

FOR BLUE AND GREEN ENVIRONMENT

Policy recommendations on better implementation of the Water Framework Directive and the Nature Directives





INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Natura 2000 is an EU wide network of protected sites established in accordance with the 1979 Birds Directive and the 1992 Habitats Directive, the so-called Nature Directives. Its aim is to ensure a long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats by achieving their favourable conservation status (FCS), defined according to the following 3 parameters: population dynamics, natural range and good prospects for the habitat. The sites are designated by the Member States and include Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) designated under the Habitats Directive and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated under the Birds Directive.

The EU's Water Framework Directive (WFD) adopted in 2000, establishes a framework for the protection of all surface waters and groundwater. The WFD introduced the river basin approach, according to which, Member States have the obligation to draw up River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) to safeguard each

one of the 110 EU river basin districts.

The Birds and Habitats Directives (BHD) do not indicate a clear timeline for achieving FCS of the habitats and species. However, one of the objectives of the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2020 is to reach the FCS for 34% of habitats and 26% of species by 2020. The WFD, on the other hand, requires the achievement of good ecological status for all natural water bodies by the end of 2019, or the latest by 2027. Although these goals may not be achieved in full (given the current level of implementation¹), extra efforts need to be made in order to ensure that we get as close to achieving these goals as possible.

With this publication, we present you policy recommendations and good practice examples on how WFD and BHD can be implemented more effectively by integrating each other's tools and mechanisms².

¹ See State of Nature Report, Report on the mid-term review of the EU's Biodiversity Strategy, implementation reports of RBMPs

² The content is based on the outcomes of the CEEweb's Academy on Building Blue-Green Infrastructure,; <http://www.ceeweb.org/event/ceeweb-academy/>

INTEGRATION

For the first time in the EU water legislation, the Water Framework Directive included monitoring and assessment of biodiversity rather than just physicochemical elements. This represented a significant shift towards the integration of biodiversity in water policies. Moreover, WFD requires a register of Protected Areas (PAs), including Natura 2000 sites, that depend on water. However, most Member States have not yet undertaken a full country-wide assessment of water dependant habitats. The measures serving the BHD and WFD objectives need to be included in the RBMPs as required under art. 13 of the WFD, as well as in the management plans of Natura 2000 sites. Unfortunately, only 11 MSs have specified measures for achieving the water related objectives of PAs referred to in the RBMPs

and the Programme of Measures (PoM). On top of that, the status of most water bodies is unknown and there are many exemptions under art. 4 of WFD that hinder the achieving of the objective.

The benefits of integration of the three directives are many. First of all, because of existing overlaps, they reinforce each other's objectives so it is more probable to achieve set goals in time and avoid penalties or infringements. Secondly, common planning, monitoring and data collection save money and time. It is easier to manage, use and extract information from a common database. Thirdly, communication between all relevant authorities can result in coordinated actions, future cooperation in common projects and better interaction with the wider public.



BENEFITS OF WFD AND BHD INTEGRATION:

- Achieving shared goals faster
- Avoiding penalties/infringements
- Saving time and money with common planning, monitoring and data collection
- Coordinated actions
- Possibilities for further cooperation
- Better communication with citizens

CHALLENGES

While setting conservation objectives, environmentalists struggle to solve conflicts between choosing dynamic processes, e.g. flooding versus static conservation of riverine habitats or protecting one species or habitat over another. All directives have a somewhat selective view on nature by considering only listed habitats, species, certain groups of species and indicators. Conflicts might occur in relation to other environmental targets, such as the sustainability issues linked to hydropower energy production, or socio-economic requirements in flood protection. Financing the management under all directives can be troublesome, as a large share of financial means is destined to flood protection rather than restoration and very little is devoted

to staff capacity building and joint actions. There are solid "cultures" of management and decision-making in nature and water sectors, which are specific to each one making it more difficult to cooperate. They often use different funding sources and monitoring methods, storing data in separate databases, using different languages. This is caused by distinct planning instruments and timelines of the three directives, as well as by differences in scales and dimensions of sites. Moreover, there are integration adversities. For example, the first cycle of RBMP has put very little emphasis on the integration issue. It could have been caused by lack of adopted Natura 2000 management plans at the time the first RBMPs were drafted.



