

# Event report

BUILDING THE EUROPEAN  
PEATLANDS INITIATIVE

## MULTI- STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP



Improving Central and Eastern  
European policy responses to  
protect, restore and sustainably  
manage peatlands in the fight  
against climate warming

Hybrid event & field trip |



**20  
JUNE**  
TATA | HUNGARY

Supported by:



on the basis of a decision  
by the German Bundestag

### CEEweb for Biodiversity

*Building the European Peatlands Initiative:  
A strong alliance for peatland climate protection in Europe*

*EUKI Grant Agreement no.: 81290291*

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## 1. Basic information

<b>Title</b>	Improving Central and Eastern European policy responses to protect, restore and sustainably manage peatlands in the fight against climate warming
<b>Date</b>	20 June 2023
<b>Place</b>	Hungary, Tata, Tópart sétány 2, 2890   Új Kajakház és Ökoturisztikai Központ and online (hybrid event)
<b>Main organiser</b>	CEEweb for Biodiversity
<b>Duration</b>	1 full day
<b>Number of participants</b>	30 (22 on-site, 8 online)
<b>Aim of the event</b>	Activity III.2 Multi-stakeholder workshop Activity III.1 will be supported by one multi-stakeholder workshop which aims to collect critical feedback and suggestions on the assessed national peatland strategies from the representatives of relevant stakeholder groups. The workshop can help in the identification of bottlenecks, weak points and best practices that will feed into the resulting evaluation report and the collection of exemplary policy measures.
<b>Representatives of the project team</b>	CEEweb, Eurosite, MSF Partner in Greifswald Mire Centre
<b>Recording available</b>	Yes <a href="https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/1Ry5AssE9A6kZORPrnzK3LnR34C3QzVcX">https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/1Ry5AssE9A6kZORPrnzK3LnR34C3QzVcX</a>

## 2. General outline and aim of the event

The multi-stakeholder workshop was organised under the framework of the project **“Building the European Peatlands Initiative: A strong alliance for peatland climate protection in Europe”**. The project is implemented by four partners: Eurosite — The European Land Conservation Network (Lead Partner), the Michael Succow Foundation - Partner in the Greifswald Mire Centre, the European Landowners’ Organization, and CEEweb for Biodiversity. We aim to support the building of a long-lasting European network for peatland climate action led by European national governments based on up- to-date data, national policies and best-practice land management.

The aim of the workshop was to collect critical feedback and suggestions on the assessed national peatland strategies from the representatives of relevant stakeholder groups, as well to identify bottlenecks, weakpoints and best practices that will feed into the resulting evaluation report and the collection of exemplary policy measures.

### 3. Target groups

We aim to build a strong European network bringing together the national governments and other stakeholders to have a better understanding of the reality, improve the current situation and act at policy level. We facilitate knowledge exchange and networking opportunities for our target audience composed of national governments, ministries for environment and agriculture, research institutes, non-governmental organisations, scientists, conservationists and experts working on peatlands (or wetlands, in general), and enable the exchange of experience and expertise on peatland protection, restoration and sustainable use.

More than 200 direct invitations have been sent out via email to stakeholders to this particular workshop. Several social media messages have been published as well, on our Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram accounts to reach a complete audience. The target group consisted of representatives of Ministries in the CEE region, NGOs, universities and institutes, national park directorates, all from Europe and especially within CEE countries (e.g. Hungary, Poland, Germany, Macedonia, Belgium, Romania, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Croatia, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine).

### 4. Presentations

**Csaba Mezei, General Secretary of CEEweb for Biodiversity** moderated the event.

[József Michl, Mayor of Tata and Balázs Rigó, Vice Mayor of Tata](#) opened the event by introducing the host city for the event, Tata, Hungary; the only city in Hungary honored with the title “Wetland City”. In a brief introduction, they highlighted the city's history, but also the municipality's pride in its precious local wetland, which is also a Ramsar site, and the measures it is taking to preserve it.

