



People protesting the construction of hydropower plants in National Park Valbona in Albania



WWF and partners reintroduced two plant species on the Drava River, German tamarisk and dwarf cattail, which had vanished from their natural habitats because of human activities

## STAKEHOLDERS

**Authorities**, both on local and national levels, are the key stakeholders for the successful implementation of the WWF Adria's freshwater strategy. The implementation of the environmental legislation often fails due to lack of capacities within the governments. WWF partners with local authorities to assist them with the implementation of environmental legislation.

**Energy Companies** - WWF Adria has started a dialogue with key energy companies, identifying the common ground for close cooperation since sustainable use of water resources is our common interest.

**Civil Society Organisations** in the Adria region, enthusiastic to preserve the most valuable biodiversity hotspots, are supported by the WWF.



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**Why we are here.**  
To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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# WWF Adria Freshwater Programme



Campaign against new hydropower plants on the Drava River in Croatia

## Key facts:

- Rivers represent **less than 1%** of the Earth's surface, but nearly half of all fish species can be found in rivers
- Freshwater fish has **72% higher** nutritional efficiency than saltwater fish – one ton of inland catch supports the total annual consumption of animal protein for 157 people
- The abundance of fish species that migrate **declined by 41%** overall between 1970 and 2012 – as if from the total world population suddenly only people living in Asia could migrate

## VISION

Freshwater species are most endangered and their population has declined by more than 80 per cent in the last 50 years. The Balkan Peninsula is a hotspot of European biodiversity with its own distinctive fauna and endemic species that are concentrated in exceptionally small areas with small population sizes.

**WWF is bending the curve of the freshwater biodiversity loss and preventing the degradation of freshwater ecosystems by:**

- Fighting non-sustainable hydropower,**
- Promoting and introducing transboundary collaboration and water management of priority watersheds.**

**The vision of WWF Adria is to have the most valuable freshwater ecosystems of the Adria region maintained or restored.**

## RESULTS

- WWF Adria has recognised the storage, regulation, diversion and/or extraction of water by hydropower as the primary contributor to the degradation and decline of freshwater habitats in the region. Since 2006, **WWF has succeeded in bringing unsustainable hydropower on all countries government's agendas**. Not only was WWF pushing governments to introducing new laws (Environmental Flow, Environmental Impact Assessment, Environmental Permit...), but has been monitoring the implementation of these laws and brought several cases to court.
- Today, WWF Adria is not alone in fighting unsustainable hydropower. Rather, we have managed to **mobilise civil society** in the region to contribute to our cause. We have triggered the interest of many other international organisations concerning the hydropower issues, such as the UNDP, REC, EuroNatur and others.
- Transboundary cooperation is the key to have healthy freshwater ecosystems in the region, since the most important watersheds are transnational. Therefore WWF has provided a platform for the intergovernmental dialogue and **multistakeholder cooperation in the priority basins** such as Mura-Drava-Danube and Neretva/Trebisnjica.



Danube sturgeon (*Acipenser gueldenstaedti*), Rhine, Germany



Neretva River, Bosnia and Herzegovina

### Freshwater facts in the Adria region:

**60%** Over 60% of rivers in the Adria region are of outstanding status

There are plans to construct over **2000 small Hydropower Plants**

Mura, Drava and Danube are to become the first **UNESCO transboundary biosphere reserve** in the world – the “Amazon of Europe”

The area of Lower Danube is the only region in the EU still holding viable, naturally-reproducing sturgeon populations. WWF has requested a temporary five-year ban on fishing wild sterlet (*Acipenser ruthenus*) in Serbia.

White-tailed eagles in the heart of the Amazon of Europe - Kopacki Rit Nature Park in Croatia

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## INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

Hydropower infrastructures with the greatest impact are already in place in the Western Balkans. These infrastructures were built 3-5 decades ago and today are quite obsolete, as they have been operating for decades without any mitigation measures. **WWF Adria is insisting on the implementation of mitigation measures that would provide better management and restoration of freshwater habitats**. We are also working on the identification of hydropower plants with the largest impact on the environment in the Balkans in order to refurbish them first. The analyses of the hydropower impacts on the critical freshwater ecosystems are being conducted. Applying the “**polluters pay**” principle, WWF Adria (through the Environmental Permit) would have national energy companies charged for the restoration/mitigation measures.

As mentioned above, there are plans to construct thousands of small hydropower plants in the region. **The main motivator for investments in these small hydropower plants are governmental subsidies**. This system of incentives or feed-in tariff for energy generated from renewable resources was established in 2007, as part of the EU energy legislation reform. Lifting subsidies and having more transparent concession processes would significantly reduce corruption in the hydropower sector and reduce non-sustainable investments. **This goal (and other similar actions) cannot be achieved by acting locally – it would require a campaign on an international level and a broader WWF network engagement**.

Today, we are fully aware that being renewable does not automatically mean environmentally friendly. Lower regions of the Mura and Drava Rivers, with the adjacent section of the Danube River, flowing along Austria, Slovenia, Hungary, Croatia and Serbia, are among the most ecologically valuable riverine areas in Europe, known as the “**Amazon of Europe**”. Almost 1,000,000 ha of this pristine riverine area will soon be proclaimed as the **world's 1<sup>st</sup> Pentilateral UNESCO Transboundary Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube**. WWF is supporting governments of those five countries in their efforts towards the UNESCO nomination.

In the **Neretva and Trebisnjica basin**, WWF Adria's proposed approach consists of two key elements that should be developing in parallel:

- Gathering, systematizing and analysing information for the development of the integrated river basin management for Neretva and Trebisnjica Rivers through the establishment of regional and international expert groups that would work on **risk prevention, ecosystem conservation and renewable energy**.
- Working towards the establishment of a forum for dialogue between decision-makers where **new principles and action plans** would be mutually agreed upon.

Kayaking on the Drava River

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Susjar waterfall on the Mreznica River in Croatia, which reaches up to 13 metres above the water, was destroyed when it's mill was turned into a small hydropower plant

**Investments in hydropower should not be encouraged by providing hydropower a privileged status. Also, not all renewables are environmentally friendly, such as hydropower. Therefore, the term “renewable” itself is obsolete and misleading as it is just partially addressing environmental issues.**

