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FACTSHEET

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Freshwater

Green Infrastructure for Europe: The Mura-Drava-Danube – “Europe’s Amazon”



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THE MURA-DRAVA-
DANUBE BIOSPHERE
RESERVE WILL BE THE
WORLD’S FIRST
5-COUNTRY
PROTECTED AREA

WHAT IS GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE?

Europe is densely populated, with much of its land intensively used and fragmented. As a result, the continent has lost many habitats and ecosystems, and with them a host of valuable ecosystem goods and services. The idea of “green infrastructure” is to reconnect and restore nature areas in order to improve the overall quality of the countryside and urban areas while delivering valuable services to society like fresh water, clean air, healthy soil, flood control, fish and fowl.

In contrast to most “grey” infrastructure such as motorways, bridges, water and sewage treatment plants, “green” infrastructure provides multiple benefits: wetland areas for example help mediate floods and droughts, purify water, provide vital nurseries for fish and habitats for other animals, but also are areas for rest and recreation.

Recognising these benefits, the EU and member states have recognized Green Infrastructure as an important tool for conserving biodiversity as well as for regional development, water management and adapting to climate change¹.

¹ EC Communication: Green Infrastructure – Enhancing Europe’s Natural Capital, COM(2013) 249 final.
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/ecosystems/index_en.htm

A TRANSBOUNDARY BIOSPHERE RESERVE FOR THE BENEFIT OF NATURE AND PEOPLE

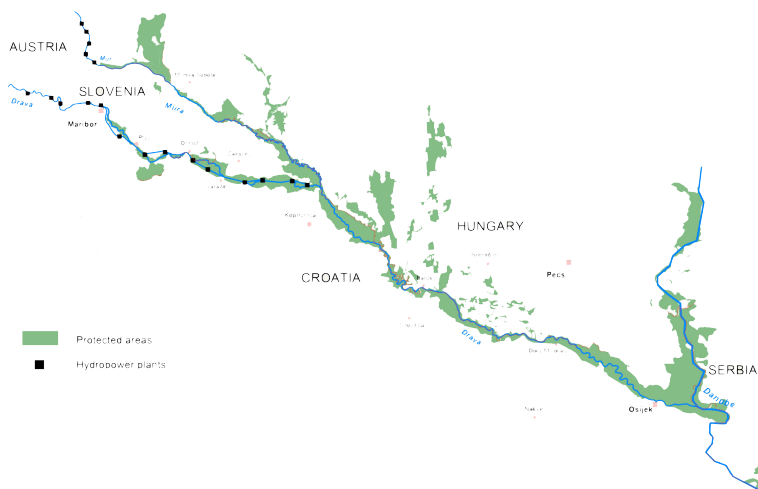


In 2011, Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Serbia and Slovenia agreed to establish the Mura-Drava-Danube Transboundary UNESCO Biosphere Reserve as the first 5-country protected area in the world and the largest riverine protected area in Europe. It will include approximately 300,000 hectares of core and buffer zones (existing protected area network) and around 700,000 hectares of transition zones.

About the Mura-Drava-Danube

Spanning Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Serbia and Slovenia, the lower courses of the Drava and Mura Rivers and related sections of the Danube are among Europe's most ecologically important riverine areas: the so-called "Amazon of Europe". The rivers form a 700 kilometers long "green belt" connecting almost 1,000,000 hectares of highly valuable natural and cultural landscapes from all five countries.

Wetlands are important not only for nature but also for humans, providing a host of different services. The wide array of benefits they provide include flood and drought management through holding and slowly releasing water, water purification through filtration, production of natural resources (e.g. fish and reeds), recreation and many others.



Blue and green corridor

Despite numerous man-made changes in the past, this stunning river landscape hosts an amazing biological diversity and is a hotspot of rare natural habitats such as large floodplain forests, river islands, gravel and sand banks, side branches and oxbows. These habitats are home to the highest density of breeding pairs of white-tailed eagles in Europe and other endangered species such as the little tern, black stork, beaver, otter and the nearly extinct ship sturgeon. Every year, more than 250,000 migratory waterfowls use the rivers to rest and to feed.

In addition to high levels of biodiversity, the river and floodplain areas are vital to local communities. Local fishermen rely upon the fish populations for their livelihoods. The extensive floodplains lower the risks from floods, secure favorable groundwater conditions and self-purification of water which is essential for drinking water, forests and agriculture. People also enjoy recreational activities along the rivers by walking, swimming, fishing or canoeing.



**MIGRATORY WATERFOWLS
USE THE RIVERS TO REST
AND TO FEED**



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.

wwf.panda.org/dcpo

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