[Marina Škunca, Project Officer at Eurosite, the European Land Conservation Network](#) gave a presentation to introduce the EUKI Peatlands project “Building the European Peatlands Initiative: A strong alliance for peatland climate protection in Europe”. The project background was highlighted and the reason why a European collaboration is needed regarding peatlands conservation. She presented the main objectives of the project, such as **the improvement of relations** between stakeholders and governments, an **up-to-date database** on peatlands and the **fulfilment of commitments** made by the various stakeholders in favor of sustainable land use. Finally, she detailed the role of the partners in achieving the goal of peatland conservation and restoration through a long-term European collaboration.

[Orsolya Nyárai, Agricultural Policy Officer at CEEweb for Biodiversity](#), introduced the role of the NGO in this project. The main activity is to **support national peatlands strategies** while collecting best policy practices and **providing recommendations to national governments**. She also mentioned the target groups during this work, which are research institutes, NGOs, national governments but also individuals. The next step is to take a closer look at the existing laws in Europe that are linked in one way or another to the restoration and conservation of peatlands. Finally, some upcoming activities were indicated such as an evaluation report, a guidance document and other workshops to bring together multiple stakeholders and enhance discussions related to peatlands conservation.

[Dr László Jánossy, biologist and environmental engineer](#), presented the importance of peatlands and their conservation value while highlighting the effect of climate change on these sensitive ecosystems. He also introduced some preliminary results of the peatland policy assessment in selected Central and Eastern European countries (Germany, Hungary, Poland and Estonia) by showing the strengths and weaknesses of peatland strategies and other relevant policies across this region. **In Hungary, all peatlands have been protected since the 1996 Nature Conservation Act**, but the National Biodiversity

Strategy (2015) has some weaknesses such as the overuse of environmental systems. The German state was presented in two main strategies: the National Peatland Strategy (2021) and the Agreement on Climate Protection through Peat Soil Protection (2021), both of which consider **peatlands to be a key element in mitigating the effects of climate change**. In Poland, the CAP strategic plan falls short of several environmental and climate objectives. Estonia's peatland protection strategy is most visible in its Nature Conservation Plan 2020. Finally, the expert made several recommendations on the way forward, particularly with regard to the sustainable use of peatlands.

[Moritz Kaiser, scientific staff at the Michael Succow Foundation, partner in Greifswald Mire Center](#), presented the peatland distribution both globally as well as within the CEE region. The unequal distribution of peatlands worldwide as well as in Europe were highlighted. The northern countries are the biggest hotspots of peatlands, and the countries around the Equator are also home to a large proportion of them. He mentioned the **huge degradation of peatlands in Europe** and the fact that Europe is the second largest emitter of GHG from degraded peatlands. In the northern countries, peatlands are mainly used for forestry while in central Europe they are used for agriculture. Finally, he indicated that **an update of the peatland map of Europe is needed**, mostly for Central and South-Eastern European countries.

[Konrád Lájér, PhD](#), explained the state of Hungarian mires and emphasized that nowadays, almost all remaining mires are located in national parks. The **national mire survey from 1997** and its results were shown, with the different mire types that Hungary holds. The expert also detailed peatland management problems, such as inadequate water supply and quality, and management methods, including hydrological control and regulation.

[Mati Ilomets, Head of the Mires Research Group of Tallinn University](#) presented the challenges and opportunities of sustainably managing peatlands in Estonia. With two-thirds of peatlands being degraded in some way, the country is currently working on **restoring drained peatlands by creating dams and blocking drainage ditches** in order to raise the water table in peatlands. He emphasized that long-term monitoring is needed for peatland restoration and that **raising the water level is just the first step** in restoring peatlands but is not sufficient alone.

