Paying for Ecosystem Services in the Lower Danube

We all benefit from nature in various ways. But because ecosystem goods and services are largely free, we tend to take them for granted. Even renewable resources can be pushed past their limits when used unsustainably. A WWF project introduces economic incentives — payments for ecosystem services — to support land managers in the Lower Danube to sustain the benefits we get from a healthy, functioning river basin.

Ciocanesti, Romania

On the Ciocanesti pilot site, located on the Lower Danube, much of the former mosaics of wetlands and natural channels, reed beds and patches of natural floodplain forest have been lost. Fortunately, some remain, especially around the highly productive fish ponds. These ponds contribute considerably to the local economy, and at the same time to biodiversity conservation. They are an important place for migration of 20,000 birds and a feeding place for endangered pygmy cormorants and ferruginous ducks. The carbon storage potential of these wetlands has an estimated value of €9,400 per year. A WWF assessment is helping convince aquaculture businesses that shifting from a pure profit-oriented to a nature-responsible business model could actually generate more income, through premiums for eco-friendly aquaculture products and bird-watching tourism development.
Persina, Bulgaria

Persina Nature Park on the Bulgarian stretch of the Danube is an area of high conservation value. It includes the country’s biggest Ramsar site, and is home to 475 plant species and over 200 bird species. The most significant ecosystems within the park are the flooded forests along the Danube, and the inland marshes. If maintained properly, they can act as carbon sinks. Kaykusha swamp accumulates 600 tonnes of carbon per year, which is worth €6,000. The WWF team is developing a scheme to demonstrate that if wetland vegetation is managed properly, it can be used as green energy source, generating income for local people and nature conservation alike.

State aid for Bulgaria’s Fisheries

In 2011, the Bulgarian government and the Executive Agency for Fisheries and Aquaculture committed 1,28 mil EUR of state aid contributing to decreasing the environmental footprint of the sector through improving water quality in commercial fishponds. Potentially 10,000 ha of water bodies with aquaculture practices can benefit. The measure, developed by WWF as part of the project, will contribute to decreasing water contamination of nitrogen, nitrates and nitrites with 50% and of hydrogen sulfide and methane with 30%.

The project is implemented by the WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme with the financial support of the GEF through UNEP, and the European Commission.