OVERLAPS

There are several overlaps between the WFD and the BHD, as they are reinforcing each other's objectives. The indicators for both FCS and GES are described in particular terms, e.g. species composition, area, river continuity or substrate of the river bed, which are not identical in the three directives, but do overlap. Moreover, all directives encourage restoration, sustainable land use and nature based solutions. Through its conservation action all are improving the retention capac-

ity of water. Article 10 of the Habitats Directive on the ecological coherence of Natura 2000 network has its equivalent in obligation of conserving ecological continuity in the WFD. All directives demand monitoring of ecological parameters to measure improvement. Despite some differences in monitored species, which type of actions can be conducted together for some of them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are many recommendations for integration of WFD and BHD that would enhance performance of all and thus decrease the use of financial and human resources.

The WFD is taking into consideration the whole catchment area, not only water bodies, which can be helpful for achieving the connectivity goal under the Habitats Directive. There is a possibility in all directives to focus on a “habitat-led, but species aware” approach in objective setting and management planning. This approach is putting more focus on safeguarding healthy habitats, but still taking into consideration specific needs of species occurring in the area e.g. water dependant species. Joining forces for a common implementation of the two directives would raise opportunities in river restoration, flood protection, water retention, sustainable land use and setting objectives for water dependent habitats and species. A more effective and precise monitoring can be achieved under the requirements of each directive through data exchange and joint actions, with a potential to decrease the overall costs. The next cycles of RBMPs (2nd till the end of 2021 and 3rd till the end of 2027) should be more transparent and provide explicit information relevant to Natura 2000 sites. As a provision of the article 4.1.c of the WFD, RBMPs, as well as Programmes of Measures, should include specific objectives for protected areas. Also, nature authorities should establish conservation objectives for Natura 2000 sites on time, use the language that can be transferred to RBMPs and improve the focus on water dependent sites by setting conservation objectives that aim to preserve water level and quality. This would reinforce conservation efforts and increase

funding possibilities. Any kind of planned maintenance works (minimising artificial input, maximising acceptance for natural river processes) should be consistent with WFD and BHD environmental objectives and Protected Areas needs, as well as previous rulings of the European Court of Justice. Additional guidance from the EU might be needed for this specific issue, as well as for the use of WFD tools for nature protection and, in turn, for conservation action input in RBMPs and flood defense. There are several publications on nature-based solutions for river maintenance and flood protection, (e.g. “A brighter future, with a little help from our nature”). Additional research and projects exploring benefits of nature-based solutions for water management would strengthen the scientific base and would be welcomed by the authorities and policy makers. *Joint planning*, timetables for implementation, financing and common research would increase level of cooperation and benefit both sectors. The EU ought to establish a *financial tool* under the next budget for joint actions and better integration.

However, until then, better sustainability and *biodiversity proofing* of the current spending would prevent contradictory projects and activities harmful for the biodiversity of ground waters. In general, more *capacity building* and training between the two sectors is needed to combine the work style, languages and tools used. Afterwards it would be easier to communicate and approach the other stakeholders jointly with a *unified message*, to build public awareness and to apply for funding. Along with the benefits for biodiversity, other arguments should be raised, such as the economic benefits of angling and tourism in natural rivers.



BEST PRACTICES

1. RESTORING DEGRADED RIVER BRANCHES AND OXBOWS OF THE DANUBE SLOVAKIA

Regional Association for Nature Conservation and Sustainable Development (BROZ), NGO from Slovakia, has conducted several restoration actions in the past years. One of the selected sites was the Velký háj oxbow lake, where around 5.5 hectares of oxbow were restored. Restoration activities began in 1992 and continued until 2012 when the side arm was opened. The fieldwork was completed in December 2012 and flood events in January of the following year helped to fill the restored area naturally. Similar tasks were carried out at Medvedovské rameno and Velkolélske rameno river branches.