[Gábor Ballabás, PhD., geographer](#) introduced the main characteristics of the **fieldtrip site**, the **Tata Fényes Springs** (“Tatai Fényes Forrás Tanösvény”). He also highlighted the town's geological history leading to the springs' emergence. In addition, he emphasized the water level changes caused by the increase of drought stress but also the **concern about the construction of a battery manufacturing factory** in the region which could affect the hydrological system.

## 5. Panel discussion

The panel discussion involved three peatlands' experts: Konrád Lájér, PhD; Moritz Kaiser, from Michael Succow Foundation, partner in Greifswald Mire Center and Mati Ilomets, Head of the Mires Research Group of Tallinn University. This session was facilitated by Orsolya Nyárai.

The discussion addressed several topics related to national peatland policies, specific areas in need of more research, the availability of peatland maps and data systems, as well as the challenges in the way of securing funding and effective policy implementation.

**The first question was about the links between the work area of the experts and policy recommendations.** Mati Ilomets said that the conservation activity is quite active in Estonia, and they try to explain that more sites need to be restored and human help is required. Nowadays, Estonian politicians are more aware about peatland restoration. In addition, he mentioned that there are some

conservation laws but also a conservation plan regarding peatlands is made every 5 years by Estonia Wetland Society.

**The second question referred to peatlands protection and restoration on the political agenda and if it has changed in the recent years.** In Germany, the topic is now in the climate agenda, and above the EU level the expert said, but for him, it's not high enough as the targeted number of rewetted peatlands is not reached. The reason why this subject is now on the agenda is that the hot, dry summers of the recent years in Germany have led to numerous problems in the field of agriculture and peat fires which have caused concern among politicians. However, he cannot say that the subject is on the daily agenda. In Hungary, according to Konrád Lájér's opinion, the restoration and protection of peatlands is a secondary order political issue. In Estonia, politicians are aware of the peatland related issues as they had dry summers and forest fires during the last years on drained peatlands.

**The third question was about the potential changes in the approaches regarding peatlands because of the geopolitical challenges since the war in Ukraine started.** In Germany, the government had changed just before the war started. It's difficult to know how they could have done more without the war, but they are pushing forward peatland protection. Debates are occurring on the question of food security if they are rewetting peatlands now. The German government has started a program in 2023 for restoring peatlands and forests with nature-based solutions for mitigating climate change affects, but the amount of funds released is not yet known. In Estonia, peat is important for horticulture, but not so much for energy use. However, production does not seem to be decreasing and peat excavators are not enthusiastic about the idea of restoring peatlands. Although, two years ago, perhaps for reasons of greenwashing, the interest in restoring peatlands to achieve a zero-carbon footprint is showed.

**The next question was related to the lack of data and its impacts on the development of actual policies.** According to Moritz Kaiser, maps could be better, but they provide a good knowledge of how much and where it must be done in a country. Nevertheless, for a specific area, accurate data is needed. Konrád Lájér mentioned the results of the national mires survey in 1997 of which maps can be found but not the data and new survey is not yet seen in the next years. In Estonia, they have an old basis of peatlands distribution while having a good overview about the state of peatlands.

**The final question was about the potential areas that research needs to catch up regarding peatlands restoration before taking actions.** Konrád Lájér warned about the temperatures and atmosphere composition changes that would affect peat decomposition. Therefore, each mire characteristics must be known for a successful restoration. Moritz Kaiser emphasized the sustainable use of peatlands through paludiculture, and mentioned that research has to be done on selecting the most productive crop varieties. He also mentioned the little understanding of peatlands located on slopes. Mati Ilomets highlighted that peatland restoration on his own remains an unknown field and there is still a lot to do to understand how a peatland is functioning and could be restored. Specialists are currently working on forestry and how to get a sustainable timber agriculture.

