

Changes in the Sites of Community Importance in the Czech Republic

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In December 2024, the Government of the Czech Republic approved the 8th amendment to the national list of Sites of Community Importance/Special Areas of Conservation (SCI/SAC) sites, the expert preparation of which had been entrusted by the Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic (MoE) in 2021 to

the Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic (NCA CR). The amendment responds to requirements of the European Commission (EC) arising from the assessment of the sufficiency of SCI/SAC sites in the Czech Republic to ensure the protection of species and habitats, as reflected in ongoing infringement proceedings.



Figure 1. Newly designated Strážkovice SCI/SAC in South Bohemia for the conservation of the Dusky large blue butterfly (*Phengaris nausithous*). © Jonáš Gaigr



Figure 2. Paseky /Clearings SCI/SAC was designated primarily for the protection of the Lady's slipper orchid (*Cypripedium calceolus*). It currently supports the species' largest known population in the Pannonian biogeographical region within the Czech Republic. Abundantly flowering clumps are visible at the site. © Petr Slavík

It should be recalled that the proposal included not only the designation of new sites and the addition of conservation features to existing ones, but also expert/technical changes, i.e. boundary refinements and complementing conservation features or entire SCI/SAC sites that met the criteria set by the EC for possible de-designation. With this update to the national list of SCI/SAC sites, the network has moved closer to its final stage in terms of sufficiency. In the future, mainly “operational” adjustments to the Czech Republic's national list are planned, reflecting the need to maintain the functionality of the network (i.e. changes that will reflect developments in natural conditions at sites and the response of the conservation

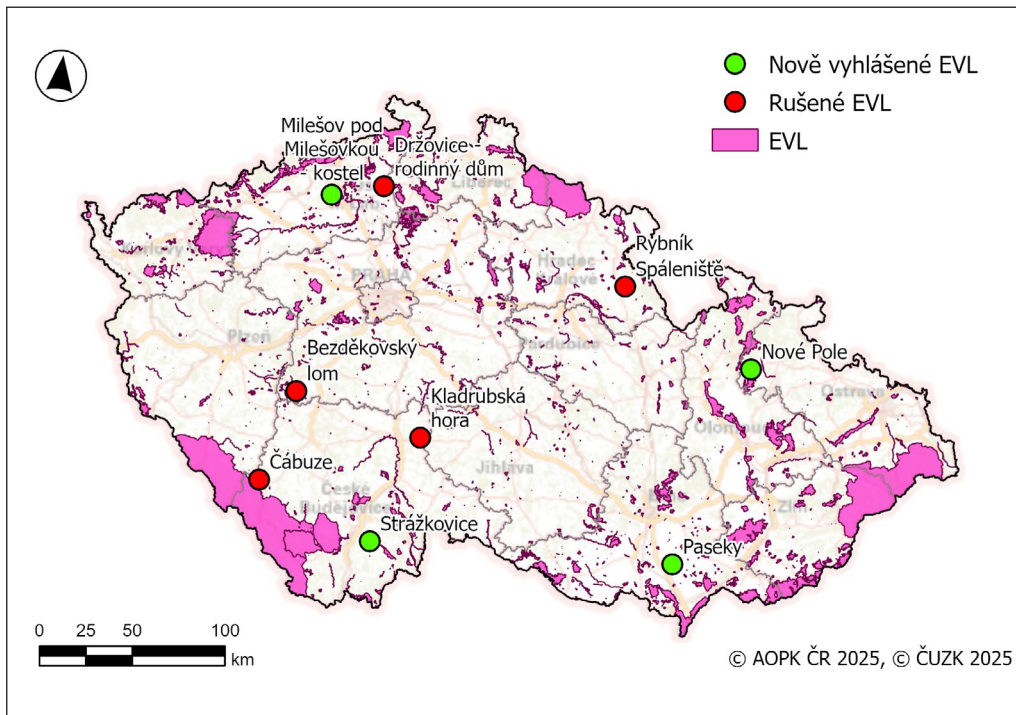
features to these, as well as other changes such as boundary revisions).

Consultation at the national level

The expert proposal, pre-negotiated by the NCA CR with the relevant stakeholders (landowners, land managers and local authorities), had been submitted to the MoE in June 2022 in accordance with the established timetable. It still included several outstanding disagreements that the NCA CR was unable to resolve at its level. Many of these comments were based on concerns about restrictions on land management.

