



Community Attitudes

Objective: Improve public support for protected areas and conservation-oriented behaviour

Carpathian Mountains
status: deteriorating



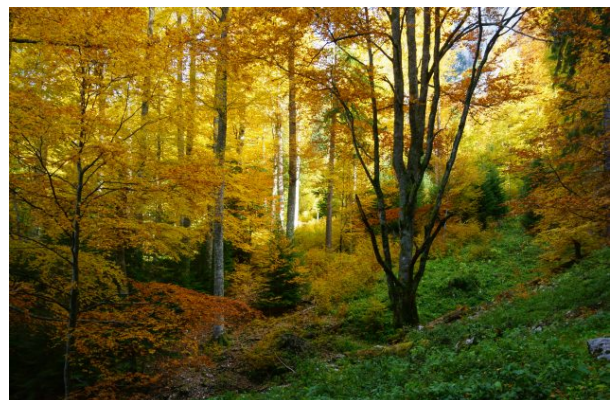
Problem: A key goal of Foundation Conservation Carpathia is to create a Făgăraş Mountains National Park in Carpathia. The successful creation and implementation of protected areas, however, is highly dependent on local communities' acceptance and support for the proposal.

Action: Foundation Conservation Carpathia are engaging with local communities to build support for restoration in a range of ways, including through education programmes and creating [sustainable income opportunities](#) through local [nature-based enterprises](#).

Indicator: Monitoring community attitudes towards and support for protected areas and the creation of a National Park will indicate local levels of support for restoration in the long-term and can inform future engagement efforts.



Landscapes of the Făgăraş Mountains. Photo: Foundation Conservation Carpathia.



Carpathian forest. Photo: George Soare.

Methods

To track changes in local peoples' attitudes to protected areas, surveys were run in 2018, 2020 and 2022. A Drop-Off-Pick-Up method was used to collect baseline data in 2018 ([Aastrup, 2020](#)). Data in 2020 and 2022 were collected through an electronic version of the survey. Respondents were randomly selected and invited to participate in the study by completing the survey with the guidance of a field agent. A total of 1,494 randomly selected residents from Arges, Braşov, Sibiu and Vâlcea participated in the study (644 in 2018, 550 in 2020, and 300 in 2022). 56% of the respondents were female and 44% were male.

Structured questionnaires containing closed-ended questions were used. Participants were asked to respond to statements using a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire focused on understanding local community resident attitudes, beliefs and behavioural intentions (willingness to support protected areas, and acceptance that benefits outweigh costs). Topics included:

- Demographic characteristics (to better understand who was completing the survey)
- Environmental values, using the New Ecological Paradigm Scale ([Dunlap and Van Liere, 1978](#); [Dunlap, 2008](#)). This explored attitudes across three categories – environmental concern, awareness of ecological limits, and sense of human dominance over nature
- Attitudes toward nature conservation
- Attitudes toward the creation of a Făgăraş Mountains National Park
- Acceptability of potential management options for the National Park
- Perceptions of cost and benefits of a National Park



Community outreach event. Photo: Georgiana Andrei.



Wildlife watching at the annual Făgăraş Fest. Photo: Mihai Donea.

Results

Environmental values:

Environmental values were assessed in 2020 and 2022. On average, respondents held positive environmental concern beliefs, and were neutral to slightly negative about domination and ecological

limits. In 2022, however, respondents were slightly less likely to express environmental concern than in 2020, although responses were still very positive. Respondents in 2022 were also slightly less likely to show strong awareness of ecological limits (around the effects and magnitude of human impacts on the environment). No significant change was observed for domination beliefs (around people's rights and abilities to control and manipulate nature, and responsibilities to protect it).

Attitudes to nature conservation:

On average, respondents from 2020 and 2022 agreed nature conservation is about protecting forests and wildlife as much as it about protecting livelihoods, that changes in human behaviors are needed, and that we need to conserve the environment for future generations (Fig. 1). Respondents disagreed that investing in conservation is a waste of time and money, and that they have more important things to worry about than protecting the environment. Statistically significant differences were observed between the two samples, with respondents in 2022 expressing slightly fewer positive attitudes toward nature conservation than people in 2020 (Fig. 1).