In 2015, BROZ restored Kráľova lúka river branch system. The site is part of the Danube inland delta and consists of river branches, oxbows and small wetlands. The aim of the restoration was improving fish spawning areas, reproduction sites of amphibians and breeding sites of birds. The project also involved cutting down invasive plant species (mainly box elder

- *Acer negundo*) and the planting of native species. The barriers which separated the river branches from the main course, mainly forestry residue and unused forest roads, were removed as well. Several parts of the branches behind the artificial barriers, with a thick layer of sediments deposited in the recent years were deepened and small isolated wetlands and river branches were reconnected to the main Danube river system. Larger cut off river branches were re-connected to the river in order to ensure constant water supply. The restoration activities took place along 6300 meters of the river and positively affected the water regime on the area of 220 ha. Habitat conditions for numerous bird, amphibian, fish, mammal, beetle and plant species were improved as a result of the implemented activities. Additional improved ecosystem services were flood mitigation, genetic resources and recreation.



2. RESTORING A COASTAL WETLAND ESTONIA

Kavaru is a Baltic coastal meadow and an important site for wading birds and amphibians. In the Soviet era the meadow was drained and the natural ditches flowing through it have been straightened and deepened. As a result, the flooding periods have decreased. Accumulation of sediments in the area of the former delta and absence of conservation management be-

tween 1990 and 2008 have led to the excessive growth of reed beds. The size of the ecologically valuable ecosystem has decreased despite being a priority habitat at the EU level. The site was a degraded meadow overgrown by reed beds, but still a habitat for the following breeding bird species: Baltic dunlin (*Calidris alpina schinzii*), redshank (*Tringa tetanus*), lapwing (*Vanel-*



lus vanellus), oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*), ringed plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*), skylark (*Alauda arvensis*), meadow pipit (*Anthus pratensis*) and yellow wagtail (*Motacilla flava*). Several significant plant species were present as well: marsh angelica (*Angelica palustris*), a dandelion species (*Taraxacum suecicum*), orchid *Dactylorhiza baltica* and military orchid (*Orchis militaris*).

The aim of the project was the restoration of the typical rural landscape by restoring the meadow's natural hydrological regime and reintroducing cattle grazing to

manage the site for biodiversity. In total, 50 hectares of the Baltic coastal meadow was restored, biomass (reeds) and nutrient levels decreased and the breeding success of coastal waders was improved thanks to an increase in suitable breeding habitat, removal of dam, opening up old delta channels, removal of tree stripe on channel edge and diversification of the riverbed. The goal of the whole exercise was to get the river to flow within its former delta and the meadow to stay wet over the summer thereby enabling successful breeding of birds, fish and aquatic plants.

3. ECONAT LITHUANIA

ECONAT is a LIFE project implemented in Lithuania, which aimed to create an ecological network which would ensure the favourable conservation status of species of the HD and enhancing overall ecological value of the site. In particular, the project aimed to save from extinction the small and isolated populations of two umbrella species, the threatened European pond turtle (*Emys orbicularis*) and the European tree frog (*Hyla arborea*). Moreover, habitats of those species were restored or created, including 215 ponds, with the establishment of 40 egg-laying sites for Europe-

an pond turtle and 30 hibernation sites for amphibians, and the installation of 24 dams positively affecting 17.48 ha of wetlands.

Project experts developed an ecological network, including preparation of criteria, methodology and management plans for the creation of an ecological network for the target species. Four new Natura 2000 network sites were proposed together with its management plans. The project is described in Best Practice Guidelines: 'Development of a Pilot Ecological Network in Southern Lithuania'.



4. SALT OF LIFE - THE RESTORATION OF ATANASOVSKO LAKE BULGARIA

The Salt of Life Project takes place on the hyperhaline lagoon of Atanasovsko Lake (Ramsar Site) which forms a part of the Burgas wetlands complex, extensively used for producing salt as well as being home to rare and vulnerable ecosystems (coastal lagoon), and bird species (333 species recorded). The 100-year long tradition of salt production resulted in the production of dykes, barriers and pools of varying salinity.

