Spain

Picos de Europa

Declaration date: 10 July 2003
Surface area: 64,660 ha; 24,560 ha in Asturias; 15,381 ha in Cantabria; 24,719 ha en León (core: 27 per cent; buffer: 71 per cent; transition: 2 per cent). There is presently a proposal for an extension.
Administrative division: Asturias: 5 Municipalities; Cantabria: 3 Municipalities; León: 2 Municipalities with territory in the Biosphere Reserve

Human activities:

Grazing and open-range sheep and goat raising as well as of autochthonous races of cattle such as the Asturian mountain cattle -Ratina and Casina- and Tudanca cattle. The mountain grasslands are used in the best possible way thanks to the summer transhumance from the valleys to the highlands. A rich heritage of traditional buildings is conserved where different kinds of artisanal cheeses are prepared, such as the Cabrales, Leon, Picon de Bejes-Tresviso, Valdeón, Liébana, Gamonedo or Beyos cheeses. Presently nature-related tourism is the main economic activity.

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Ecological characteristics:

The Biosphere Reserve is located on two different geological formations: the Picos de Europa limestone mass and a fraction of the central Cantabrian Cordillera. The landforms are abrupt with steep slopes modelled by fluvial incisions, Karstic dissolution and Glacial and Periglacial processes. A temperate humid Atlantic-type climate predominates, where the great variation of altitudes, lithological diversity and ancestral human presence have given rise to a great variety of landscapes. The vegetation includes large pure or mixed forests of Beech, Pedunculate Oak, Birch, Holm Oak and gallery woodlands with Aspen, Ash, Willow and Alder. Livestock-raising is done in the vast meadows and grasslands interspersed with gorse and heath scrubland. In the higher areas, creeping Junipers grow close to the ground to avoid the lethal effect of frosts. As a whole there are over 1,600 species of phanerogam plants in the Biosphere Reserve. The fauna is also very diverse, including the Wolf, Brown Bear, Chamois, Western Capercaillie, Golden Eagle, Alpine Newt, Atlantic salmon and some other seventy species of vertebrates. There is also a great variety of bats and little known fauna associated with the sinkholes, that in some cases are over 1,500 m deep.

Protection classifications:

• National Park
• Specially Protected Bird Area (SPBA)
• Site of Community Importance (SCI)