

## PRESS RELEASE

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### Greece gives legal protection to roadless areas

**Biodiversity and ecosystems are highly threatened by road development worldwide. Greece has taken the lead in Europe by legally protecting six mountainous roadless Natura 2000 sites from further road fragmentation, introducing the first national roadless policy in Europe.**

New roads and other infrastructure are banned to protect from further road fragmentation on six iconic mountains in Greece, as a start of a broader national roadless policy. The Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis announced the conservation program “Untrodden Mountains” at the Climate Change Conference (COP26) and presented it on 21 January 2022 through six ministerial decisions signed by the Deputy Minister of Environment and Energy Giorgos Amyras. The legislation precludes all artificial changes to the natural environment that alter the character of six pristine mountains of the country. This means that 974 km<sup>2</sup> of mountain lands will remain unchanged (0.74% of Greek land).

The Society for Conservation Biology-European Section (SCB-ES), an international organization of conservation professionals representing 28 European countries, considers it as a pioneer initiative in Europe and a crucial step to mitigate the climate and biodiversity crises. “We hope this important initiative will continue in Greece and will encourage other European countries to maintain the last wilderness roadless areas in Europe”, says John Piccolo, Chair of SCB-ES.

Europe is the most road-fragmented continent, but still holds large tracts of unfragmented natural lands. Scientists have been calling for halting infrastructure expansion in areas of high biodiversity and for implementing roadless policies for biodiversity and ecosystem function preservation. While roadless areas have been protected for 20 years in the USA under the Roadless Areas Conservation Rule, Greece is the first country in Europe that legally tackles the root of the problem: road sprawl, which is an unstoppable driver of land use changes. The EU’s 2030 Biodiversity Strategy commits to protect a minimum of 30% of the EUs’ land area and to provide strict protection to one third of this. “It is paradoxical that at the same time that billions of Euros will be invested in restoring degraded lands under the EU Biodiversity Strategy, natural and pristine ecosystems remain vulnerable to new roads and land-consuming projects” says Vassiliki Kati, the Greek Professor from the University of Ioannina, lead author of the publication that provided evidence for this political decision. Providing a legal roadless status to the remaining unfragmented lands will be a straightforward and cost-effective way to tackle both climate and biodiversity crisis at the EU. This roadless policy should inspire conservation policies in other parts of Europe and the world.

This is part of the Roadless Initiative of the Society for Conservation Biology.

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#### Links

<https://bc.lab.uoi.gr/en/research/projects/roadless/> [ROADLESS: BCL, University of Ioannina, Greece]

<https://conbio.org/policy/global-policy-initiatives/roadless-areas-and-biodiversity> [SCB: Roadless initiative]

<http://www.roadless.online/> [Roadless initiative]

Kati V et al. 2020. Conservation policy under a roadless perspective: Minimizing fragmentation in Greece. *Biological Conservation* 252:108828. <https://doi.org/10.3390/d12040124>