&
Habitats

Wilderness

Ecosystems

Processes



Source: O'Connor et al, 2021 (Science); Illustration by Camille Martinez-Almoyna;

Selection criteria will make a difference when identifying priorities

Multiple criteria can be combined with weighting to reflect relative importance



source: Endemic oro_Mediterranean heaths with gorse; google image result from EUNIS factsheet

Red List status; conservation status
(bad or declining)



Source: google image result from Wikipedia

Iconic species or landscapes that we value for their appearance or function



Source: <https://iucngreenlist.org/sites/arcipelago-toscana-national-park/>

Where additional actions or regulations make the biggest difference

Our preliminary scenarios

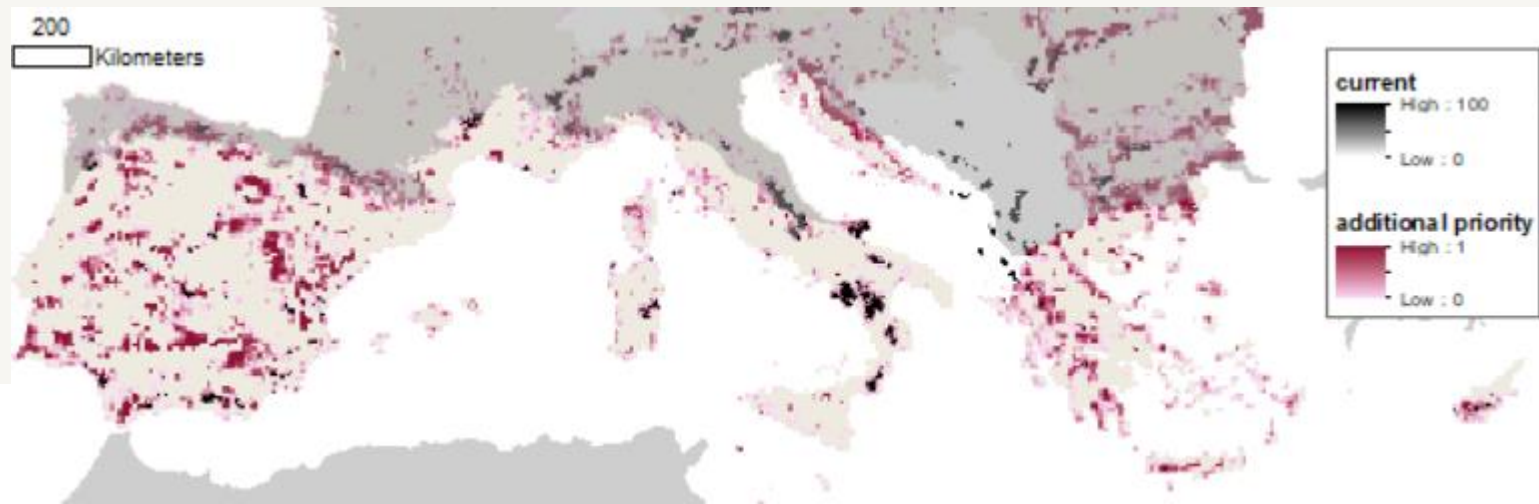
Which priority areas emerge for the 10% that complement existing strict PA, focusing on biodiversity in need?

Included: all species & habitats that are assessed as **threatened** in the Red Lists, and **U1/U2** in Art 17.

