



## **Carpathian Convention: A call to protect European forests**

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The Carpathian Mountain region isn't often at the forefront of climate conversation, but that wasn't the case on Wednesday as the seven nations of the Carpathian Convention met virtually for their COP6 meeting.

The agreement is what binds the Eastern European nations of Poland, now accepting the rotating leadership from Hungary, and their neighbors in Romania, the Czech Republic, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine, when it comes to fighting climate change and protecting the ecosystems of the Carpathian range.

Inger Andersen, the executive director of the United Nations Environment Program, stressed the importance and fragility of mountains that also are home to 18 million people. Many of them rely on natural resources for a living, notably in tourism, forestry and agriculture, at the same time that the region's biodiversity must be protected.

"The Carpathians are a mountain range of global importance. They contain Europe's largest remaining old-growth forest ecosystems outside of Russia," said Andersen in a keynote address. "One-third of all European vascular plant species. Over 40 percent of Europe's brown bears and 30 percent of its grey wolves."

Efforts to protect resources in the Carpathians often are compromised by illegal activity. A 2017 report focused on the impacts of illegal deforestation, in part to meet demand for biomass. Illegal logging already has had serious consequences, Andersen warned.

"Ukraine has seen several devastating floods over the last years. Villages and roads submerged. Bridges brought down. People killed. These are, in part, linked to climate change," she said. "But illegal logging – taking place under the cover of the difficulties Ukraine has suffered – has removed large chunks of forests that soak up excess water and provide a buffer against flooding. Meanwhile, over the past 20 years, illegal logging has cost Romania over five billion euros."

Illegal sturgeon fishing linked to the caviar trade, along with poaching, also are wreaking environmental and economic havoc in nations already facing COVID and climate challenges.

The Carpathian Convention's focus on implementing conservation measures and enforcing them, particularly in the face of organized criminal activity, makes clear it is only possible to achieve environmental protections and climate targets through partnership among the seven nations.

"The ecosystems of the Carpathians are intertwined – as we see in the East Carpathians Biosphere Reserve, an area spanning Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine, that UNESCO defines as one of global importance," Andersen said. "Species migrate across and between countries. River basins, such as the Danube, are shared between the countries of the region. Criminal groups transport their ill-gotten gains through routes that respect no national interest."

While the convention calls for climate action from all signatory states, only Hungary and Poland have so far ratified the article that requires states to pursue policies on climate change mitigation and adaptation in all sectors.

"The impacts will only intensify, damaging not just ecosystems, but societies and economies," Andersen said. "Member states must get ahead of the game before it gets worse, both in terms of cutting their own greenhouse gas emissions and finding ways to adapt to the changing climate – such as ensuring healthy and abundant forests that absorb carbon and protect against flooding and landslides."

Source: <https://www.sustainability-times.com/environmental-protection/carpathian-convention-a-call-to-protect-european-forests/>