

What is NATURA 2000 ?



Useful information for land owners, residents and tourism providers in NATURA 2000 sites

LCTA "Lauku ceļotājs"
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What is NATURA 2000?

NATURA 2000 is a network of nature protected areas of European importance. It has been established to protect rare and endangered plant and animal species and their habitats (biotopes) in Europe.

In Latvia the network was based upon the existing nature protected areas, adding 122 new sites. It means that every EU country develops its own system of NATURA2000 sites as a part of the whole NATURA2000 system. Thus, NATURA 2000 sites are nature protected areas of European scale and importance.

Human beings can also be an important and essential part of nature, through implementing long term, well considered management measures targeted at conservation of territories and protection of species, for, example, taking care for overgrown meadows, restoration of endangered species etc. The status of NATURA2000 does not automatically mean termination of all economic activities – it rather means well thought over activities, including economic, at the same time respecting the “needs” of the natural values which are of European significance – biological diversity, species, biotopes, landscape, etc.

In most cases, visitors are welcome to NATURA2000 sites – those visitors respecting the natural as well as human born heritage. Many NATURA2000 sites are important environmental cognitive objects.



What does the term NATURA 2000 mean?

Natura means „nature” in Latin, and 2000 is the year by which the system was supposed to be built. The term NATURA is understood the same in all countries and recognised as a “brand” of protected nature areas.

Sometimes, for the sake of convenience, the sites are called simply the „NATURA sites” or “NATURA”.

What is the aim of the NATURA2000 network of sites?

The main aim of the NATURA2000 sites network in Europe is protection of rare and endangered plant and animal species and their habitats. It is necessary, because economic activities during the 20th century have influenced and even destroyed innumerable natural values – ecosystems, biotopes and species.



What is a biotope?

A biotope is a territory, formed as a result of nature processes or human activities; it has its unique, specific conditions and elements of animate and inanimate nature. A biotope can be flood-land meadows, bog, overgrowing lakes, black alder swamp etc. Especially protected are those biotopes which are rare or endangered through human activities, e.g., grey dunes, which are nearly lost in Europe.



How many species and biotopes of European importance are protected in the NATURA2000 sites?

Of the species and biotopes, listed in the EU directives, there are 20 plant, 20 invertebrate, 5 mammal, 3 reptile, 11 fish, 70 bird species and 60 diverse types of biotopes protected in Latvia.



What bird species are protected in the NATURA 2000 sites?

Several bird species are protected, like black stork, white tailed eagle, golden eagle, eagle-owl, black woodpecker, wood grouse, black grouse, etc. There are records of about 1/3 of protected bird species seen in Latvia! Latvia is located on the migrating route from Baltic to White sea therefore in spring and fall thousands and thousands of diverse bird species can be observed on the sea shore (as example Cape Kolka, several lagoon lakes) and other places. Lake Pape (lagoon lake) has been observed 241 bird species 43 of which are included in the Red Data Book of Latvia (list of extinct species)



What are the protected area types of the NATURA 2000 sites?

In Latvia, there are the following types of the NATURA 2000 sites: nature reserves, national parks, nature restrictions, nature parks, protected landscape areas, protected sea territories, nature monuments and micro restrictions. The latter are small-size territories (e.g., a part in a forest) that are designated to protect and maintain places where protected species or biotopes are found.

Today there are 327 NATURA 2000 sites in Latvia (4 nature reserves, 4 national parks, 240 nature restrictions, 37 nature parks, 9 protected landscape areas, 7 protected sea territories (will be established in year 2010) 9 nature monuments and 24 micro restrictions). Their total space is ~12 % of the country's territory. (see picture 2, page 9)



Are protected nature areas and NATURA 2000 sites the same thing?

All the NATURA 2000 sites are also protected nature areas. However, not all the protected areas are designated as NATURA2000 sites. Today in Latvia there are 681 protected nature areas, and 327 of which are NATURA 2000 sites. The brand sign for nature protected areas is white oak leaf on green background



Which are the largest and the smallest NATURA 2000 sites in Latvia?

The largest NATURA 2000 site in Latvia is the Gauja National Park (91 745 ha). The smallest sites are particular nature monuments (bedrock outcrops, spring etc) and micro restrictions.



Can I advertise and show to visitor rare plant and animal species found in the NATURA2000 sites?

Information about habitats and biotopes in the protected areas can be disseminated only with written approval from the administration of the respective protected area, or, where there is no one, with written approval of the Latvian Environment, Geology and Meteorology Centre. Namely, it is illegal to advertise rare species and protected biotopes in tourist literature and/or expose them as tourist attractions during the visit.



