



60 YEARS
OF ACTION FOR NATURE

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

BISONS

Once widespread throughout Europe, the European bison were driven to extinction in the early 20th century by over-hunting and habitat loss. As of 2014, Rewilding Europe and WWF-Romania's ongoing programme for the reintroduction of the bison is the largest attempt of its kind in the Southern Carpathians. The first two transports took place in 2014 and 2015 in the Tarcu Mountains, in the vicinity of Armeniș commune. The transports have been repeated every year with the objective of establishing a demographically and genetically viable wild population of bison in the Southern Carpathians. The sub-populations will be connected by natural corridors, allowing migration and genetic exchange.

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OLD-GROWTH FORESTS

The largest areas of surviving old-growth and virgin forests in Europe (outside of Russia) are found in the Green Heart of Europe, primarily in Romania, Ukraine, Slovakia and Bulgaria. Old-growth forests are forests that have attained a great age without significant disturbance, shaped only by natural processes and thereby exhibit unique ecological features. The most pristine forests, virgin forests, show no traces of human use at all. The preservation of these ancient forests is essential not only for ecological reasons, but also for the ecosystem services they provide, from carbon storage to constituting living laboratories that can teach us what makes a forest habitat resilient to climate change.

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DAM REMOVAL

European rivers are among the most fragmented in the world. According to the [European Environment Agency](#), barriers are one of the main reasons why 60% of European rivers do not have good ecological status, and a key cause of the decline in freshwater biodiversity – according to WWF’s [Living Planet Report 2020](#), average freshwater species populations have declined by 84% since 1970. The removal of old and useless dams is the best way to free a river. Removing such barriers improves the ecological status and biodiversity of the rivers, restores the function of the river landscape, including water retention, and thus contributes to the mitigation of the climate crisis.

WWF Slovakia has been working with the Slovak Water Management Enterprise and the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic to monitor and evaluate river barriers in the country. The list of barriers suitable for removal contained in the Water Plan of the Slovak Republic will be extended after WWF Slovakia finalises its work on reassessment of removal methods.

In Ukraine, WWF has also been working to restore the connectivity of the rivers and streams in and around Verkhovynskyi National Park near the country’s border with Romania. At the end of the 19th century, Carpathian Rivers were turned into cascades of artificial water bodies to bring timber down the valleys. Even though these splash dams have historical and recreational value, they continue to block the migration routes of Brown trout, Danube salmon and other wildlife. Obsolete splash dams become the insuperable obstacles on their way and thus significantly impact fish populations and species that depend on them for food, like the Brown bear.

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MURA-DRAVA-DANUBE BIOSPHERE RESERVE

After a 20-year process, the new Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve (MDD) has become Europe's largest protected riverine area and a model region for nature conservation and sustainable development. It was declared by UNESCO on 15 September 2021.



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Stretching across Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary and Serbia, the biosphere reserve covers 700 km of the Mura, Drava and Danube Rivers and a total area of almost 1 million hectares in the so-called 'Amazon of Europe' – making it the largest riverine protected area on the continent.

Due to its size and ambitions, the MDD represents an important contribution to the [European Green Deal](#) and contributes to the implementation of the [EU Biodiversity Strategy](#) in the Mura-Drava-Danube region. The Strategy aims to revitalise 25,000 km of rivers and protect 30% of the EU's land area by 2030. MDD's recognition is a mandate to all 5 countries to jointly advance the protection and revitalisation of the Mura-Drava-Danube area, and boost sustainable business practices. It also showcases how the protection of our unique international natural areas can be connected with the development of sustainable business practices.

Source/more information [here](#).

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HYDRO-POWER PROJECTS

Over the past 150 years the Danube Basin and its wetlands have been heavily impacted by human activity. The main threats stem from unsustainable flood management plans, hydropower, navigation and drainage of lands due to intensive agricultural practices. The resulting dikes, dams, drainage and dredging activities have straightened large parts of the rivers, and cut off and dried out their floodplains. Overall, more than 80% of the Danube's wetlands have been lost, and with them, the ecosystem services they provide to people like flood protection, fish production, recreation, livelihoods and biomass. WWF-CEE is advocating for push back of hydropower in favour of other renewable energy technology and for designing unavoidable river infrastructure in a way that does no harm to freshwater ecosystems.

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BE PART OF OUR JOURNEY!

Help build a world where people and nature thrive!
