

How to fund the Trans-European Nature Network (TEN-N)

User-Pays Principle for Protected Areas



Funded by
the European Union

NaturaConnect receives funding under the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement number 101060429.



User-Pays Principle for Protected Areas

The User-Pays Principle states that the user of a given “natural resource should bear the cost of running down natural capital”[1]. When applied to protected areas, this has been converted into entry payments, fees for business use (tourism operators or nature guides), or charges for overnight stays (accommodations or camping). The User-Pays Principle is mentioned in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 as it has the potential to raise extra funds for the management of protected areas[2].

In Europe, paying for use in protected areas is rare and occurs only in a handful of countries and in a few protected areas. This contrasts to other regions such as North America (USA and Canada), Africa (e.g. South-Africa, Botswana, Kenya, and Gabon), or India, where it is a common practice.

Who is this factsheet for?

- ✓ EU Member State representatives
- ✓ Local and central governments, and public sector agencies
- ✓ EU representatives

How can the User-Pays Principle be relevant for TEN-N actions?

- ✓ Protected area managers that are looking to increase revenue to help cover management costs.
- ✓ Regulate visitors' numbers in line with the carrying capacity of a given area.
- ✓ The User-Pays Principle applied to protected areas has the potential to generate a long-term source of funding for management.

[1] <https://www.eea.europa.eu/help/glossary/eea-glossary/user-pays-principle>

[2] <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0380&from=EN>

User-Pays Principle - Important considerations

Implementation should be done in consultation with local communities and include exceptions/ reductions of fees for special groups (e.g. students or retired people).

Transparency is key for acceptance of the additional costs (e.g. on-site communication and information on the use of the funds collected).

Strong governance of protected areas must be in place to ensure proper collection and use of the funds.

The destination of extra funds can be allocated to a site-specific or national-level fund or a mix.

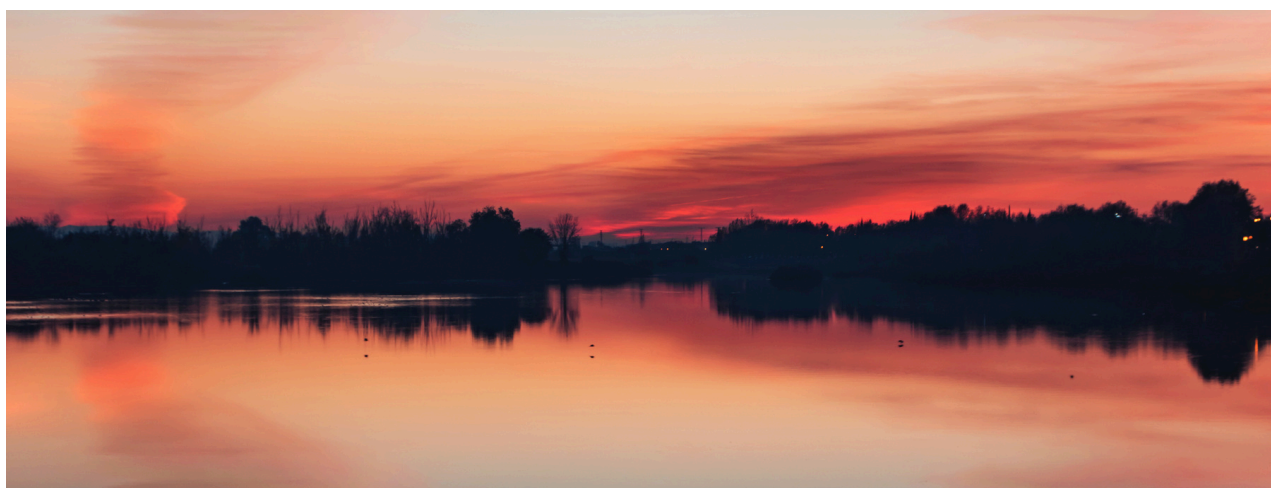
The use of the funds should be decided before the funds become available, with a strong percentage of any profits allocated for nature conservation and restoration but also with flexibility to allow for citizen participation in the use of the funds (e.g. similar to participatory budgets where citizens provide suggestions and/or vote where the funds are most needed).

The money generated by the User-Pay fees should at least generate enough funds to cover the costs associated with the management of visitors in the protected area.

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It can be relatively easy to implement on islands (e.g. it was recently implemented in Portugal on the Island Nature Reserve of Berlengas), or closed access areas which are often fenced (e.g. the Zwin Nature Park in Belgium), or remote landscapes, inaccessible mountains or valleys (e.g. in the National Park of Paklenica in Croatia) [3].

Implementing the User-Pays Principle should not be an incentive to fence areas or introduce other measures that could lead to habitat fragmentation (fencing off areas can facilitate fee collection, yet it can also reduce landscape connectivity). Using existing natural features such as rivers or steep cliffs to control entry could be an option.