How can I know that I have entered a protected area or a NATURA 2000 site?

The protected areas are marked with the sign– an oak leaf on green. The symbol of NATURA2000 sites is shown in the photo. Because of the large numbers of the NATURA2000 sites, their borders are not marked everywhere.



Who is responsible for administration of the NATURA2000 sites?

The largest NATURA 2000 sites – nature reserves, national parks have administrations, and one of their main functions is to govern and manage these territories. Other protected nature areas and NATURA2000 sites are managed by the Nature Conservation Agency (www.dap.gov.lv) under the supervision of the Ministry of Environment. The Nature conservation system in Latvia has been through major reconstruction in 2009. All administration offices of Natura2000 and nature protected areas are structural units of Nature Conservation Agency now.



Where to find general information on the NATURA 2000 sites?

The information on the NATURA 2000 sites can be found in the web site of the Nature Conservation Agency www.dap.gov.lv and in the web site of the Ministry of Environment of Latvia www.vidm.gov.lv as well as in the regional environment boards or administrations of the NATURA 2000 sites. There is useful information on about 100 nature protected areas available on the website of Latvian Country Tourism Association Lauku celotajs (www.celotajs.lv) – description of the territory, tourism offer, photos, and maps.



What are the principal restrictions to economic activities in the NATURA2000 sites?

Depending on the aim and category of a particular NATURA2000 site, and depending on the location of your property and activities, restrictions may vary – starting from total prohibition of economic activity (in nature reserves, nature reserve or nature restricted zones) to minimal restrictions in protected landscape areas in the neutral zones of the national parks.



What popular tourist areas in Latvia are designated as NATURA 2000 sites?

Most of NATURA 2000 sites in Latvia can be freely visited, except nature reserves. Many tourism attractions as nature monuments, landscapes, species, developed infrastructure etc., are found there. The most popular tourist destinations in the NATURA2000 sites in Latvia are the national parks of Gauja, Ķemeri and Slītere, the Pape and Engure nature parks, the hilly landscapes of Talsi, the Abava river ancient valley, the nature parks of Tērvete, Piejūras („Seaside”), Daugavas loku („the curves of the River Daugava”), the protected landscape areas of Veclaicene, Vestiena, Augšzeme, Augšdaugava, etc.



Is there visitor friendly infrastructure provided in all NATURA 2000 sites?

Part of all NATURA2000 sites have the necessary infrastructure – nature trails, active tourism routes, boardwalks, viewing towers, resting-places, waste bins, toilets, signposts, information posters, tourist camp sites, available services of environment guides, etc. However, it is not necessary to increase the numbers of visitors in all areas – some of them should be „reserved” for natural processes to take place! For example, there are 4 nature reserves in Latvia where visitors are not allowed. However, with previous appointment, it is possible to visit the Teiči nature reserve and walk Sildu nature trail, only with the guide from the administration of the nature reserve.



How can people find information on NATURA 2000 sites in a particular area of interest?

Information on the NATURA2000 sites in Latvia and their respective location by former administrative regions can be found in the web site of the Nature Conservation Agency of Latvia (see <http://www.dap.gov.lv/?objid=257>).

Tourism related information may be found on the web site of LCTA Lauku celotājs web section “Worth Seeing” – NATURA2000 (www.celotajs.lv)

For example, in Valmiera region, you will find several nature restricted areas – the Lake Burtnieks meadows, the Oleru marsh, the Rūjas floodlands, the Zilaiskalns hill, the Salaca valley nature park, as well as some parts of the Gauja national park and the North Gauja protected landscape areas are in this administrative region.

What benefits can I get as a rural tourism provider or property owner in the NATURA2000 sites?

The first advantage is the little transformed nature, the quality of natural environment, landscape, nature monuments, plant and animal species and other natural values which are found in your territory and the nearest location (and in Latvia in general), and are extinct in Europe, therefore they are an attraction to local and foreign guests. You have to know how to package them in a tourism product doing it in a highly responsible and sustainable way! Another advantage is that land owners and self-governments have a possibility to apply for EU funding for management of the NATURA2000 sites. Thirdly, those land owners, subject to restrictions of economic activities due to the NATURA2000 status of their property, can apply for compensation according to legislation. More information in <http://www.dap.gov.lv/?objid=1256>.

What is the legislation on designating, management and other use (incl. tourism) of the NATURA2000 sites? Where to find them?