During this session, a participant from a national park directorate in Hungary took the floor to describe the Hungarian position on peatland restoration. He highlighted the efforts made by the Hungarian government few decades ago to protect natural habitats throughout the country. This was done by purchasing the most important protected lands and entrusting their management to national park staff. He said that the current government does not place as much importance on biodiversity as it did 15 years ago, due to the economic crisis. However, a good basis for nature conservation was established before and the national parks are doing the same job as before. Currently, there is a continuous monitoring program in the national parks for all types of habitats, including mires and peatlands. Their work on it depends, of course, on the amount of money available. He also indicated that this monitoring program is a success and that it could work in all the national parks of Europe. Finally, he emphasized the fact that peatland restoration requires continuous monitoring, as this is a

fairly new field and governments cannot base their legal frameworks on old experience - up-to-date research is therefore needed.

Overall, the issue of protecting and **restoring peatlands was described as higher on the political agenda** in the countries surveyed than it was a few years ago, reflecting a growing awareness of the essential role of peatlands. During the discussion, the lack of data was also outlined as a topic requiring progress, but also, experts all agreed on **the need for long-term monitoring for a successful peatland restoration**. In addition, research was mentioned as a key to go through a sustainable use of peatlands, with paludiculture for example. Despite all the peatlands conservation measures available, all experts testified to that **the budget was too low for these measures to be applied properly and successfully**. Finally, **the importance of communicating good practices and discoveries, as well as sharing monitoring results** were emphasized, given that peatland restoration remains a less-understood field.

## 6. Critical feedback and suggestions / Questions and answers

During the event, several questions were raised by the audience. One *question was asked regarding the link between this project and the European Peatland Initiative*. **The two projects are collaborating for the same goal: the protection and restoration of peatlands across Europe.**

The *question of the financial support to restore peatlands* was raised. **Private fundings, through carbon credits, were mentioned as well as public fundings.** Companies could contribute to the fundings as having a greener approach is now on a trend.

A participant also asked, as the benefits of peatlands are now known, *why peatlands are still drained*. The expert has answered that it's because **EU is still paying farmers to use, and then degrade those lands for agricultural purposes. The goal is now to fund sustainable use of peatlands such as paludiculture, and to stop funding activities that damaged them.**

One participant highlighted the *current negotiations within the EU to release more funds for peatland conservation and restoration*.

Finally, one participant mentioned despite that some *managements of peatlands* are not recommended (such as grazing), in some cases they are helpful, in moderation, to fight against other threats like the invasive species. In other words, there are many ways of conserving and preserving peatlands, but the way in which this is done must be studied in advance to avoid damaging the ecosystem.

## 7. Results of the interactive small-group session on exchanging views and suggestions on national peatland action and policy

Participants were divided into groups to discuss national and cross-border initiatives, best practices and weaknesses in peatlands policy of which they were aware. The aim was to allow debate and to put ideas on a whiteboard in order to organize a pooling session at the end with all the participants.

### What are the bottlenecks or weakest points in your country's current peatland related policies?

- No political will (especially when it comes to voting)
- Lack of intrinsic awareness-raising programmes to educate the government
- Lack of coherence between funds and policies
- No targeted peatland related policy
- No land-use strategy
- Weakest priority: industry and agriculture water supply → water policy in Hungary
- Bottleneck: the government itself
- No dedicated environmental ministry (e.g. Hungary)
- We (CEE countries) don't always know exactly where the peatlands are → Lack of data; maps need to be updated
- Lack of distinction between peatlands and mires
- Lack of understanding on what a peatland is and why they are important → lack of knowledge

### Can you mention any best practices, innovative approaches in peatlands policy and governance?

- Peat carbon project (Latvia, Lithuania, Germany, Poland, Estonia)
- EUKI Peatlands project
- Natura 2000 EU projects
- Natura 2000 Management plans
- LIFE Projects
- Natura Connect (H2020)
- Hungarian Landscape Strategy
- Small/Local/Municipality-scale projects
- Cross-border initiatives
- Community Wetlands Forum (Ireland)
- Ecosystem services mapping approach

