

During these difficult days of war in Israel, we should not forget the ecological challenges the war brings. Here is a summary of the current situation in Israel regarding the damage to nature and its habitats caused by the war, and why your ongoing support is more critical than ever.

War of Iron Swords - The Effects of War on Israel's Nature

During the 'Iron Swords' war, many employees and volunteers were drafted into reserve service and many others were evacuated from their homes. Meanwhile, SPNI and the Nature and Parks Authority are estimating the extent of both direct and indirect damage caused by the war and offering options and solutions for coping and rehabilitation. We must mention the director of the southern region of the Green Patrol, who is still abducted in Gaza, and we all wish for his safe return home together with all the hostages.

War damage



Stray dogs near IDF tanks in southern Israel (credit to Arutz 14 Israel)

Beyond the security aspect needed for the Iron Swords war, there are many effects on nature, animals, and ecological diversity at various levels. Some of the expected damages include road encroachment, destruction of habitats in assembly areas, waste, bombing & noise hazards, the entry of stray dogs (with the accompanying threat of rabies), invasive species, an increase in poisonings, and more.

Additional side effects are also evident in the field of incoming tourism, which has seen a significant decline—about 47% less than the corresponding period of last year. A preliminary examination of the state of nature in light of the Iron Swords war has identified several damages and issues, such as:

- Stray dogs and limitations in treating rabies
- Changes to Israel's defense strategy: new outposts, additional roads, related infrastructure
- Growth in populations of invasive species, requiring species thinning
- Waste & wastewater treatment
- Changing migration routes of birds
- Destruction of habitats in assembly areas
- Fires, bombing & noise hazards

Based on preliminary estimates, most of the problems are fixable. Thanks to years of experience and knowledge, some issues will be naturally resolved, while others will demand significant effort and resources. This is why your continued support is crucial.



Invasive species (credit to SPNI)

Differences in War Damage Between the North and the South of Israel

There is a significant difference between districts in terms of treatment, planning, and restoration of war damage to nature. However, ongoing contacts with the defense department during the war significantly reduced the damage.

In the northern district, (Galil and the Golan) road breaking in hard rock makes rehabilitation correspondingly difficult. Severe damage has occurred in the areas of Wadi Man, Nahal Aviv, and Nahal Dishon. In the future, it is expected that bedding will be washed away and block drainage routes.

In the central and southern districts, the damage is mainly to light soils that are easier to restore. There are no large areas of reserves and gardens in Otef (the villages and towns around Gaza) that were damaged by the war. The main damage is in the open areas that constitute ecological corridors.



Forests and natural green areas are on fire due Hezbollah rockets (Kiriath Shmona) Credit to Arutz 14, Israel

New Infrastructures

The overall defense concept is changing due to the war, leading to more installations and bases, more roads, more noise, and more infrastructure for electricity, water, and sewage.

New Villages and Bases

In some of the affected Kibbutzim, new neighborhoods will be built alongside new infrastructure, increased economic means, and photovoltaic energy in employment areas. The competition for open areas is both with the IDF and civilian sectors.

Debris and Invasive Species

There is a need for cleaning operations in sites where the IDF operates, including assembly and training areas. Despite the relative cleanliness of IDF-deployed sites, Israel does not clean itself, and agricultural areas hold much organic waste, which feeds invasive species (mainly wild boars, jackals, and crows). The thinning of these species' populations through shooting was stopped during the war, and their populations are expected to have increased. Hundreds of stray dogs invaded from the Gaza Strip, and the authorities will need to thin out jackals and dogs near the northern & southern borders to prevent rabies.

Here are some recommendations for treatment and preservation of nature due to the war.

- Restoration of roads and assembly areas immediately after the fighting ends.
- Cleaning operations along routes and at assembly sites immediately after the fighting ends.
- In the northern sector, restoration of areas on Mount Hermon, the Dishon stream basin in general, and the Aviv stream in particular. In Western Galilee, additional mapping of assembly areas and roads opened due to the war is required.
- In the south-central sector, special emphasis should be given to the Kurkar reserved areas north of the Gaza Strip (Gabram, Nir Am) and entrance roads to the Gaza Strip between Erez and Zikim.
- In the southern sector, focus on restoration along Nahal Gerer and Nahal Hashur. A key area needing attention is Kibbutz Beeri, in partnership with residents, the council, and tourist entrepreneurs who aim to maintain an open area.

Immediate actions during the fighting should be taken by the IDF, SPNI, and the Nature and Parks Authority, in cooperation with other parties such as the Tkuma Administration and regional councils. Mapping affected areas is crucial, with many areas inaccessible

during the fighting and others not yet mapped. This task falls to the districts with the help of the GIS (geographic information system).

Public Perception of Visiting Nature and Heritage Sites During the War

An audience survey was conducted to examine the perceptions of the Israeli public regarding visiting nature and heritage sites during the war. Key insights from the study include:

- 31% visited natural sites during the survey period.
- 45% greatly missed visiting the sites.
- 50% did not visit due to lack of mood and personal security.
- 86% agreed that being in nature contributes to mental well-being.
- 66% agreed that being in nature contributes to a sense of stability.

Your ongoing support is extremely important. We must keep in mind and hope that the war will end. Wars have catastrophic side effects on nature, which most of us don't think much about; these side effects impact our survival and well-being. We at Natural Israel Canada will keep working, developing, and promoting our existing programs as hard as we can with your imperative support for our generation and many generations to come.

Thank you again for your support and consideration in donating during this unprecedented time.

Am Israel Chai.