Strong points

Extra revenue generation: It is a clear tool to increase funds for nature conservation.

An incentive for ecosystem restoration: The interest in visiting will increase if the number and diversity of animals and plants are high, especially if visitors can view them easily.

Visitor management: It is a chance to improve infrastructure for visitors, analyse the carrying capacity of protected areas and regulate visitors' practices.

Opportunity to engage with local businesses: To understand the opportunities for economic development within protected areas as well as understand their concerns and potential mitigation measures.

Weak points

Cultural values: People often see nature as a public good that should be available to everyone, free at the point of use and financed by general budgets. This can be a strong barrier preventing the implementation of user pay fees.

Legal frameworks: Some countries have the "right to roam" law, enabling public right of access. This implies access, and in some instances allows harvesting of some wild products and camping in protected areas. These rights create a strong legal case against user pay fees.

Equity: The implementation of a user fee can affect low-income groups more significantly than medium to high-income ones. It is important to consider equity issues in designing the user pay fee (e.g. potentially alienating local communities and national residents in favour of foreign visitors with higher spending power).

Cost of fee collection and management: There can be extra costs for the management of the user- pays fees.

Dependency on visitors/tourism: It can be risky if a high proportion of the protected area's budget is dependent on a single revenue stream e.g. tourism. An "external shock" can result in a sudden significant drop in numbers (as was the case during the Covid pandemic in African protected areas).

Corruption: User pays can be susceptible to corruption if proper governance structures are not in place.

[3] <https://www.ipbes.net/global-assessment>

[4] <https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2018-12/jrc113718.pdf>

[5] <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1439179114001728>

What TEN-N activities can the User-Pays Principle fund?

The User-Pays Principle can raise significant and flexible amounts of money that can be used to cover a variety of costs, from general management needs to communications expenses:

Types of measures needed to build the TEN-N		Can user-pays funding be used
Network planning costs	Administrative	✓
	Spatial planning	✗
	Biogeographical network planning	✗
	Monitoring and reporting of the protected area network	✗
Protected area establishment costs	Site/corridor designation and management planning	✗
	Administrative	✓
	Remaining knowledge gaps and research needs	✓
	One-off establishment actions	✗
	Compensation	✗
	Land purchase	✗
Management costs	Site (cluster) administration	✗
	Enforcement	✓
	Monitoring and reporting	✓
	Maintenance and restoration measures for species and habitats	✓
	Additional green infrastructure measures (outside protected areas)	✓
	Protected area infrastructure maintenance	✓
Communication and awareness raising costs	Natura 2000-related communication and awareness raising measures, education and visitor access	✓
	Best practice exchange	✓

Annex I: How to implement the User-Pays Principle? Step-by-step guide

General Research

- This series of steps guide the implementation of a User-Pays Principle on a national network of protected areas. The following points should be analysed:
- User-Pays Principle in similar areas (analyse goals, governance and logistics).
- "Willingness to pay" among visitors (which can be determined, for example, by questionnaires to tourists).
- Local communities' perceptions about the potential user-pays fees (with organised forums).
- Relevant options outlined for user-pays fees (for entry, for use or for overnight stay).
- Impact on local businesses, guides and operators using or benefiting from the protected area assessment to determine any impact.



Preliminary studies

- Implementation logistics (carrying capacity of a given area and how fees will be collected).
- Governance considerations (local or national level fund, allocation of money, decision power or control over the allocation of funds).
- Revenue forecasting (taking into account the predicted level of visitor and entry fee costs).
- Analyse several fee scenarios (impact on revenue and visitors' numbers, different prices for local, national or foreign)



Implementation

- Pilot in one or a group of protected areas with different characteristics.
- Monitor impact on visitor numbers, quality of tourist experience, local communities' perceptions and the effects on businesses. Share results with local communities, local businesses and national and local media.

Annex II: Examples of subsidies for nature

Croatian National Parks

Aim of User-Pays Principle initiative: To improve management of protected areas and to ensure their financing.

Financing mechanism: In Croatia's network of protected areas, only national parks charge entry. There are 8 national parks in total. The entry fees vary across the year from high to low season and from park to park. The tickets are valid for a period of up to 3 days. There is also the possibility to buy a yearly ticket for a specific park. The fees are collected at entry points of the national parks by employees and often the landscape characteristics of the parks allow for the control of visitors.