### Are you aware of any cross-border initiatives for healthy peatlands?

- Global Peatlands Initiative, RAMSAR, Med Wet, Several Horizon and EUKI projects
- Fertő-Hanság National Park (Austria and Hungary)
- Free-flowing rivers campaign
- Bavarian Forest National Park (Germany) and Sumava National Park (Czech Republic) LIFE for Mires project
- Several EU funded projects (Green Deal)
- Horizon Europe, waterLANDS, ReWet, Wet Horizons, ALFAwetlands
- Interreg projects
- LIFE projects
- Government initiatives (funding)
- Disaster-risk reduction: project along Rhine to model/explore the sponge function of soil (including peatlands); wetlands in Europe (Germany, France, Belgium)



## What recommendations would you give to improve your country's national policies and action on peatlands?

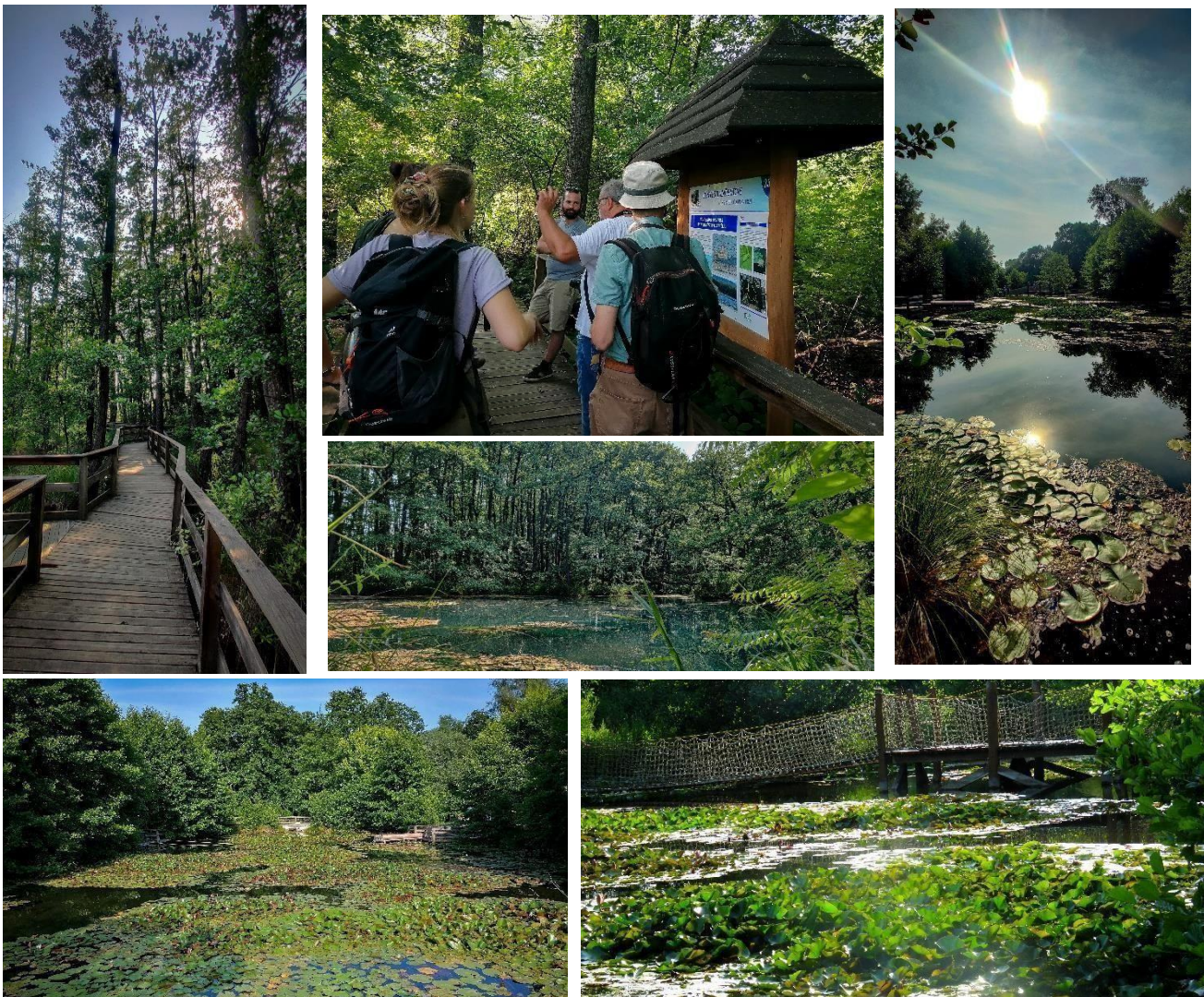
- Discover and communicate economic feasibility and importance to save peatlands (especially towards private companies)
- Think about “bordering topics” where conserving peatlands can be also beneficial (health, national heritage, etc.)
- Promote peatland restoration as a carbon offset (buying carbon credits for companies)
- Competent manpower is needed in order to realise the ambitious goals
- It will be necessary to integrate the land users and the landowners into the process of peatland restoration
- The legal framework must be strengthened in order to make the permission processes easier (Germany)
- Make it a business → Provide visibility, involve private sector, support studies & scientific work
- To reach better CAP support possibilities in the new CAP (changing every year) (Hungary)
- Forbid maintenance of peatland drainage infrastructures (exception: settlements) and ensure financial burden is carried collectively (Germany)
- Involve stakeholders constructively (co-creation)
- To adapt to local circumstances for more successful restoration
- As much as possible: get involved in advocacy and lobby your governments
- Can be limited to local rural area development plans: infrastructure, workforce, ecotourism