Optimal 10%
uncompromised focus on species and habitats



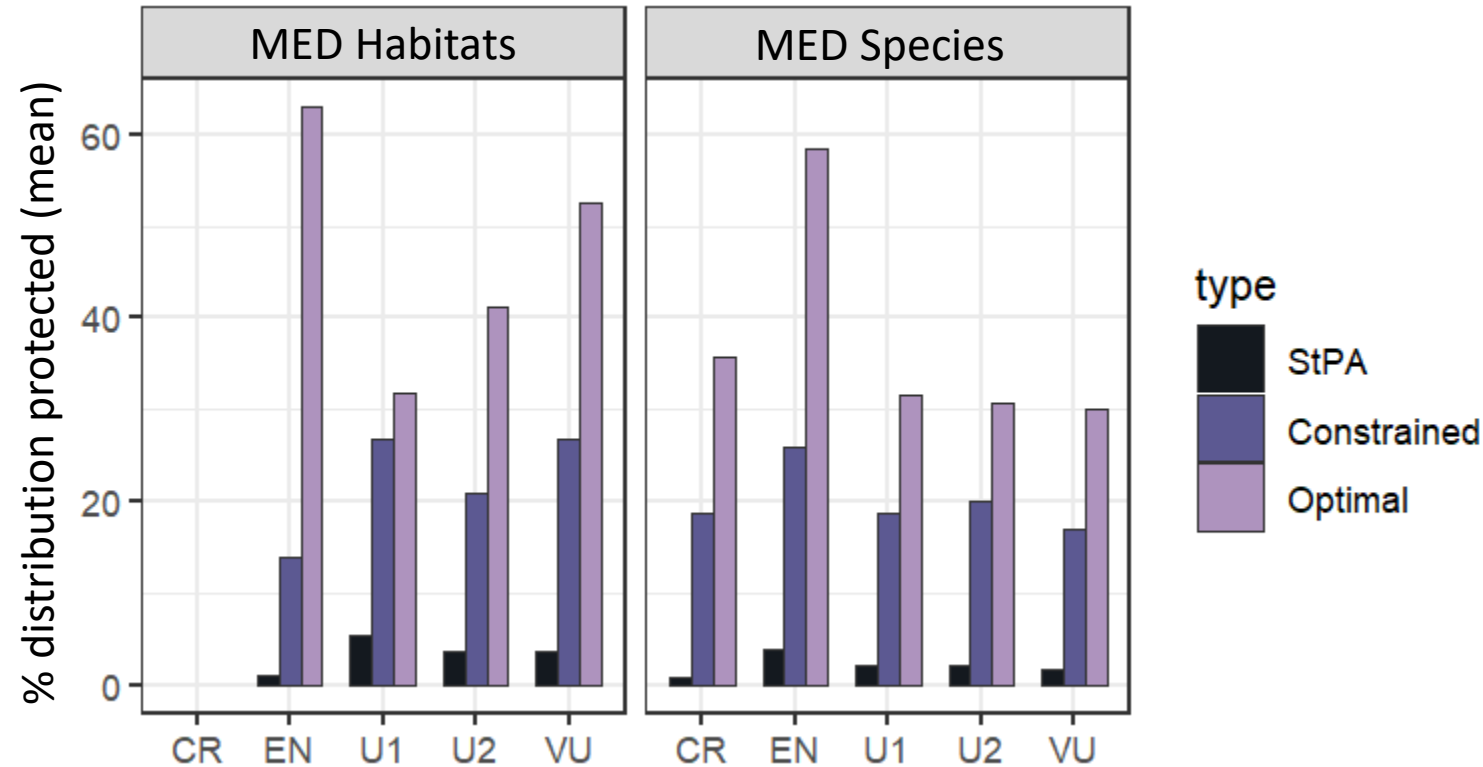
Constrained 10%
minimizing costs & only upgrading existing PA



Implications for species and habitats in the Mediterranean

How much of the Mediterranean range of species & habitats is represented in the current strict PA and in different scenarios for strict PA expansion?

Biodiversity	Conservation status	Constrained scenario	Optimal scenario
<i>Sitta whiteheadi</i>	VU, endemic to Corsica	15 %	100 %
<i>Silene velutina</i>	NT + U1; only in FR & IT	5 %	100 %
Habitat 9570 (<i>Tetraclinis articulata</i> forests)	Annex I priority habitat, only present in ES & MT	5 %	100 %



Conclusion: the constrained scenario (selecting only sites with low cost & upgrade from current protection), leads to much lower ecological gains

Typology of strict protection

2 main axes of uncertainty for a clear definition / understanding of what "strict protection" means

