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Short summary: Federal Action Plan on Nature-based Solutions for Climate and Biodiversity

Draft of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation,
Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection

What is Nature-based Climate Action¹?

Intact ecosystems are a natural defence against climate change. Forests and floodplains, soils and peatlands, seas and water bodies, urban and rural near-natural green spaces remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it for the long term. Intact ecosystems also act as buffers against the impacts of climate change, by accommodating flood waters and providing cooling during hot weather. Not least, they sustain our foundations of life, provide important habitats for animals and plants, store water and are places of respite and recreation for people. Our Action Plan on Nature-based solutions for Climate and Biodiversity strengthens ecosystems and unites climate action and nature conservation. A wide range of measures will ensure that degraded ecosystems regain their health, their resilience and their biodiversity.

Nature-based Climate Action is vital

The climate crisis has long since reached Germany. Extreme weather events are becoming more frequent. We are experiencing heat waves and droughts on the one hand, heavy rainfall and flooding on the other. More and more species are being irretrievably lost, space for nature is dwindling and ecosystems are severely impaired. The human-induced dual environmental crises of global warming and biodiversity loss threaten our foundations of life. And the two crises are reinforcing each other. For instance, low water levels and high

¹ Throughout this document, the German term “Natürlicher Klimaschutz” will be translated as either “Nature-based Climate Action” or “Nature-based Solutions [for climate and biodiversity]”, according to the respective context. Thereby, “Nature-based Climate Action” refers to the policy level while “Nature-based Solutions [for climate and biodiversity]” refers to the actual measures taken. I.e., Nature-based Climate Action is the policy of implementing Nature-based Solutions for climate and biodiversity.

temperatures in water bodies place animals and ecosystems under enormous strain, and can make environmental disasters like the massive fish die-off in the River Oder even worse.

Global warming is causing conditions to change faster than ecosystems can adapt. In turn, degrading ecosystems like forests and peatlands are releasing the carbon that they have stored for thousands of years at an extremely rapid rate, thus exacerbating the climate crisis.

That is why we must resolutely combat both these environmental crises, and at the same time prepare for the unavoidable impacts of climate change. This is precisely what the Action Plan will do. Nature-based Climate Action starts at the interface between biodiversity conservation, climate action and adaptation to the climate crisis.

Funding the Action Plan

The Action Plan will be largely financed from the new Climate and Transformation Fund. By 2026, a total of four billion euros will be available for the different measures. The focus will be on funding specific renaturation measures and incentives for climate-friendly, environmentally sound management forms.

Content of the Action Plan

The Action Plan comprises all the necessary steps for protecting and strengthening ecosystems. These range from assessing ecosystem status and determining the causes of degradation, to developing suitable countermeasures, building the necessary capacities and implementing and monitoring measures for the long term.

To exploit synergies and ensure a consistent approach, the Action Plan is closely linked to many other federal government programmes and strategies. For example, it includes concrete measures for implementing the immediate climate action programme for the LULUCF sector. There are also synergies with the Immediate Action Programme for Climate Adaptation, the National Water Strategy and the National Peatland Protection Strategy.

Specific measures under the Action Plan

The Action Plan comprises 64 measures in ten fields of action. Examples are:

- Implementing the National Peatland Protection Strategy

Peatlands are important as habitats for animals and plants, for a functioning water balance and as carbon storage. However, 92 percent of peatlands are currently drained and cannot fulfil these functions. As a result, in Germany 53 million tonnes of carbon dioxide are released into the atmosphere each year. That is why it is imperative to rewet these peat soils and protect peatlands. This is the goal of the National Peatland Protection Strategy, and its

implementation is a component of the Action Plan on Nature-based Solutions for Climate and Biodiversity.

- Restoring a near-natural water balance

A near-natural water balance protects against droughts and floods. Near-natural soils, wetlands and water bodies prevent rapid run-off and keep water in the landscape. Moreover, intact floodplains provide flood protection. For this reason, under the Action Plan, a federal programme will promote climate action in the water sector, supporting measures such as reconnecting and renaturing floodplains.

- Promoting healthy forests

Healthy, near-natural forests remove large amounts of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, provide habitats for animals and plants, improve the local climate and keep water in the landscape. Only 36 percent of Germany's forests, however, are near-natural. To change this, the Action Plan envisages developing additional near-natural forests, continuing and increasing the funds for this purpose.

- Making cities and municipalities climate-resilient

Nature in cities and settlements improves air quality and provides shade and cooling on hot summer days. Contiguous green spaces act as cooling and fresh air corridors and offer habitat and refuge for many animal species. To make our towns and cities resilient to climate change and heat, the Action Plan will, for instance, support the planting of 150,000 additional urban trees by 2030 and advance the model of the water-smart city.

The next steps

The current draft of the Federal Action Plan on Nature-based Solutions for Climate and Biodiversity is based on ideas and proposals from within the German government. In a next step, from 5 September 2022 the Länder, associations and the public can express their views on the Action Plan. After reviewing the feedback, the Action Plan will be revised, coordinated within the German government and adopted by the Cabinet at the beginning of 2023.