This session provided important contributions on actions and policies relating to peatlands in the CEE region as well as in Europe as a whole. LIFE projects were strongly mentioned as good practice and initiatives, as were Natura 2000 projects. Weaknesses included the lack of strong targeted policies on peatlands restoration. The need for a better understanding among the general public and government of what peatlands are and their benefits and as well the lack of coherence and political will were highlighted as bottlenecks. Finally, several recommendations were put forward, e.g. involving all stakeholders, especially governments, in the restoration process, strengthening the legal framework and making the subject attractive for fundraising are just some of them.

## 8. Field visit to the Educational Trail of the Fényes Springs in Tata

The second part of the afternoon was reserved for a field trip, visiting a nearby peat fen forest with alders, the Tata Fényes Springs. The protected area is managed by the city of Tata and is also a Ramsar site. The area is a best practice example on how a formerly degraded area can recover if water is permitted to return. The local springs dried up in 1972 because of the coal mining in the area. The springs are working once more since the end of mining. At the moment, 30,000 m<sup>3</sup> of water rise to the surface each day. As a result, the ecology and the lakes' old natural life can flourish again.

Next to the visitor center, a 14-meter-high wooden tower indicates that the karst water in the depths would reach this height if it could break free. The path leads along a well-established educational trail with several panels on the management, conservation and protection plan of the fauna and flora of this wetland. In addition, a lookout point overlooking one of the site's largest lakes allows visitors to observe the site's biodiversity, from the purple heron to kingfishers and European pond turtles. The sound of frogs, water bubbles and insects create a magnificent, soothing orchestra.



## 9. Next steps and Evaluation of the Workshop

In order to reach the aim to build a strong European network, **further multi-stakeholder workshops are planned** to involve target groups from CEE countries and include their critical feedback into the Evaluation Report by the end of 2023. CEEweb and project partners are planning to organise those multi-stakeholder workshops from autumn 2023 online and further on in-person in 2024.

The lessons learned of this workshop are a valuable experience which will support determining following workshop subtopics and the way of involving stakeholders during the project.

Moreover, to collect feedback on organisational matters, after the workshop, an evaluation form was sent out to participants. Please, see the summarized averaged answers below.