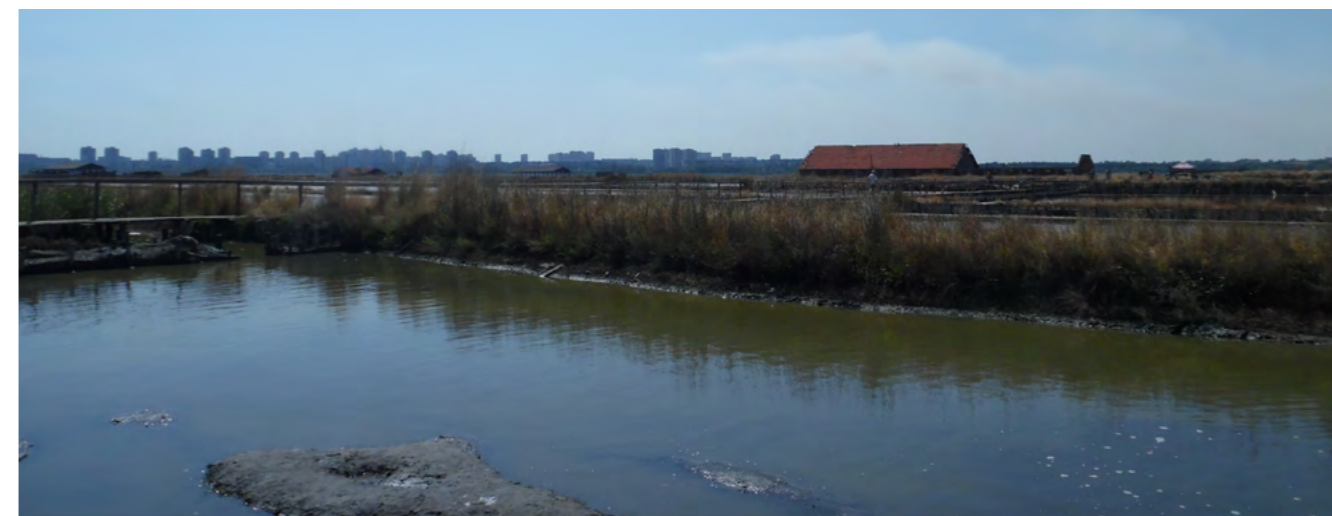
The project was initiated after the disastrous flooding that took place in 2010 around the lake. Within the

frame of the project, 23 km of a channel were cleaned to restore the quality of water in the lake. Moreover, it was designed to prevent further flood events from occurring in a case of heavy rainfall. Dykes and wooden barriers were installed to improve roosting sites for birds by maintaining sustained water regimes and improving water quality for the benthic community. Hydrological, hydrochemical and biodiversity (plants and birds) indicators will be monitored in order to determine whether the project was successful. Furthermore,

education and awareness-raising activities within the frame of the project included the creation of a website, organization of a Salt of Life Festival visited by more than 2000 people; establishment of the Atanasovsko Lake Public Council, instead of; in order to strengthen local participation, and promotion and communication activities.

The project contributed to the enhancing of several

ecosystem services: climate control and flood management, provision of salt (which has the potential to be marketed as a local eco-product and sold at higher prices), habitat for wildlife, preservation of aesthetic values of the habitat and its wildlife, recreation (in the summer 2000-3000 people visit the salt bath – a byproduct of the salt extraction - daily), education, local heritage, jobs in salt mining, jobs in ecotourism, increased long



5. CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION OF ENDANGERED WATER-DEPENDENT HABITATS IN CENTRAL SUDETY MOUNTAINS

POLAND

The project area is an old mountain range (maximum altitude of 1015 meters); the majority of sites are quaking and raised bogs, wet meadows and swampy forests located between 500 and 1000 meters above sea level. Past efforts to make those sites more productive for agriculture and forestry have led to drastic changes in plant composition and hydrology. Most of the sites are designated Natura 2000 sites.

Phase I of the project consisted of restoring small water bodies and micro retention. Experimental fen restoration and the publication of a montane wetland protection manual accompanied the project. Phase II of the project aimed to improve the hydrological and light conditions at the sites. In order to stop drainage and runoff, micro-obstacles were put in place, using locally sourced logs and rocks. The logs were also meant to stabilize peat forming vegetation. Secondly, natural succession (especially spruce) was removed to increase light at the sites. Rendering meadows fit for mowing, restoring small water bodies for endangered amphibian species, reintroduction of beavers and battling invasive species also took place. Monitoring of vegetation and hydrology was conducted.