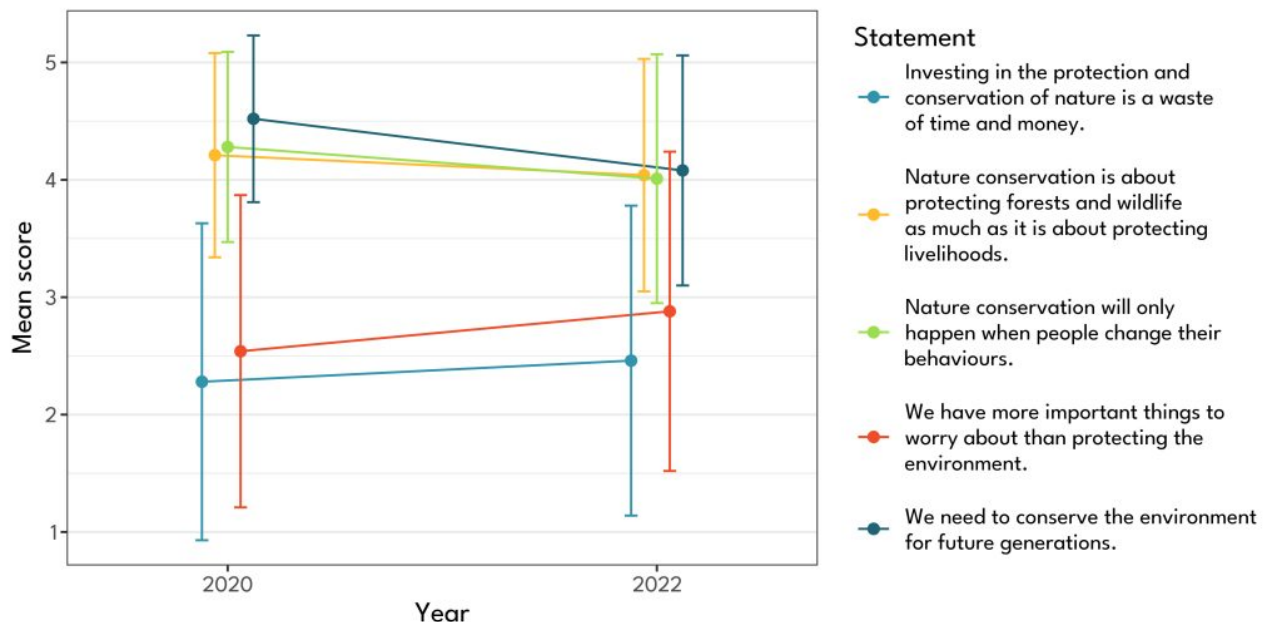


Figure 1: Attitudes towards nature conservation. Scores are on a Likert scale ranging from Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (5).

Attitudes to creation of a Făgăraș Mountains National Park:

There was no significant overall change in attitudes to the creation of a Făgăraș Mountains National Park between 2018 and 2022 (Fig. 2).

