Environmental News, Research & Analysis (ENRA)

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Agriculture/ Land Use

Future farming: re-localising food systems across Europe

What are the benefits of re-localising parts of our food systems and creating shorter and fairer supply chains? These four stories from across Europe hold some of the answers.

Developing accounting methods for land cover changes

The European Environment Agency (EEA) has developed land accounts that allow for assessing changes in land cover types. These changes can have environmental impacts, such as decline in biodiversity, reduced carbon stocks, or weakened capacity for food production and flood regulation.

Sustainability on the farm: Shared ambition in Canada and the EU

A recent seminar co-hosted by IEEP and the Mission of Canada to the EU discussed initiatives and efforts undertaken in Canada and the EU on agriculture and sustainability on the farm. Considering the importance of the agriculture sector in meeting environmental and climate change mitigation objectives, as well as in addressing consumers' concerns on the sustainability of the food they eat, the event showcased practical examples where efforts are being made in Canada and the EU to achieve environmental, social and economic sustainability in the food supply chain. These objectives are also at the core of the European Green Deal, in particular the Farm to Fork Strategy, as well as the Food Policy for Canada and other Government priorities.

Five recommendations for achieving healthy soils by 2030 through Horizon Europe

The Horizon Europe mission on Soil Health and Food has set the ambitious target for 75% of soils in the EU to be healthy within just 10 years. Here are five recommendations for achieving this. The upcoming Horizon Europe research and innovation (R&I) framework programme aims to advance research through five missions that deliver solutions to current and future challenges, including the mission on 'Soil Health & Food'.

Air Quality

Marked improvement in Europe's air quality over past decade, fewer deaths linked to pollution

Better air quality has led to a significant reduction of premature deaths over the past decade in Europe. However, the European Environment Agency's (EEA) latest official data show that almost all Europeans still suffer from air pollution, leading to about 400,000 premature deaths across the continent.

Three quarters of EU city dwellers breathe toxic air

A new report on air quality in Europe shows that the EU is behind schedule reducing pollution, despite improvements. And the consequences are dramatic.

EU environment ministers back bolder climate action by 2030

Following the recent position of the European Parliament which called for an increase of the EU's 2030 climate target to 60% emission cuts, several EU Environment ministers advocated for upgrading the proposed goal to 60-65% to stay on track with the Paris Agreement and prevent dangerous climate change.

Biodiversity

Restoring biodiversity to its natural place

Although the climate crisis has been recognised as a threat for decades, it is only belatedly that the biodiversity emergency and its associated mass extinctions is receiving the attention it deserves.

Towards an Inclusive Global Biodiversity Framework: the ENVISION project at the "Vital Sites: the journey to Marseille"

Leading experts presented the ENVISION project and the Inclusive conservation approach in the "Vital Sites - The Journey to Marseille" webinar series, a 6-month series of online events and multimedia content that

highlights the importance of protected and conserved areas from around the world. The series is organized by IUCN's Global Protected Area Programme and the World Commission on Protected Areas.

Global biodiversity conservation and COVID-19: Building back better with nature
A recent virtual seminar co-hosted by IEEP and the Mission of Canada to the EU discussed the future of biodiversity conservation in the COVID-19 context. The seminar was part of a series of events the Mission of Canada to the EU is organising on shared 'green' policy priorities on the Canada and EU agendas.
New State of Nature report points to persisting pressures on Europe's nature.

Climate Action
European Commission urged to develop a new EU climate adaptation strategy
The EU's Assembly of Regional and Local Representatives urge the Commission to develop a new climate adaptation strategy. Climate change is having wide-ranging impacts on ecosystems, economic sectors, human health and well-being in Europe. From 1980 to 2016, the total reported economic losses caused by weather and other climate-related extremes in Europe amounted to over EUR 436 billion.

UK ramps up climate adaptation plans in build up to COP26
The UK has become one of the first countries to publish an official plan setting out how the nation is responding to the climate crisis through adaptation and resiliency plans that focus on flood prevention and rewilding.

Covid-19
COVID-19 measures have mixed impacts on the environment
The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting restrictions imposed to fight the spread of the disease have provided some short-term positive impacts on Europe's environment, according to a EEA briefing. These include temporary improvements in air quality, lower greenhouse gas emissions and lower levels of noise pollution. However, the assessment also stresses that there have been negative consequences such as increased use of single-use plastics, and that ways out of the pandemic should focus on reshaping our unsustainable production and consumption systems to achieve long-term environmental benefits.

What constitutes a European green recovery?
A review of what think tanks and civil society are saying on the conditions for a green and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. COVID-19 has led to a historically unprecedented economic crisis, plummeting the global economy into the deepest recession since the Second World War. As the European economies enter a post-lockdown restart, the European Commission has tabled a new budget that aspires to "build back better" and create the foundations for a future-proofed continent.

EU Green Deal and biodiversity strategy: A new beginning or nipped in the bud?
IEEP look back at October's tumultuous CAP and biodiversity week and reflect on its implications for the achievement of the European Green Deal's biodiversity objectives and the fresh EU commitments for an ambitious new global deal for nature.

Energy
Understanding the world of tomorrow through the great challenges of energy and climate change
"Only a broad policy framework – taking into account economic, fiscal, industrial, labour, innovation and social policy issues – can address the challenges of the climate crisis in a balanced way". Energy resources underpin the development of the international orders of modern history: coal was the backdrop for the British Empire in the nineteenth century, oil was at the centre of the next 'American century', and today many people predict that China will become the world's renewable energy superpower of the 21st century.

