

Western Balkans Six Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030

VISION, MISSION AND STRATEGIC GOALS

Vision

By 2030, the Western Balkans Six (WB6) is a region where biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored, and sustainably used, contributing to resilient ecosystems, healthy societies, and a thriving green economy. Through collective action, strengthened governance, and regional cooperation, the region ensures that nature and people coexist in harmony, in line with global and European commitments.

Mission

The Western Balkans 6 Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030 provides a common regional framework for translating global and European biodiversity goals into coherent actions across the WB6. It aims to guide coordinated implementation, strengthen governance and institutional capacity, promote knowledge-based decision-making, and mobilise resources to halt biodiversity loss and restore ecosystems across the region, while supporting alignment with biodiversity-related EU policies and the pertinent parts of the EU acquis, including Chapter 27 on Environment and Climate Change.

Strategic Goals

Goal 1: Ensure Effective, Equitable, and Representative Area-Based Conservation

Ensure that by 2030 at least 30% of terrestrial and marine areas in the Western Balkans Six are effectively conserved, with at least 10% under strict protection, prioritising areas of high biodiversity value and those critical for ecosystem functions and climate resilience.

Goal 2: Restore and Enhance Ecosystem Integrity and Resilience

By 2030, initiate large-scale ecosystem restoration across the Western Balkans Six, ensuring that at least 20% of degraded terrestrial, inland water, marine, and coastal ecosystems are undergoing effective restoration, in line with domestic-level and regional opportunity assessments.

Goal 3: Halt Species Loss and Strengthen Conservation of Endangered Species

Prevent species extinctions, support recovery of threatened species, and improve the conservation status and trend of at least 30% of those currently at risk.

Goal 4: Integrate Biodiversity into Sectors and Policies

Ensure that biodiversity considerations are fully integrated into policies, planning, and decision-making across key sectors, including agriculture, forestry, energy, water management, spatial planning, and infrastructure.

Goal 5: Advance Biodiversity Action through Knowledge, Governance, and Finance

Strengthen biodiversity governance, data systems, knowledge sharing, and financial resources at all levels of governance to enable inclusive, effective, and accountable implementation and reporting.

Rationale for the Strategic Goals

The *Western Balkans 6 Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030* is a regional response to the commitments made by the Leaders of the Western Balkans Six (WB6) through the **Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (2020)** and reaffirmed in the **Hamburg Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (2024)**. Building on these political foundations, the Plan sets out a shared framework for conserving biodiversity, restoring degraded ecosystems, and ensuring sustainable use of natural resources across the region.

It translates globally agreed biodiversity goals and the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 into actionable priorities tailored to the region's ecological, socio-economic, and institutional realities. By fostering cooperation, coherence, and accountability among the WB6, the Plan aims to reverse biodiversity loss, strengthen ecosystem resilience, and contribute to a nature-positive future for the region, in line with European integration processes and relevant EU environmental standards.

Goal 1: Ensure Effective, Equitable, and Representative Area-Based Conservation

The Western Balkans Six harbour a rich mosaic of ecosystems, many of which are globally significant yet underrepresented in formal protection systems. While progress has been made in expanding protected areas, gaps remain in coverage, ecological representativeness, and governance. This goal reflects the global ambition to scale up area-based conservation and strengthen management effectiveness, as reaffirmed by recent global and European biodiversity commitments.

By 2030, the region aims to ensure that at least 30% of terrestrial, inland water, marine, and coastal areas, especially those essential for biodiversity, ecosystem services, and climate resilience, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected, and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), including at least 10% placed under strict protection. These systems will be integrated into wider landscapes and seascapes, with any sustainable use fully consistent with long-term conservation outcomes.

Goal 2: Restore and Enhance Ecosystem Integrity and Resilience

Ecosystems across the Western Balkans Six, including wetlands, forests, grasslands, rivers, and coastal areas, are increasingly degraded due to land-use change, pollution, climate change, and unsustainable resource use. Many of these ecosystems are critical for biodiversity and provide essential services such as clean water, carbon storage, and flood protection.

This goal responds to global and European commitments to scale up ecosystem restoration as a key solution for biodiversity loss and climate resilience. It emphasizes the need to initiate coordinated, large-scale restoration efforts grounded in context-specific and regional restoration opportunity assessments.

By 2030, the region aims to bring at least 20% of degraded terrestrial, inland water, marine, and coastal ecosystems under effective restoration, and have restoration measures in place to cover all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050, setting the foundation for long-term ecosystem recovery, improved connectivity, and enhanced ecological integrity.

Goal 3: Halt Species Loss and Strengthen Conservation of Endangered Species

The Western Balkans Six host exceptional species diversity, including many endemic and threatened species of global importance. However, the extinction risk is increasing due to habitat loss, land use, pollution, overexploitation, invasive alien species, and climate change. Conservation action remains fragmented, and many species lack targeted recovery plans or effective monitoring.