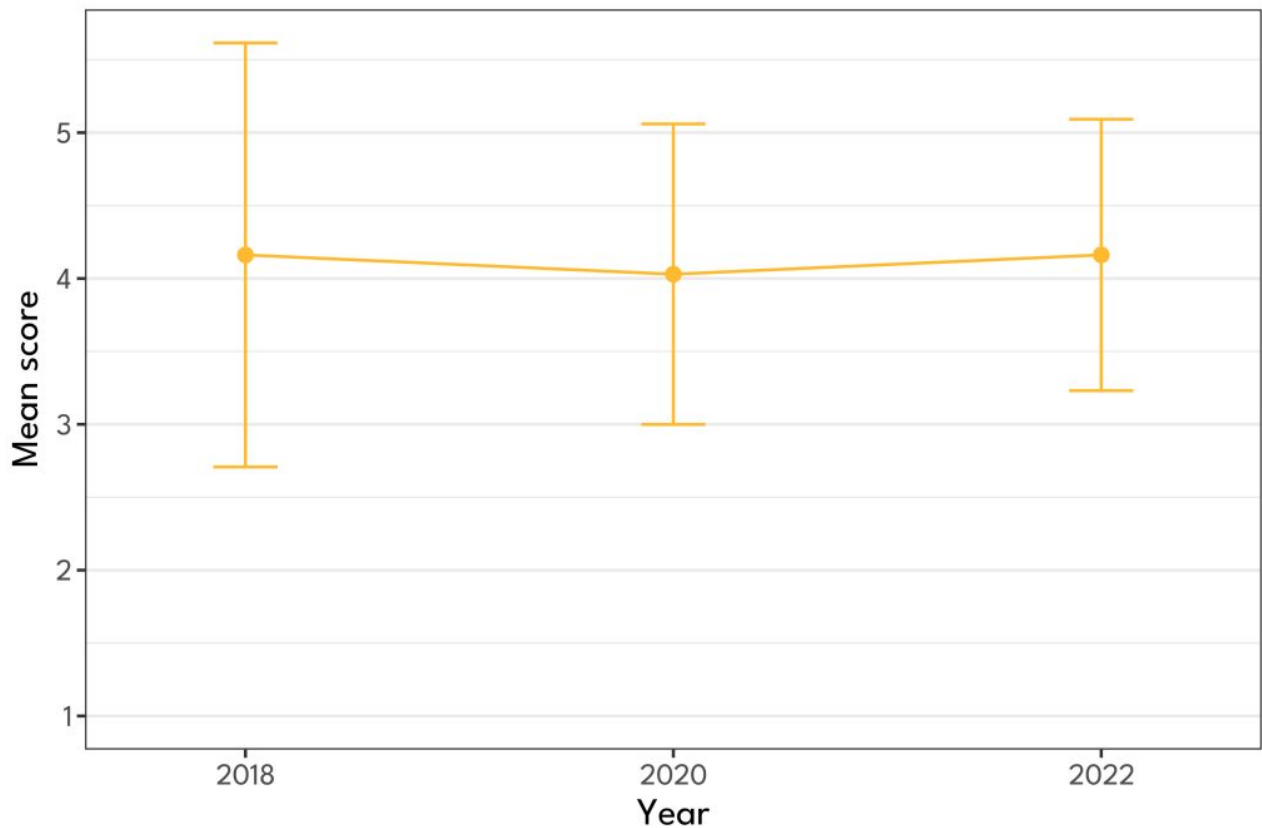


Figure 2: Attitudes towards the creation of a Făgăraș Mountains National Park. Scores were on a Likert scale ranging from Very bad (1) to Very good (5).

Management options for the National Park:

On average, a decline in support for restricting hunting was observed between 2018 and 2020, although support increased again in 2022 (Fig. 3). There was also a decline in support for restricting wood cutting between 2018 and 2022. In contrast, support for restricting berry and mushroom picking and sheep herding increased during the period.

