

## **Towards a Climate-smart Forest Connectivity for Large Carnivores in the Balkan-Carpathian-Dinaric Region - Forest Connect project**

### short summary

Forest Connect project is designed to address common challenges and needs on protecting and preserving ecological corridors of large carnivores (LC) in the target area of the project - the Carpathians, Balkans and Dinarides. Specifically, it will focus on: the Western Balkan mountain on the territory of the Bulgarian North-Western State Forestry Enterprise and the Serbian nature park Stara planina (BG-RS border), the Romanian larger Apuseni-Maramures Carpathian region and the Ukrainian Carpathian Biosphere Reserve (RO-UA border); the Slovak Paradise National Park in SK as part of the Western Carpathians and the National parks Durmitor, Biogradska gora, and Prokletije in MN.

The functionality of the ecological corridors of LCs in the target area is endangered by unsustainable management practices and infrastructure developments in forest habitats and their surroundings, which harms their structure. Climate change (CC) poses additional pressure on the ecosystems. Due to the prevalence of LC cross-border distribution and the complex effects of CC, a multinational conservation planning accompanied by a holistic governance framework for biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction is required.

ForestConnect aims to secure climate-resilient forest corridors for LC to move across borders in the Balkan-Carpathian-Dinaric region. To achieve this, the project has set 3 specific objectives (and relevant activities) that will tackle the identified issues in the ecological target regions:

1. New tools and technologies integrated in transnational monitoring of LCs' forests
2. Heterogeneity, connectivity and climate resilience of LCs' forests is improved
3. Promote capacity and cooperation for integrated LC climate-forest connectivity across eco-regions.

The partnership is key to the project's success and lasting impact. The project addresses the need for a strong partnership and mobilization of resources to achieve a coherent climate-smart integrated approach to preserve the LCs' forest habitats on a transnational level. Therefore, the project involves 15 project partners from seven countries: WWF Bulgaria, Executive Forest Agency – Bulgaria, North-west State Enterprise – Bulgaria, WWF Romania, University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine from Cluj-Napoca, WWF Adria-Srbija, NGO “RakhivEcoTour” – Ukraine, The Carpathian Biosphere Reserve – Ukraine, Carinthia University of Applied Sciences -Österreich, WWF Slovakia, Slovak Paradise National Park Administration with headquarters in Spišská Nová Ves, Center for Protection and Research of Birds Montenegro,

Cluj Environmental Protection Agency România, Public enterprise for national parks of Montenegro and “Emblem” Civil Association Serbia.

The project is an Interreg Danube Region Programme project, co-funded by the European Union and with total project's budget 2 952 735,31 Euro.