There are five types of tickets:

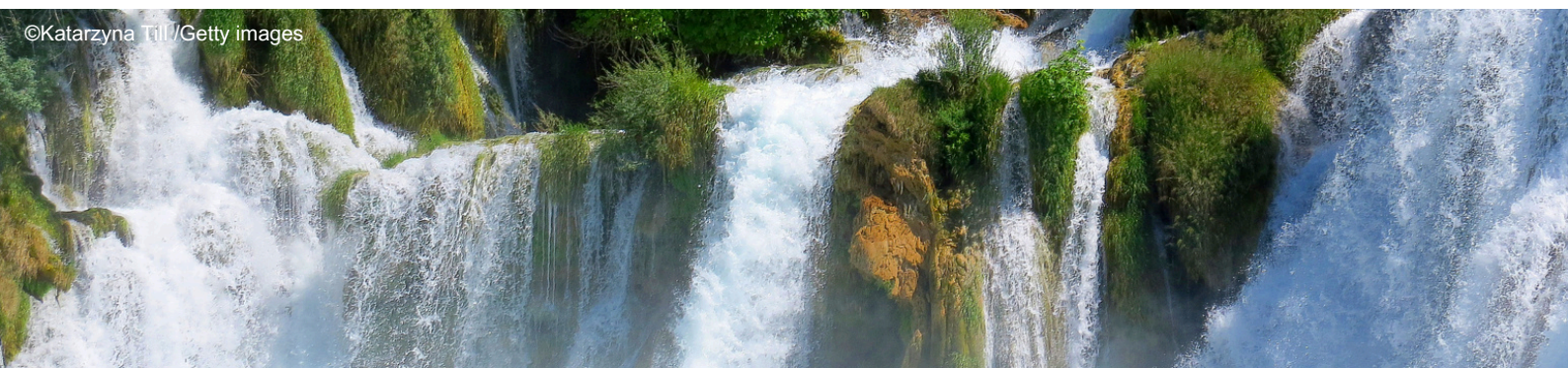
1. Basic (for a single individual)
2. Discounted ticket (for mountaineers, walkers and cyclists, students, elderly people over 60, war veterans, disabled people and for children under 14)
3. Group tickets (for organised groups over 15 people)
4. Free tickets (for special cases, children under 6 years of age, persons with a park management permit, members of Croatian Armed Forces or Croatian Police Forces if on exercise or a task, members of Croatian Mountain Rescue Service and journalists writing about the park)
5. Family ticket (for 2 adults with children under 14)

Use of funding: Part of the fees collected by each park go to a central fund (The Parks of Croatia Fund), to redistribute funds from those parks with a high number of tourists to areas with a limited number of visitors. The proportion is currently 3%. The remaining fees are retained by the park that collected them.

Funding raised: Several million euros per year. For the national parks with large numbers of visitors, user fees are an important source of income. The majority of Croatia's parks and all the protected areas that are not national parks are funded by the Croatian state budget.

Sources: Croatian National Parks Website (<https://np-sjeverni-velebit.hr/www/en/visiting/price-list>) Accessed 18 September 2023.

Bellamy, J., Leginja, D. (2017). Strengthening the Institutional and Financial Sustainability of the National Protected Area System - Croatia. Global Environment Facility. <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/10996>



Australia – National Park Service

Aim of User-Pays Principle initiative: To regulate visitor impact on protected areas and financetourism infrastructure. Australia's networkof protected areas, the National Reserve System, includes areas managed at State or Central level.

Financing mechanism: Most of the protected areas charge fees for entering in a vehicle, but do not charge entry fees if visitors walk orcycle into the park. Park revenues are also made through other mechanisms such as camping, attractions (guided walks, 4 x 4 tours and boat trips) and other services.

Use of funding: The funds collected by each park are used locally to help cover the costsof managing protected areas and maintaining tourism infrastructures.

Funding raised: Around 8.5 million Australian dollars (5.5 million euros) in 2022 from fees and permits for 6 National Parks.

Sources: Australian National Parks Website (<https://parksaustralia.gov.au/about/>) Accessed 18 September 2023.
Director of National Parks Annual Report. 2022 (<https://www.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/dnp-annual-report-2021-22.pdf>) Accessed 18 September 2023.



United States of America – National Park Service

Aim of User-Pays Principle initiative: To regulate the use of the protected areas and raise extra funds for their management. Only 116 of the 419 areas managed by the American National Park Service charge entry fees.

Financing mechanism: There are four types of entry fees for American National Parks:

- Park-Specific Annual Pass (for regular visitors)
- Per vehicle
- Per person
- Per motorcycle (for occasional visitors)

There is also the possibility to acquire an annual pass for all the protected areas and free entry on special days. The cost varies according to the National Park. The American National Park Service also generates income from concession contracts to provide a wide range of services in protected areas, mainly connected with tourism such as guided tours, accommodation, food or others.

Use of funding: Around 80% of the fees collected in a park are used for its management. To increase transparency and public support there is information online regarding the use of the fees collected.

Funding raised: Several hundred million US dollars per year in fees and concession revenues.

