



PRESERVING CARPATHIAN OLD GROWTH FORESTS

The Green Heart of Europe hosts one of the largest remaining areas of virgin and natural forests in the continent



© Doru Oprisan



CLOSE TO 500

VASCULAR PLANTS IN THE
CARPATHIANS ARE ENDEMIC

The Carpathian Mountains, arching across seven countries from the Czech Republic across Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine and Hungary, and down to Romania and the tip of Serbia, are Europe's last great wilderness area – a bastion for large carnivores, with two thirds of the continent's populations of bears, wolves and lynx, and home to the greatest remaining reserves of old growth forests outside Russia.

The Carpathian Mountains are part of WWF's Green Heart of Europe initiative to preserve the continent's greatest natural treasures.

Europe's treasures under threat

Less than 300,000 hectares of old growth forests are now thought to exist in the region. Unfortunately, many of them are felled because of our constantly increasing need for wood and the new opportunities to reach them, like new forest roads and powerful machines.

In 2013 in Romania’s Brasov and Covasna counties, old growth forests cover only 24% of their total area calculated in 2005.

In Slovakia, only 0.47% of forests could be considered old growth, as demonstrated by a thorough field study done in 2010. Prior to the study it had been thought that 2% of forests were old growth.

Some representative old growth forest areas, like the magnificent beech forests of Slovakia and Ukraine, are in UNESCO’s World Heritage List.

Why are old growth forests important?

Old growth forests (including those called ancient, virgin or primeval) are complex systems of seedlings, young, mature and old trees dominated by very large, imposing trees. Dead trees and decaying logs are just as important as living trees.

Old growth forests are critical to life on earth. They are home to almost nine out of ten land species of plants and animals, many of them endangered --like the brown bear, wolf and lynx, and others so unique that they amaze even scientists -- like a 63-meter high fir tree recently found in Romania!

Or like the standing volume of over 1500 m3 per hectare in Sinca forest, near Brasov.

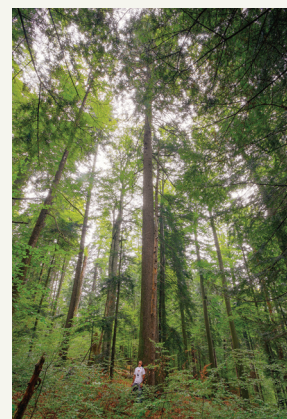
Old growth forests generate oxygen, lock up vast amounts of carbon and filter fresh-water. Without them, we would lose our best teacher of maintaining forest surface in the context of climate change, as well as our connection to untouched nature. They also provide excellent information about the ecosystem resilience at different altitudes and climatic zones.

What is being done?

A growing number of legislative tools and political commitments, such as the EU Timber Regulation, the EU Habitats and Birds Directive and the Forestry Protocol under the Carpathian Convention, can help us preserve old growth forests in the Carpathians and beyond.

Action for preserving forest treasures

1. **Identifying/ mapping** areas of the remaining old growth forests.
2. **Advocating and lobbying** for a “no intervention regime” in these woods.
3. **Public awareness, education** and compensatory measures for the identified old growth forests of the region.



© Doru Oprisan

< 300 000 HA

OF OLD GROWTH FOREST ARE
THOUGHT TO EXIST IN THE
CARPATHIAN REGION. SOME
OF THEM ARE IN THE UNESCO
WORLD HERITAGE LIST



Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet’s natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

This publication has been produced with the assistance of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of WWF and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.