Laws and regulations concerning nature protection are accessible from the homepage of the Latvian Ministry of Environment: http://www.vdm.gov.lv/lat/likumdosana/normativie_akti/?doc=3151

Individual regulations on protection and use (by the Cabinet of Ministers) prescribe the protection and use as well as functional zoning of each particular territory.



Nature protection plans (accessible from the homepage of the Nature Conservation Agency) are recommendations, defining management activities planned in each particular territory, admissible and inadmissible actions, incl. in tourism.

It means that residents and those planning tourism related activities in the NATURA2000 sites must be aware of the requirements and conditions set in the above documents.

What NATURA 2000 territories as attractive tourism sites are in the other Baltic countries?

The most popular NATURA 2000 sites in Estonia are the national parks of Vilsandi, Matsalu, Karula and Lahemaa, the Endla and Nigula reserves, the Haanja and Otepää nature parks, etc.

In Lithuania – the Curonian spit, the national parks of Žemaitija, Aukštaitija and Dzūkija, and many regional parks (more than 30) – Birži, Kurtuvėnai, Asveja, Nemunas Delta, Nemunas loops, Sartu etc.

Is there an entrance fee to visit NATURA 2000 site?

There is no united decision in national or Europe level to set an entrance fee to visit national parks, nature parks, protected landscape area, nature restricted areas etc. In some cases there is entrance fee for use of infrastructure (for example - parking), service (guide, equipment rental etc) or visit of facilitated area (Līgatne nature trail, the Turaida Museum Reserve etc.) applied from the management body of the territory. Most of water tourist camping sites are free of use on the River Gauja, meanwhile on the River Salaca these sites are privately owned and the owners might apply some fee. Products and services provided by the SMEs – accommodation, catering, boat rental, guide service, transportation etc. are paid services.

Where in the internet to find information on how to develop tourist activities in environment friendly and sustainable way in nature protected areas and NATURA2000?

The experts of the LCTA “Lauku ceļotājs” have established website macies.celotajs.lv where anyone free of charge can find and use educating information about the nature friendly tourism management in Natura2000 sites and other nature protected areas.



What is allowed in NATURA2000 territories?

It is not truth that one is not allowed to do anything in NATURA2000 sites even pick up fallen branch from the trail or cut shrubs for viewing platform etc. National parks in Latvia (except nature reserve zones) for example are open to hikers, plant, animal and landscape watchers, berry and mushroom hunters, swimmers, sunbathers, bicyclists and boaters. Mechanized motor vehicles are allowed only on general use roads. It applies also for nature parks, protected landscape areas and in most cases also for nature restricted areas.



What are the most frequent restrictions for tourism in the NATURA 2000 sites?

Restrictions can refer to specific activities and/or territories (where visiting is not allowed or restricted to particular seasons of the year). They can also depend on the nature protection category of a particular NATURA2000 site.

The following things are useful to remember when visiting NATURA2000 sites and protected nature areas, e.g., nature parks:

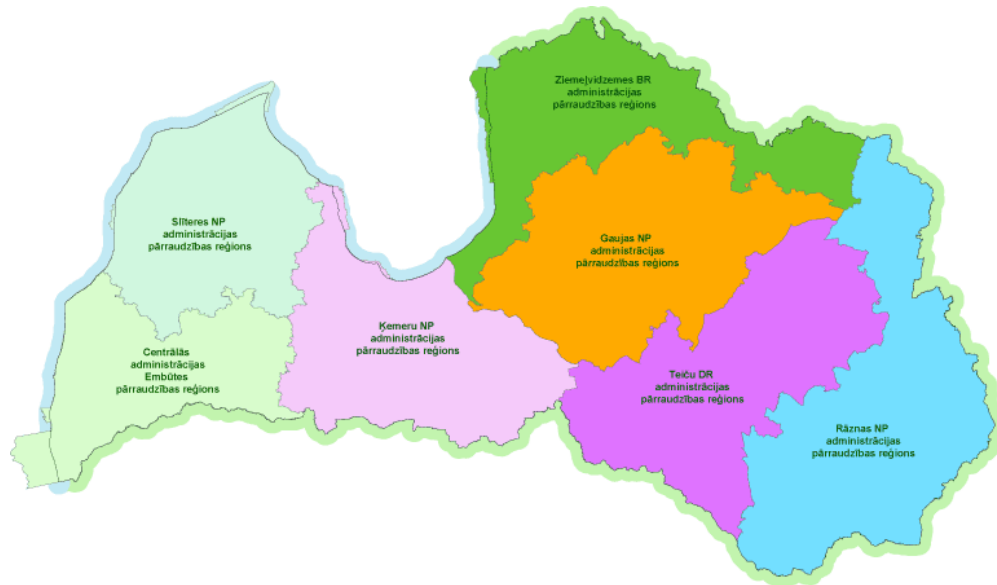
- The following is allowed exclusively in designated areas:
 - o Parking of vehicles and trailers
 - o Tenting
 - o Camping
 - o Making bonfires
- Driving all kinds of mechanical vehicles and horse drawn carts is allowed only on the roads. It is not allowed to drive off road in the forest and on farmlands;
- Any such activities are forbidden that leave or could possibly leave a significant negative impact on natural biotopes, species of wild animals, plants and mushrooms and their habitats or reproduction, rest and feeding of wild animals and birds, as well as gathering during the periods of migration;
- Without written permission from the administration of the territory, it is not allowed to:
 - o Organise open air mass sports and entertainment events with more than 50 participants;
 - o Install educational, recreational and tourism infrastructure objects;
 - o Establish new enclosed open air wild animal gardens/farms;
 - o Organise car, bike, motorboat and water skiing races, as well as rallies, test or training rides.