## 10. Detailed Agenda

Multi-stakeholder workshop | Improving Central and Eastern European policy responses to protect, restore and sustainably manage peatlands in the fight against climate warming

**Tuesday, 20 June**

*Organised bus from Budapest to Tata (8:30-10:00).*

Moderator: Csaba Mezei, CEEweb for Biodiversity

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10.00 – 10.30	<i>Registration</i>
10.30 – 10.35	<b>Csaba Mezei, General Secretary, CEEweb for Biodiversity</b> <b>Welcome on behalf of the organiser</b>
10:35 – 10.40	<b>József Michl, Mayor of Tata and Balázs Rigó, Deputy Mayor of Tata</b> <b>Welcome on behalf of the host city</b>
10.40 – 10.50	<b>Marina Škunca, Project Officer, Eurosite – the European Land Conservation Network</b> <b>Introducing the project ‘Building the European Peatlands Initiative: a strong alliance for peatland climate protection in Europe’</b>
10.50 – 11.00	<b>Orsolya Nyárai, Agricultural Policy Officer, CEEweb for Biodiversity</b> <b>The role of CEEweb in the project ‘Building the European Peatlands Initiative: a strong alliance for peatland climate protection in Europe’</b>
11.00 – 11:20	<b>Dr. László Jánossy, Biologist, Environmental Engineer</b> <b>Preliminary results of the peatland policy assessment: a Central and Eastern European overview</b>
11.20 – 11.40	<b>Moritz Kaiser, Scientific Staff, Michael Succow Foundation, Partner in Greifswald Mire Centre</b> <b>The distribution and state of peatlands globally and in the Central and Eastern European region</b>
11.40 – 12:00	<b>Q &amp; A</b>
12.00 – 13.00	<i>Lunch break (cold buffet lunch)</i>
13.00 – 13:20	<b>Konrád Lájer, PhD.</b> <b>The state of Hungarian mires – Protection and management</b>
13.20 – 13.40	<b>Mati Ilomets, Head of the Mires Research Group, Institute of Ecology of Tallinn University (online)</b> <b>The challenges and opportunities of sustainably managing peatlands in Estonia</b>

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13.40 – 14:40 Panel discussion | Moderator: Orsolya Nyárai, CEEweb for Biodiversity  
Strengths and weaknesses of CEE peatland related policies & best practices on protecting, restoring and sustainably managing peatlands  
National experts

Konrád Lájér, PhD, Hungary

Moritz Kaiser, Scientific Staff, Michael Succow Foundation, Partner in Greifswald Mire Centre, Germany

Mati Ilomets, Head of the Mires Research Group of Tallinn University, Estonia (online)

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14.40 – 15.00 Coffee break

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15.00 – 15.20 Interactive small-group session: Exchanging views and suggestions on national peatland action and policy (moderated by CEEweb)

15.20 – 15.35 Gábor Ballabás, PhD., geographer  
Introducing the site of the field trip

*Traveling to the field by organised bus (15:45-16:00). End of programme for online participants.*

16.00 – 17.30 Ferenc Márkus, conservation ecologist, and Gábor Ballabás PhD., geographer  
Expert guidance on Tata Fényes Springs Educational Trail

17.30 – 18.00 Q & A | Wrapping up & closing of the workshop, next steps

*Organised bus from Tata to Budapest (18:00-19:30).*

The field visit leads on a well-maintained nature trail. However, please prepare and wear adequate footwear and outdoor clothing.

*The project “Building the European Peatlands Initiative: a strong alliance for peatland climate protection in Europe” is part of the [European Climate Initiative \(EUKI\)](#). EUKI is a project financing instrument by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK). The EUKI competition for project ideas is implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. It is the overarching goal of the EUKI to foster climate cooperation within the European Union (EU) in order to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions.*

Supported by:



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We thank our Project Partners for their professional contribution to this event.



## 11. Photos