Although the NCA CR had prepared so-called supporting sheets for the consultation, containing basic information on the sites, the additional conservation features, and their management requirements, this did not provide sufficient assurance for some stakeholders.

However, unlike the designation of national Specially Protected Areas, summaries of recommended measures (SRMs), which describe the optimal management of EU Natura 2000 network sites and their conservation features, are prepared only after the legislative changes have been adopted. The reason is that the European Union's Habitat Directive requires SCI/SAC sites to be designated



Map 1. Delineation of SCI/SAC (pink colour) in the Czech Republic following the amendment of the national list, highlighting newly designated (green) and abolished (red) sites. Compiled by Martin Šíkola

Change	SCI/SAC code and name
New SCI/SAC	4 CZ0317017 Strážkovice CZ0427014 Milešov pod Milešovkou - kostel CZ0627016 Paseky CZ0717012 Nové Pole
De-designated SCI/SAC	5 CZ0213008 Bezděkovský lom/Bezděkov Quarry CZ0312035 Kladrubská hora/Kladruby Hill CZ0313096 Čábuze CZ0423651 Držovice - rodinný dům/family house CZ0523287 Rybník Spáleníště/Burn.site Fishpond
Addition of conservation feature	34
Removal of conservation feature	7
Boundary refinement	129

Table 1. Overview of changes to the national list of SCI/SAC. Source: Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic

solely on the basis of scientific data, while other interests in the area, including economic ones, are to be taken into account only when setting conservation measures, *i.e.*, *inter alia*, in the preparation of SRMs. An advantage of preparing SRMs only after the amendment is that more time is subsequently

available to agree on their form with the relevant stakeholders.

Following submission of the proposal, the MoE promptly initiated the preparation of legislative documents; however, due to the Czech Republic's Presidency of the EU, discussions on

the remaining disagreements could only begin in 2023. In that year, all outstanding objections were addressed by the MoE with expert support from the NCA CR. Meetings with landowners and land managers were followed by discussions with the relevant ministries – the Ministry of Transport of the Czech Republic (MoT), the Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic (MoD) and the Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic (MoA). The proposal had also been preliminarily discussed with the Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic (MIT) and the Ministry of Regional Development of the Czech Republic (MRD). The MoE noted the remaining disagreements regarding the proposed amendment to the legislative regulation. In January 2024, the inter-ministerial consultation process was launched, during which some ministries carried forward their previous objections.

The disagreement with the MoA was subsequently resolved through a compromise delineation of the boundaries of the expanded Kozlov–Tábor SCI/SAC. The objection of the MoD to the addition of the habitat type Euro-Siberian steppic woods with *Quercus* spp. (91I0) to the Doupovské hory/Doupov Hills SCI/SAC was resolved through mutual agreement on the future establishment of a contractual protected area.

A different situation ultimately arose in addressing the objection to the inclusion of the Yellow-bellied toad (*Bombina variegata*) among the conservation features of the Boletice SCI/SAC, which is also a military training area. In this case, the MoE accommodated the request of the MoD not to increase nature conservation requirements within the military training area in the current geopolitical situation, which requires intensive use of such areas for their primary purpose; the specific proposal was therefore withdrawn following agreement at the ministerial level. At the same time, the NCA CR was tasked by the MoE with investigating amphibian species' alternative sites in 2025.

Within the inter-ministerial consultation process, no solution was ultimately found to a single outstanding issue, namely the MoT's objection to the addition of the habitat type Alluvial forests with *Fraxinus excelsior* and *Alnus glutinosa* (91E0) to the Porta Bohemica SCI/SAC. In the end, this single issue alone was submitted to the Government for a decision. This concerns a long-standing, site-specific requirement of the EC. The MoT expressed

concerns about the impact on the preparation of the Děčín navigation weir project, specifically regarding the appropriate assessment under Section 45i of Act No. 114/1992 Gazette on Nature Conservation and Landscape Protection, as amended later.

