Remote sensing as a tool for Natura 2000 habitat monitoring: a need for clear user requirements

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The Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) has been a great stimulus for nature conservation in the European Union. Member states made already important efforts, but real challenges remain. Establishing a monitoring system for protected habitats and species (Art. 11) and reporting on their conservation status every six years (Art. 17) is such a challenge to many authorities. Cost-efficient ways to acquire useful and up-to-date information are urgently needed. Remote sensing has a great potential to support the monitoring of Annex I habitat types. Yet, its use is still limited, and a more day-to-day use may be hampered by a lack of mutual understanding between what users need and what producers can deliver. We state that potential users of remote-sensing derived information can help to overcome these difficulties by making their requirements more explicit, in terms of characteristics directly related to remote sensing (e.g. thematic accuracy, spatial resolution). Within the Habistat-project (http://habistat.vgt.vito.be), we conducted a thorough requirement analysis for Annex I habitat mapping and monitoring and identified data requirements in which remote sensing can provide an added value. We illustrate how these user requirements can be subsequently exploited to tailor remote sensing products to the users’ needs.

Topic areas: 1) Natura 2000; 2) Inventory and monitoring; 3) Methods and analytical tools