In respect to all above mentioned it requires written approval of responsible branch office of Nature Conservation Agency to develop infrastructure for public recreation area, tourism, environmental cognition or to organize big public event. (See picture 1)

Behave with responsibility towards the culture and nature values and local residents when visiting the NATURE 2000 sites!

How to know responsible branch office of Nature Conservation Agency to coordinate the action?

The territory of Latvia has been divided into 7 regions having one of former management bodies of NATURA2000 or nature protected areas responsible for the whole region (see Picture 1). As an example, if you want to develop tourist trail in the Ancient Abava River Valley Nature Park it has to be agreed with administration of Slitere National Park or if it is geographically closer - with administration of Kemeru National Park. The map below can be found in the website of Nature Conservation Agency.



Picture 1. Source: Nature Conservation Agency: <http://daba.gov.lv/index.php?objid=1990>



Picture 2. The NATURA 2000 sites in Latvia marked green. Source: Nature Conservation Agency (<http://www.dap.gov.lv/?objid=257>)

Useful information:

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2. Biotopu rokasgrāmata. I. Kabucis. Rīga, 2000, p 160;
3. Dabas takas Latvijā. Tourism Map. LCTA „Lauku ceļotājs”, 2006;
4. Jautājumi un atbildes zemes īpašniekiem īpaši aizsargājamās dabas teritorijās, mikroliegumos, jūras piekrastē, upju un ezeru aizsargjoslās. Nature Conservation Agency of Ministry of Environment, 2006, p 55;
5. Padomi lauku tūrisma uzņēmējiem dabas resursu saudzīgā izmantošanā. Group of authors. LCTA „Lauku ceļotājs”. Rīga, 2002, p 42;
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7. Smaļinskis J. Vides, sociālie un ekonomiskie aspekti lauku tūrisma ilgtspējīgas attīstības nodrošināšanā. Situācija, analīze, priekšlikumi. LCTA „Lauku ceļotājs”, 2006, p 83;
8. Smaļinskis J. Vadlīnijas un piemēri dabas resursu – dabas objektu, biotopu, sugu un teritoriju iekļaušanai ilgtspējīga un videi draudzīga tūrisma piedāvājuma popularizēšanā”. LCTA „Lauku ceļotājs”, 2006, p 79;
9. www.celotajs.lv – Latvian Country Tourism Association „Lauku ceļotājs”;
10. www.biosfera.gov.lv – the North Vidzeme Biosphere reserve;
11. www.dap.gov.lv – Nature Protection Board;
12. www.eco.celotajs.lv – the Green Certificate;
13. www.eedp.lv – the Lake Engure nature park;
14. www.gnp.gov.lv – the Gauja national park;
15. www.kemeri.gov.lv – the Ķemeri national park;
16. <http://latvijas.daba.lv/saturs.shtml> - portāls „Latvijas daba”;
17. www.ldf.lv – the Latvian Fund for Nature;
18. www.lob.lv – the Latvian Ornithological society;
19. www.lvgma.gov.lv/public/ - the Latvian Environment, Geology and Meteorology agency;
20. www.lvm.lv – the state stock company „Latvijas valsts meži”;
21. www.pdf-pape.lv – the Pape nature park;
22. www.putni.lv – birds in Latvia;
23. www.slitere.gov.lv – the Slītere national park;
24. www.teici.gov.lv – the Teiču nature reserve;
25. www.vidm.gov.lv – the Ministry of Environment of Latvia;
26. www.vitila.gov.lv – the network of Latvian environmental guides.

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