Sources: American National Parks Website (<https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/entrance-fee-prices.htm>) Accessed 18 September 2023.
Budget justifications and performance information – National Park Service. 2022 United States Department of Interior (<https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/fy2022-nps-budget-justification.pdf>) Accessed 18 September 2023.



Annex III: What are the costs associated with building the Trans-European Nature Network?

Network planning costs

One time or recurring costs associated with planning for or updating a comprehensive and well-connected network of protected areas (PAs).

- **Administrative:** Staff, overheads, training, as part of the network planning exercise.
- **Spatial planning:** Surveys and mapping (habitat and species distribution, land use, corridors), site identification information, IT infrastructure.
- **Biogeographical network planning:** Exchange and joint planning (e.g. meetings, travel to neighbouring Member States, information sharing).
- **Stakeholder engagement:** Costs associated with organising meetings with landowners and other potentially affected stakeholders.
- **Monitoring and reporting of the protected area network**

Establishment costs

One-time or recurring costs associated with planning for placement, levels of protection and designation of additional PAs and corridors.

- **Site/corridor designation and management planning:** Site identification (land surveys, GIS data, land parcel data, species and habitat data), designation, legal protection, management planning, impact assessment and permit issuing.
- **Administrative:** Staff and salaries, training, overheads or office acquisitions, planning and coordination with other PA management teams in cross-border PAs.
- **Remaining knowledge gaps and research needs:** Additional surveys and research, engaging external expertise, modelling of ecological changes under climate scenarios, social impacts, capacity building.
- **One-off establishment actions (e.g. time and tools (incl. machinery)) for:**
 - Infrastructure: e.g. building trails, removing roads, removal of river barriers.
 - Landscape restoration: e.g. fencing, breaking off/moving dykes, engineering works, bulldozing, clear-cutting non-native trees, replanting, recreating floodplains.
 - Creation of corridors and connectivity/defragmentation features: Infrastructure or restoration actions, e.g. installing green bridges, creation of green infrastructure features along watercourses or transport networks for biodiversity.
 - Compensation: Establishment of alternative income-generating activities, short-term compensation, one-off stewardship contracts with landowners.
 - Land purchase: e.g. buy outs, land swaps.

Management costs

Fixed and variable, recurring annual or one-off costs of post-implementation management and day-to-day activities.

- **Site (-cluster) administration:** Staff and salaries, training, overheads, coordination with other PA management teams in cross-border PAs, renewal of stewardship contracts with landowners.
- **Compliance checking and enforcement:** Equipment, data, staff.
- **Impact assessment and permits:** Assessments of development projects, control and issue of permits or licenses for activities or developments.
- **Monitoring and reporting:** At site/corridor level.
- **Maintenance and ongoing restoration measures for species and habitats,** incl. tools and machinery.
- **Additional green infrastructure measures** outside the PA: maintenance and ongoing restoration measures for species and habitats in corridors, buffer zones, stepping stone habitat patches etc.
- **PA infrastructure maintenance:** Access (roads, paths), hides, visitor centres, parking lots.

Communications and awareness raising costs

- Protected area-related communication and awareness raising measures, education and visitor access: **General communication and awareness-raising measures, education, access to visitors, etc.**
- **Best practice exchange** between PA managers.

Annex IV: References and further recommended reading

Information about Croatian protected areas

<https://np-sjeverni-velebit.hr/www/en/visiting/price-list>

<https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/detail/10996>

Information about Australian protected areas

<https://parksaustralia.gov.au/about/>

<https://www.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/dnp-annual-report-2021-22.pdf>

<https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/fees-at-work.htm>

<https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/land/nrs/about-nrs/australias-protected-areas>

Recommended reading

World Bank (2021) Banking on Protected Areas Promoting Sustainable Protected Area Tourism to Benefit Local Economies. The World Bank Group, Washington DC.

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/35737/Banking-on-Protected-Areas-Promoting-Sustainable-Protected-Area-Tourism-to-Benefit-Local-Economies.pdf?sequence=5&isAllowed=y>

Producción Naturaleza (Producing Nature) by Ignacio Jiménez Pérez, Rewilding Argentina:

[https://www.rewildingargentina.org/library/libros/institucional/produccion_de_naturaleza_\(ed_digital\).pdf](https://www.rewildingargentina.org/library/libros/institucional/produccion_de_naturaleza_(ed_digital).pdf)

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Author

Daniel Verissimo, Rewilding Europe
daniel.verissimo@rewildingeurope.com

Design

Caroline Herman, BirdLife Europe and Central Asia
Cover image: Nielieboukune/GettyImages

October, 2024



www.naturaconnect.eu



[@naturaconnect](https://www.linkedin.com/company/naturaconnect)



naturaconnect@iiasa.ac.at



[@naturaconnect](https://twitter.com/naturaconnect)



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