

Saving Europe's last primary and old-growth forest in Romania

Beneficiary: Euronatur - Stiftung Europäisches Naturerbe

Location: Romania, Europe

Grant Cycle: 2021 - 2024

Type of Grant: three-year program support

Environment & Biodiversity Protection

Website: euronatur.org

EuroNatur protects large-scale natural landscapes as well as ecologically valuable cultural landscapes throughout Europe. The organisation has been working on the protection of virgin, primary and old-growth forests in Romania since 2016.

Romania still hosts about two-thirds of Europe's last primary and old-growth forests. These forests are of outstanding value: they are biodiversity hot spots and home to the largest populations of brown bears, wolves and lynx in Europe. In addition, they host a huge number of endemic species and serve as important carbon sinks. Despite their high ecological value, Romanian forests are highly threatened by illegal logging and many species are directly threatened by the loss of their habitat and the ecological connectivity of their habitats. One major issue that needs to be urgently addressed is that it is unknown where exactly Romania's primary and old-growth forests are located. Thus, further mapping, identification and validation work is needed alongside advocacy work to ensure Romanian authorities use the provided data to secure the protection of these valuable forests. The goal of the project supported by the **Nando and Elsa Peretti Foundation** in 2021 was to initiate the necessary legal changes on a national and EU level respectively, in order to foster a mobilised civil society and comprehensive protection of the Romanian forests, especially primary and old-growth forests. This goal is being pursued in partnership with Romanian civil society and, in particular, with the Agent Green Association, a non-profit NGO for environmental protection and biodiversity conservation founded in 2009 in Romania. Primarily

established to protect the Retezat Mountains, one of the last intact forest landscapes in the temperate climate of Europe, Agent Green evolved over time and now carries out investigations, scientific approaches, strategic cooperation and effective campaigns targeted at bringing about positive and lasting change for nature. Changes are needed on many levels to advance the protection of primary and old-growth forests in Romania. These include the adaptation of national legislation (e.g. the forestry code) as well as their proper implementation, better management in place and more transparency in the forest industry. This also includes a push for Romania to adapt to the requests of the EU Biodiversity Strategy. One of the main areas of work concerned is the mobilisation of a passionate, persistent and peaceful civil society movement in support of the protection of primary and old-growth forests at a national level. High pressure from the Romanian population is an important step to move politicians to tackle the issue of forest destruction and the corruption around it. Media play a major role in creating political pressure. EuroNatur thus wanted to continue to make sure the drama of forest destruction in Romania and the cruel methods of illegal logging are made public and that main stakeholders are aware of the situation and become active. This includes generating reports and articles in media (radio, newspapers, magazines, online etc.) but also producing original content like videos.