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Russia Creates New Nature Reserve in Urals Steppe

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The Shaitan-Tau will preserve the area's unique oak forest steppe, the decree said.

The Russian government on Sunday authorized the creation of a new nature reserve to protect the wood-grown steppe of the southern Urals.

The Shaitan-Tau reserve in the Orenburg region will cover 67 square kilometers, according to the government's website, making it slightly larger than Manhattan Island (59 square kilometers).

The Shaitan-Tau (Turkic for "Devil's Mountain") will preserve the area's unique oak forest steppe, the decree said.

The reserve comprises a still-untouched ecosystem that hosts relict plants, rare falcons and endangered butterflies.

It also attracts geologists and paleontologists thanks to its 500 million-year-old limestone deposits full of fossils.

Russia has more than 100 strict wildlife reserves, including 10 natural UNESCO World Heritage sites.

The country has also signed the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, which obliges participants to allot 17 percent of their total land territory for nature reserves by 2020.

But environmental groups say Russia's current plans for new reserves fail to meet the UN obligations, and two of the UNESCO sites are in danger of losing their status due to state-endorsed human activity there.

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