



INTERNATIONAL
LAND CONSERVATION
NETWORK

A New Paper by Eurosite and Partners Explores Project Selection Criteria for Conservation Easements to Protect Nature in European Quarries

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How can nature protection on private land be guaranteed long term? How can conservationists incentivize landowners to protect nature on their land? These two intertwined questions have been on the minds of European conservationists for years and are now the basis for a paper, cowritten by Eurosite, Birdlife International, and Heidelberg Materials, and published as an opinion piece in the journal *Frontiers in Conservation Science*.

Europe is experiencing a surge of interest in nature protection from the private sector, much of which can be attributed to a two-fold recognition. Across society, there is growing acknowledgement of the inherent value nature provides, coupled with mounting public pressure for sustainability.

Through its LIFE ENPLC project, Eurosite has been exploring several elements of conservation easements. In partnership with the Birdlife International, a global partnership of conservation non-governmental organizations, and the multinational building-materials company Heidelberg Materials, Eurosite dug into how conservation easements could be used to protect nature in quarries. The result of their work is the opinion piece, “Conservation easements — project selection criteria for quarries in Europe”, which was published in November, 2023, under the section “Global Biodiversity Threats” of *Frontiers in Conservation Science*.

The paper highlights the potential for the extractive industry to advance biodiversity objectives written in the European Union Green Deal. It argues that well-managed quarries can serve as vital habitats for endangered species, particularly near Natura 2000 sites and introduces conservation easements as a financial incentive for quarry operators to invest in ecological restoration.

Conservation easements limit specific land uses, making conservation a more financially predictable business venture. In the United States, tax benefits have made conservation easements popular tools for private land conservation; however, their application in Europe remains nascent. The paper also provides a comprehensive set of 12 selection criteria to help identify optimal quarry sites for such easements. These criteria consider various factors, from location and size to ecosystem services and stakeholders.

By aligning economic incentives with conservation goals, the paper offers a pragmatic blueprint to incorporate the extractive industry into Europe's biodiversity strategy. Conservation easements could be pivotal in creating a symbiotic relationship between commercial interests and ecological preservation, expanding the scope of partnerships to other stakeholders like water companies or insurance firms.

'As a land steward, Heidelberg Materials has a responsibility to nature. For this reason, as part of its Sustainability Commitments 2030, the company has committed to contributing to a Nature Positive future. This includes activity restoring and protecting biodiversity wherever possible within its footprint. Quarries can offer unique habitats that can support a rich biodiversity, including a number of threatened species. Having a means to secure the efforts made to restore habitats is fundamental. The use of conservation easements could in some cases, provide the necessary long-term guarantees needed. It is for this reason we have been working through our Partnership with BirdLife International in collaboration with Eurosite to investigate this opportunity'. – Shane Sparg, Senior Manager Biodiversity and Water at Heidelberg Materials

The full paper is [available here](#).

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