

FOSSIL FUELS IN PROTECTED AREAS:

Low-hanging fruit for additional mitigation



Summary

50 Gigatons of potential CO₂ emissions are located under the world's protected areas, mostly in economically marginal oil, gas and coal fields. Pledging to keep these in the ground constitutes an accessible additional mitigation measure that adds millions of tons of avoided CO₂ emissions to a country's NDC with significant biodiversity co-benefits.

Background

The Paris Agreement requires leaving over 80% of proven fossil fuel reserves untouched. The Global Stocktake has shown that additional mitigation is needed to achieve the Paris targets. In this context, keeping fossil carbon in the ground within protected areas represents a remarkable opportunity that not only mitigates CO₂ emissions but also protects biodiversity.

Protected Areas serve as crucial safety mechanisms for critical biodiversity, support local communities and evoke national pride.

LINGO Analysis on Fossil Fuels under Protected Areas

LINGO analysis has identified 2337 oil and gas assets in 835 protected areas in 95 countries. Assuming their full extraction and burning, these projects would generate over 50.8 billion tonnes of CO₂. Nearly half of them contain small quantities of oil and gas, making them of marginal commercial interest. This lack of commercial appeal makes them perfect candidates for non-extraction and thereby, massive climate and biodiversity gains.

Countries with Fossil Fuels Under Protected Areas

Angolia	Greece	Palau
Albania	Greenland	Papua New Guinea
Argentina	Guatemala	Poland
Australia	Croatia	Paraguay
Austria	Hungary	Qatar
Azerbaijan	Indonesia	Romania
Bangladesh	Iran	Russian Federation
Bulgaria	Iraq	Saudi Arabia
Bahrain	Israel	Serbia
Belize	Italy	Seychelles
Bolivia	Jordan	Slovakia
Brazil	Japan	Slovenia
Botswana	Kazakhstan	South Africa
Canada	Kenya	South Sudan
Chile	Kuwait	Suriname
China	Lithuania	Tanzania
Cameroon	Morocco	Thailand
Congo, DRC	Moldova	Trinidad and Tobago
Congo	Madagascar	Tunisia
Colombia	Mexico	Turkey
Cyprus	Myanmar	Turkmenistan
Czechia	Malaysia	Uganda
Dominican Republic	New Caledonia	Ukraine
Algeria	Niger	United Arab Emirates
Ecuador	Nigeria	United Kingdoms
Egypt	Netherlands	United States of America
Spain	Nepal	Uzbekistan
Ethiopia	New Zealand	Venezuela
France	Oman	Viet Nam
Gabon	Pakistan	Zambia
Germany	Peru	Zimbabwe
Georgia	Philippines	



Sheikh Badin National Park in Pakistan.

The full list of affected protected areas is available [here](#). 

¹ [Unburnable Carbon in Protected Areas. LINGO & Oil Change International, October 2023.](#)

A quantifiable mitigation measure

Progressive countries² are already restricting fossil fuel extraction in their protected areas, in line with World Conservation Congress Resolutions from 2000 and 2016 that suggest a legal prohibition of such activities. In many more countries, it may already be illegal to explore, drill, or mine within protected areas. Public opinion overwhelmingly supports the preservation of natural heritage over fossil fuel extraction. Implementation costs are low. While effective conservation may require donor support, the quantification of a non-extraction measure is easy.

The [LINGO database](#) contains avoidable CO2 emissions for each protected area identified. In countries where extraction from protected areas is already prohibited, it primarily requires reviewing the CO2 estimate and adding this measure to the next NDC.

Countries whose protected areas do not currently enjoy legal protection from extractive activities would need to work a bit more. The COP28 presidency has invited nature-rich countries to present national investment plans that align with the Paris Agreement and the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.³ Countries with higher implementation costs for non-extraction commitments could seek support from donor countries for such measures that combine a high CO2 mitigation potential with biodiversity co-benefits.

Besides strengthening the respective protected areas, support could be requested for policies such as sustainable economic development (as alternative to the fossil fuel option) and solar rural electrification. Declaring protected areas as no-go zones for fossil fuel extraction can be a cost-effective, politically sound, and morally compelling path for increasing mitigation ambition.

² including [Mexico](#), [Belize](#) and [Norway](#).

³ Al Jaber, Ahmed (2023). COP28: Letter to Parties. <https://www.cop28.com/letter-to-parties>



NEXT STEPS:

[Check out your country profile in the LINGO Database on Protected Carbon.](#) [Get in touch with questions.](#)