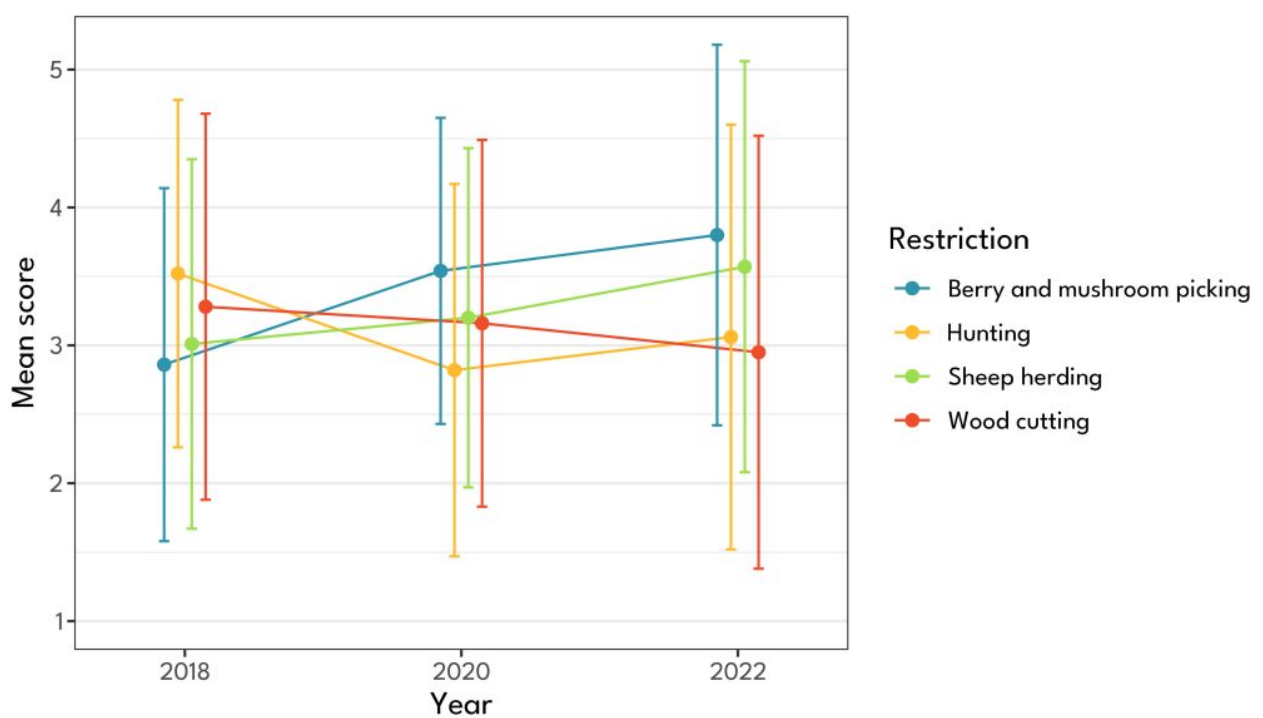


Figure 3: Acceptability of restricting different activities inside the proposed National Park. Scores were on a Likert scale ranging from Extremely unacceptable (1) to Extremely acceptable (5).

Costs and benefits of a National Park:

There were no statistically significant changes in perceptions of benefits of the National Park. In terms of costs, in 2022 respondents were less likely to believe that a National Park would restrict wood cutting, grazing or hunting, but more likely to believe it would restrict berry and mushroom picking.



Sheep herding in the mountains. Photo: Michiel van Noppen.



Mushrooms harvested from the forest. Photo: George Soare.

Interpretation

Some differences in attitudes and beliefs were observed over the period. However, despite being statistically significant, the size of these differences was small and changes in attitudes seem to be slow to take place. Overall however, respondents expressed positive attitudes towards protecting the environment for future generations, and a belief that the ways people behave can influence conservation outcomes. People also expressed overall support for the creation of a National Park.

Respondents in 2020 held slightly stronger positive views, and this may be because of the effects of the Covid-19 lockdown on people's perceptions towards nature ([Soga et al., 2021](#)). Therefore, it is possible that the results from 2020 may not represent how people would 'normally' perceive and behave toward nature and the creation of a national park.

Citations

Aastrup (2020). Conservation narratives and conflicts over protected areas in post-socialist Romania. [*Journal of Political Ecology*, 27: 84-104.](#)

Dunlap, R. E., & Van Liere, K. D. (1978). The "new environmental paradigm". [*The Journal of*](#)

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Dunlap, R. E. (2008). The New Environmental Paradigm Scale: From Marginality to Worldwide Use. [*The Journal of Environmental Education*, 40\(1\), 3-18.](#)

Soga, M., Evans, M. J., Cox, D. T., & Gaston, K. J. (2021). Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on human-nature interactions: Pathways, evidence and implications. [*People and Nature*, 3\(3\), 518-527.](#)

Partners