The disagreement was ultimately resolved during the Government meeting through the addition of a condition to the Government resolution concern-

The changes included boundary refinements to SCI/SAC sites (in some cases leading to the exclusion of parts of the sites) and the removal of conservation features. Such removal of a conservation feature is possible only in exceptional cases, where the long-term absence of the given feature has been confirmed due to causes that could not have been prevented (natural development), and where there has been no human influence or neglect of management. At the same

Replacement of Čábuzé with Strážkovice for the Dusky large blue butterfly in the South Bohemian Region

One of the expert/technical adjustments involved the de-designation of the Čábuzé SCI/SAC, which had been designated for a single conservation feature – the Dusky large blue (*Phengaris nausithous*) – and its replacement by the new Strážkovice SCI/SAC (CZ0317017).

The species had long been absent from the Čábuzé site, despite the presence of its host plant, the Great burnet (*Sanguisorba officinalis*), the implementation of appropriate management (including support from agricultural subsidies), and occasional records of the species in the surrounding area.

This site had already been proposed for de-designation as part of the amendment approved in 2016; however, the proposed replacement SCI/SAC site of Nová Ves nad Lužnicí-Lanopás was contested by several

stakeholders during the interministerial consultation process due to the close proximity of its boundary to a planned road transport corridor. As the proposal could not be advanced, it was withdrawn together with the proposal to de-designate Čábuzé SCI/SAC, since the European Commission had agreed to the de-designation only in exchange for a replacement site.

As part of the amendment presented there, the regional office of the Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic identified a new, promising replacement site, Strážkovice, located near the city of České Budějovice; it had a long-term occurrence of the dusky large blue and other common butterflies. The proposal covered the most important and long-term monitored meadows with occurrences of the species in the area between the villages of Strážkovice and Trocnov. The site attracted no objections.

ing the riparian vegetation management, and the habitat type was consequently added to the list of conservation features of the SCI/SAC site.

Consultation with the EC regarding the proposed changes

In addition to updating the national list in response to the sufficiency assessment, the amendment also included the so-called expert/technical changes. These had to be discussed in advance with the EC to ensure that no changes were made that would subsequently be rejected at the EU level, thereby avoiding inconsistencies between national and EU legislation.

time, it is desirable to propose a replacement site. Such a case is described in the box below.

Boundary refinements enhance legal certainty in delineating SCI/SAC sites, as the original boundaries of many sites were delineated using source data that no longer meet current accuracy standards. The refinements were aligned to existing boundaries in the field, namely (in order of priority) small-size Specially Protected Areas, contractual protected areas, cadastral parcel boundaries, forest stand units, etc. Similar adjustments are also envisaged in the future.

In both cases, extensive sheets with detailed justifications had to be prepared for the EC, followed by several rounds of queries from its side.

In the end, the proposed boundary alignment was withdrawn for only three SCI/SAC sites.

Outcomes

The proposed amendment to the Czech Republic's national list of SCI/SAC sites was approved by the Government of the Czech Republic on December 18, 2024 (i.e. three years after the start of preparations), and on January 9, 2025 it was promulgated as Government Regulation No. 2/2025 in the Collection of Laws/Gazette, entering into force on January 24m, 2025. This marked a major step towards achieving the sufficiency of the Czech Republic's Natura 2000 network and, at the same time, increased legal certainty across a wide range of sites. In addition, the updated data were successfully submitted to the EC in January 2025 through the Standard Data Form – the official format (available via the Natura 2000 Viewer) used to transmit information on the Natura 2000 network (including site boundaries, protection, conservation and management and conservation features) in individual Member States. The amended national list will thus be incorporated into the European Union's list at the beginning of 2026.

Summary of changes to the Czech Republic's national list of SCI/SAC sites

Four new SCI/SAC sites were designated (mostly as replacements for removed conservation features), and new conservation features were added to 34 sites. Particular attention should be paid to Nové Pole/New Field SCI/SAC, which is the first site in the Czech Republic designated for the protection of the bryophyte species Round notothylas (*Notothylas orbicularis*). At seven SCI/SAC sites, one or more conservation features were removed, and five sites were de-designated entirely. There are currently 1,111 SCI/SAC sites in the Czech Republic, covering an area of 796,182 ha (i.e. 10.1% of the country). In addition, the boundaries of 129 sites were refined. An overview of the changes is provided in the table. The revised delineation of SCI/SAC sites, highlighting newly designated and de-designated sites, is illustrated on the map and is also available as a data layer on the NCA CR data portal (data.aopk.gov.cz) or in the MapoMat application (<https://webgis.nature.cz/>), which is also available in a desktop version. ■