# Areas of Special Conservation Interest (Emerald Network) (ASCI)

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## DEFINITION

A regional network of ecologically important areas, established in Europe and North Africa as a result of the Bern Convention.

## DESCRIPTION

Areas of Special Conservation Interest (ASCIs) are protected areas in Europe and North Africa, set up by the contracting parties to the Bern Convention (Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats), which together form the Emerald Network. [1] Under the Convention, Contracting Parties are encouraged to take steps, either by legislation or otherwise, to designate ASCIs to ensure that necessary and appropriate conservation measures are taken for areas within their territory or under their responsibility. While the network was envisioned in 1989, it was only implemented in 1998.

The aim of the ASCIs is to ensure the conservation and protection of those habitats and species listed under Appendices I and II of the Bern Convention. As the European Union is a Contracting Party to the Bern Convention, the Natura 2000 network is considered to be the EU contribution to the Emerald Network. [2]

There are three phases to the development of the Emerald network:

**Phase 1:** Identification and selection of potential ASCI sites. The proposed sites can be officially nominated candidate Emerald sites by the Standing Committee, as provided for in Recommendation No. 157 (2011) on the status of candidate Emerald sites and guidelines on the criteria for their nomination.
**Phase 2:** Assessment of proposed sites and declaration of the sites as ASCIs.
**Phase 3:** Official designation of the adopted ASCIs at the national level.

## SUPPORTED BY

Council of Europe.

## YEAR OF CREATION

1998

## COVERAGE

Regional (European and North African) network of marine and terrestrial sites.

As of Sept 2014, 37 sites from Switzerland have passed into Phase 2 and have been officially adopted as ASCIs.[3] In addition a number of sites still currently in Phase 1 have been nominated as "candidate Emerald Sites".[4] These candidate sites occur in seven countries in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, five countries in the Western Balkans, as well as in Norway and Morocco.

## CRITERIA

ASCIs within member states of the European Union are those of the Natura 2000 (see link for those criteria). ASCIs of the non-EU members and observers of the Bern Convention are those areas which fit one or several of the following conditions:[5]

1. Contributes substantially to the survival of threatened species, endemic species, or any species listed in Appendices I and II of the Bern convention;
2. Supports significant numbers of species in an area of high species diversity or supports important populations of one or more species;
3. Contains an important and/or representative sample of endangered habitat types;
4. Contains an outstanding example of a particular habitat type or a mosaic of different habitat types;
5. Represents an important area for one or more migratory species;
6. Otherwise contributes substantially to the achievement of the objectives of the convention.

All sites proposed by member states as ASCIs are reviewed and approved by the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention against these criteria.

## MANAGEMENT

While designating ASCIs to implement the Emerald Network is optional, the obligations on the Contracting Parties to protect natural habitats are rigorous requirements set out in the Bern Convention. Setting up the Emerald Network at national level is therefore considered as one of the main tools for the Contracting Parties to comply with their obligations under the Bern Convention, but is not the only means to do so and states may opt to fulfil the conservation requirements through other means. Sites are managed by the appropriate authorities in each of the Contracting Party states according to recommendations of the convention, including:[6]

1. ASCIs "are the subject of an appropriate regime, designed to achieve the conservation of the factors" responsible for the designation of the area;
2. "The agencies responsible for the designation and/or management and/or conservation of ASCIs have available to it sufficient manpower, training, equipment and resources (including financial resources) to enable them properly to manage, conserve and survey the areas;
3. Appropriate ecological and other research is conducted, in a properly coordinated fashion, with a view to furthering the understanding of the critical elements in the management of ASCIs and to monitoring the status of the factors giving rise to their designation and conservation;

4. Activities taking place adjacent to such areas or within their vicinity do not adversely affect the factors giving rise to the designation and conservation of those sites."

Furthermore, the States are recommended to take steps, as appropriate, in respect of ASCIs to:

1. Draw up and implement management plans which will identify both short- and long-term objectives;
2. Regularly review the terms of the management plans in the light of changing conditions or of increased scientific knowledge;
3. Clearly mark the boundaries of ASCIs on maps and, as far as possible, on the ground;
4. Provide for the monitoring of ASCIs and especially of the factors for which their conservation is important.

## BUSINESS RELEVANCE

**Legal and compliance** - Protection under national law is not a necessary requirement for designation of an area as an ASCI. However many sites are likely to have legal recognition and protection, and those within EU countries in particular do have legal recognition and protection under the Natura 2000 network. While states implementing the Emerald Network are invited to pay conservation attention to ASCIs to promote the long-term survival of the protected species and habitats, there is no precise recommendation to give legal protection to ASCIs. The Standing Committee of the Bern Convention recommend only that the areas 'be subject to the appropriate regime'.[6] The Bern Convention emphasizes the achievement of conservation results rather than protection procedures. As sites recognised under the international Bern convention, these areas are regarded as protected areas by some international safeguard standards such as those of the European Investment Bank[7] and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development[8] that largely do not fund activities within such areas unless no adverse impacts can be expected.

**Biodiversity importance** - The criteria for the designation of ASCIs include high irreplaceability and vulnerability of species and habitats in a European context and therefore many sites are likely to hold significant biodiversity value. As site-scale areas, these areas are highly relevant to business in terms of mitigating and avoiding risk from biodiversity loss and identifying opportunity associated with their conservation.

**Socio-cultural values** -Social, economic or cultural values are not included in the criteria or management regime of ASCIs and the states implementing the Emerald Network have the flexibility to liaise in any way with local communities. Nonetheless as many of these areas are located in human dominated landscapes, human activities and social-cultural values can be expected.

## REFERENCES & WEBSITE


1. Council of Europe. website on the Emerald Network.
2. Council of Europe. The Emerald network: A Tool to protect Europe's natural habitats (2011).
3. Standing Committee of the Bern Convention. List of Emerald Sites (December 2013).
4. Standing Committee of the Bern Convention. List of candidate Emerald Sites (2013).
5. Council of Europe. The Emerald Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest (factsheet) (2009).
6. Council of Europe. Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (2011).

7. European Investment Bank. Environmental and Social Handbook (2013).
8. European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Environmental and Social Policy (2014).



Vallée de Joux ASCI (Emerald Network site), Switzerland.

pcst/freeimages.com

Category:

Protected areas

Related pages

Natura 2000 (Areas)

Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) (Terms)

Site of Community Importance (SCI) (Areas)

Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (Areas)

Special Protection Area (SPA) (Areas)

Tools

Protected Planet a tool for visualizing information on protected areas at the site level, country level, regional level and global level. This includes information on the IUCN category where known. Protected Planet brings together spatial data, descriptive information and images from the World Database on Protected Areas, WikipediaTM and PanaramioTM.

Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool (IBAT) provides a visualisation and GIS download tool for protected areas, including the IUCN category where known.

Links

The Council of Europe

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