This goal reflects the region's commitment to prevent the extinction of known threatened species and improve their long-term viability through active conservation and recovery efforts. This goal aligns with global and EU objectives to halt biodiversity loss and to improve the conservation trend and status of at least 30% of species currently at risk. Strengthening protected area networks, implementing species action plans, restoring habitats, and addressing key pressures will be critical to achieving this goal by 2030.

Goal 4: Integrate Biodiversity into Sectors and Policies

Biodiversity loss in the Western Balkans Six is driven not only by direct pressures, but also by the absence of biodiversity considerations in decision-making across key economic sectors. Agriculture, forestry, energy, infrastructure, water management, and spatial planning all play a critical role in shaping land- and seascapes and influencing ecosystem health.

This goal reflects the urgent need to mainstream biodiversity into sectoral policies and development planning to address underlying drivers of biodiversity decline. It aligns with global biodiversity objectives and the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, which call for integrating biodiversity values across sectors, including the energy transition and spatial development frameworks.

By systematically embedding biodiversity considerations into policies, planning processes, and investment decisions across sectors, the Western Balkans Six can reduce negative impacts, promote nature-positive development, and achieve better coherence between conservation and socio-economic goals.

Goal 5: Advance Biodiversity Action through Knowledge, Governance, and Finance

Effective implementation of biodiversity strategies depends on strong and inclusive governance, reliable data, knowledge sharing, and adequate and sustained financial resources. In the Western Balkans Six, institutional capacities, monitoring systems, and access to biodiversity finance vary significantly across economies and sectors. This creates implementation gaps and weakens long-term accountability and coordination.

This goal supports the development of transparent, participatory, and science-informed governance frameworks at all levels, including through harmonised monitoring and reporting systems, integrated biodiversity information platforms, and increased technical and financial capacities. It echoes global goals to strengthen governance, mobilise financing, and enhance data systems, and complements the EU Biodiversity Strategy's call for improved financing and accountability mechanisms.

By strengthening biodiversity governance, data systems, and financial frameworks across the region, this goal will enable more effective implementation, inclusive participation, and credible progress tracking towards 2030 targets.

Development of the Strategic Plan

The *Western Balkans 6 Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030* has been developed as a common regional framework for advancing biodiversity conservation, restoration, and sustainable use in the Western Balkans Six. It serves as a key instrument under Pillar 5 of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (GAWB) and reflects recent global and European biodiversity policy directions, including the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030.

The Strategic Plan is intentionally structured in two complementary phases. Phase I – Political Commitment and Strategic Direction (2025) includes the shared Vision, Mission, and Strategic Goals of the Plan, which are expected to be endorsed by the Ministers responsible for environment and nature conservation from the Western Balkans Six at the upcoming Green Agenda Ministerial Meeting (Dubrovnik, 14–15 October 2025).

The full operationalisation of the Strategic Plan – Phase II, including prioritisation of actions, identification of regionally coherent and locally relevant targets, and development of measurable indicators, will be guided by the forthcoming State of Biodiversity Report (SoBR) in the Western Balkans Six to be prepared by IUCN ECARO in close cooperation with the competent authorities and regional partners. This work will take place in the six months following the Ministerial endorsement. It is intended to serve as a credible basis for resource mobilisation, implementation, and regional and global reporting, while contributing to alignment with obligations under the EU accession process.

Implementation Context and Strategic Value of the BSP

The Western Balkans 6 Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030 is being developed in the context of existing global and European biodiversity commitments. These include the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), to which five of the WB6 are Parties, as well as the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. While these frameworks provide a strong foundation, there is currently no formal mechanism in the region for distributing responsibilities or adjusting targets according to the capacities of the WB6. This stands in contrast to the European Union, which supports the collective achievement of biodiversity goals through burden-sharing arrangements, financial instruments, and compliance mechanisms.

Against this backdrop, the BSP offers significant added value. It provides a shared strategic platform that helps interpret global and European biodiversity goals through the lens of the Western Balkans Six. By setting out common priorities and strategic directions, it enables each of the WB6 to pursue progress that is regionally coherent while still respecting individual circumstances and governance structures. The BSP also complements broader regional aspirations, particularly alignment with Chapter 27 of the EU acquis on Environment and Climate Change.

Furthermore, the BSP encourages intraregional cooperation, transboundary ecosystem management, and joint monitoring efforts. It creates opportunities to join forces and leverage synergies for mutual accountability, harmonised data collection, and more strategic use of technical and financial support. In doing so, the Plan strengthens institutional and operational foundations needed to advance biodiversity conservation as a pillar of sustainable development and regional integration.