Waste coffee grounds could provide carbon for use in high-energy storage devices
Demand for portable energy storage is growing with rising demand for products such as electric cars. Supercapacitors supply a higher power density and longer cycle life than a conventional battery but require porous carbon in their manufacture. A new study presents a method to create large amounts of carbon — suitable for supercapacitor manufacture — from an abundant, low-cost source: used coffee grounds.

[Offshore wind power plan offers climate hope – provided countries ramp up biodiversity protection](#)
NGOs welcome a proposal to scale up offshore windfarms but raise concerns over its potentially negative impact on marine habitats.

Green Recovery
[The evolving role of green and blue infrastructure as refuges from a pandemic](#)
The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of green and blue infrastructure in cities as a refuge for urban residents, providing a range of health and other benefits. A webinar held on 29th October 2020 discussed this issue in the context of experiences in European and North American cities and of research conducted by the BiodivERsA-funded ENABLE project into green and blue infrastructure in complex social-ecological regions.

Forestry/ Woodland
[Commission sets Forest Reference Levels in a delegated act](#)
The European Commission has today adopted the forest reference levels (FRLs) for each Member State to apply between 2021 and 2025. FRLs are benchmarks to calculate the sum of greenhouse gas removals and emissions from existing forests in each Member State. CO2 removal from existing forestland is the backbone of the EU land use sink.

[Landscape features of European ash tree populations increase resilience against dieback disease](#)
Ash dieback disease, caused by an invasive fungal pathogen, was introduced into Europe via Poland in the 1990s, and reached France in 2008. The disease causes leaf infections, shoot blight and 'collar cankers' — damage at the base of the trunk — eventually killing the tree. A study investigates how landscape features impacted the spread of the disease in north-eastern France, in order to inform future management decisions and efforts to limit its spread.

Freshwater
[New eDNA-modelling approach accurately maps biodiversity of rivers](#)
Researchers have shown how accurate, fine-scale maps of riverine biodiversity can be obtained using a method combining the trace genetic material (eDNA) found in rivers and streams and modelling based on hydrological principles. This non-invasive method can identify biodiversity hotspots to inform their management and conservation and could provide information on locations that are inaccessible (and therefore very difficult to monitor).

Marine
[Extending full protection in marine protected areas can meet fishery and conservation goals](#)
Marine fisheries provide a major source of food and livelihood for hundreds of millions of people worldwide. However, many fish stocks are being overfished, with major cascading impacts on marine biodiversity. Identifying effective strategies for fishery management is, therefore, a matter of urgency. To assess stock status and sustainability, this study models three ecologically and economically important coastal fish species inside and outside Mediterranean marine protected areas (MPAs).

[A new approach to marine ecosystem assessment: researchers use EU policy data to rate capacity for ecosystem service supply](#).
Based on information gathered under EU policies such as the Common Fisheries Policy and Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), researchers present a new way to assess the capacity of the marine environment to provide ecosystem services.

[Human activities put pressure on every part of Europe's seas](#)
Many different human activities on land and at sea cause pressures on Europe's seas. A European Environment Agency's (EEA) briefing shows that these pressures have now reached the outermost sea areas and the deepest seafloor. Human activities affect negatively 93 % of Europe's sea area.

[Bridging the funding gap in MPAs: IUCN to serve as strategic advisor to the Blue Action Fund](#)
The IUCN Global Marine and Polar Programme is delighted to announce it was recently nominated as strategic advisor to the Blue Action Fund, supporting its grant programme in the funding of selected conservation projects in marine protected areas and their buffer zones. The Blue Action Fund's funding programme fills a critical gap, as marine protected areas worldwide remain largely underfunded.

Planning
[Green infrastructure offers many ecosystem-service benefits in densely populated areas, finds study](#)
A new study models ecosystem services at a local level to support urban planning in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. The researchers assess how ecosystem services might change in the city as [green infrastructure](#) natural and semi-natural features such as parks and green roofs — is developed. By identifying the key factors that generate value for residents, the approach could help planners optimise green infrastructure and communicate its importance to decision-makers, investors and residents.

[New IUCN-IOC guide demonstrates how sports can benefit nature in cities](#)
While sports and nature often occupy and compete for the same green spaces in cities, well-planned sports infrastructure can make positive contributions to urban biodiversity. A new guide published today by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), in collaboration with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI), identifies key ecological criteria that city officials and sports venue developers can apply to incorporate the needs of nature in their planning.

Plastics
[Reduce your plastic waste](#)
Irish organisation VOICE has created a series of videos together with the City Council of Dublin to help us all reduce our use of plastic. At school, at home or on the go: the videos include many tips for how to live a more plastic-free life. Articles and tips can be found on their [website](#).

Sustainable Development
[European countries taking action on putting in place UN's environment-related SDGs](#)
A vast majority of the European Environment Agency's (EEA) 39 member and cooperating countries are putting in action United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including those focused on climate action, water and sanitation, and affordable and clean energy, according to a pan-European assessment of how the SDGs are being implemented.

[Fostering socially and environmentally responsible businesses – new report](#)
As business leaders strive for sustainability, systemic problems such as poor working conditions, unfair distribution of profits and wasteful consumption patterns undermine Europe's quest for a fair and truly circular economy.

Transport
[Sustainable batteries: Revised EU laws can pave the way for greener transport](#)
EU officials want to make durable, repairable and recyclable batteries the norm. From transport to energy storage, this is the way forward to reduce the environmental impact and downside risks of our increasingly electrified economy.