6. LOWER PRUT FLOODPLAIN – ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION OF THE LOWER PRUT FLOODPLAIN NATURAL PARK

ROMANIA

The project area is located at the entrance of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve. The Lower Prut Floodplain Natural Park is an important resting place for migratory bird species, as it is lying on their flyway route. It is also a nesting site for over a hundred bird species, of which over 50 are protected under the Birds Directive and the Bern Convention.

The aim of the project was to improve the conservation status of the aquatic bird species, which are listed in the Birds Directive. The project objectives were to address the degradation of hydrological structures and re-establish the ecological balance of lakes, including improvement of the water level and its maintenance.

Project activities included creating a scientific inventory, monitoring, drafting of a management plan, the designation of four Special Protected Areas as well as awareness raising activities. Ecological restoration works included the creation of dams to maintain the optimal water level in Vlascuta Lake, restoration of two canals for water supply and evacuation in the Prut River, cleaning and reprofiling of the two channels connecting Pochina Lake and Prut River, construction of dykes, rehabilitation of two dykes which separate the Mata Lake.



7. MANAGEMENT OF THE LUBANA WETLAND COMPLEX

LATVIA



The Lubana Wetland Complex covers almost 50,000 hectares and has the highest diversity of habitats in Latvia. The site contains the country's largest shallow water lake, numerous fishponds, fens and wet grasslands. 186 bird and 23 mammal species were recorded on the site including white-tailed sea eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*), osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) and golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetus*). The main aim of the project was to develop a holistic participatory management plan for the wetland. The plan included three activity types: habitat management (removing natural succession, erection of dams, deepening the sites of fish wintering, building islands, restoring sluices and controlling the water level), strengthening the management capacity, stakeholder involvement, governance and raising public awareness.

Thanks to the project, several habitats were restored: degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration (7120); active raised bogs (7110); transition mires and quaking bogs (7140) and alluvial meadows of river valleys (6450). One concrete and 57 wooden dams

were constructed which contributed to the whole hydrological system of Lubana Wetland Complex, preventing Salas bog from drying out. Additionally, over 200 artificial nests were created and maintained.

8. RESTORATION OF BABINA POLDER IN THE DANUBE DELTA

ROMANIA

Babina polder extends over 2,100 hectares in South-Eastern Romania. In the 20th century, Babina polder was dyked to be a rice paddy, but it was abandoned before being fully built. As a result of such inter-

vention, the natural processes and the ecological balance were altered, which led to the deterioration and loss of area-specific habitats.



The aim of the project was to connect the abandoned agricultural polders and fishponds to the natural flooding regime of the Danube by breaching the dams. The objective of the project was to ensure ecological restoration of the area by recovering the hydrological, biogeochemical and ecological functions characteristic to wetlands. Such restoration enabled redevelopment of

the ecosystem and its functions and, as a consequence, site-specific habitats and their biodiversity recovered. The following activities were implemented under the project: creation of breaches in the banks, creation of wetlands and reconnection of Babina polder to the Danube flooding regime.

9. POLICY INTEGRATION IN BAVARIAN ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

GERMANY

Bavarian Environment Agency is implementing integrated management of WFD and BHD by combined monitoring and by integrating Natura 2000 objectives and measures into RBMPs.

The agency also started the LIFE Flusserlebnis project Isar, in the Lower Isar Valley in Bavaria, which represents a practical implementation of the three directives. In the past, large-scale modifications to the river have been made to meet the demands of flood protection, energy production and the intensification of land use. The ecological function of the river, as well as the allu-

vial floodplains and the natural dynamics of the alluvial floodplains, have declined significantly. The main aim of the project is to improve the habitats at the Isar valley through restoration measures focused on the River Isar and specific tributaries, and by optimising the habitat conditions in the alluvial areas. It focuses on demonstrating scientific and economic synergies created through close cooperation between water management and nature conservation authorities. The project will end in 2022.

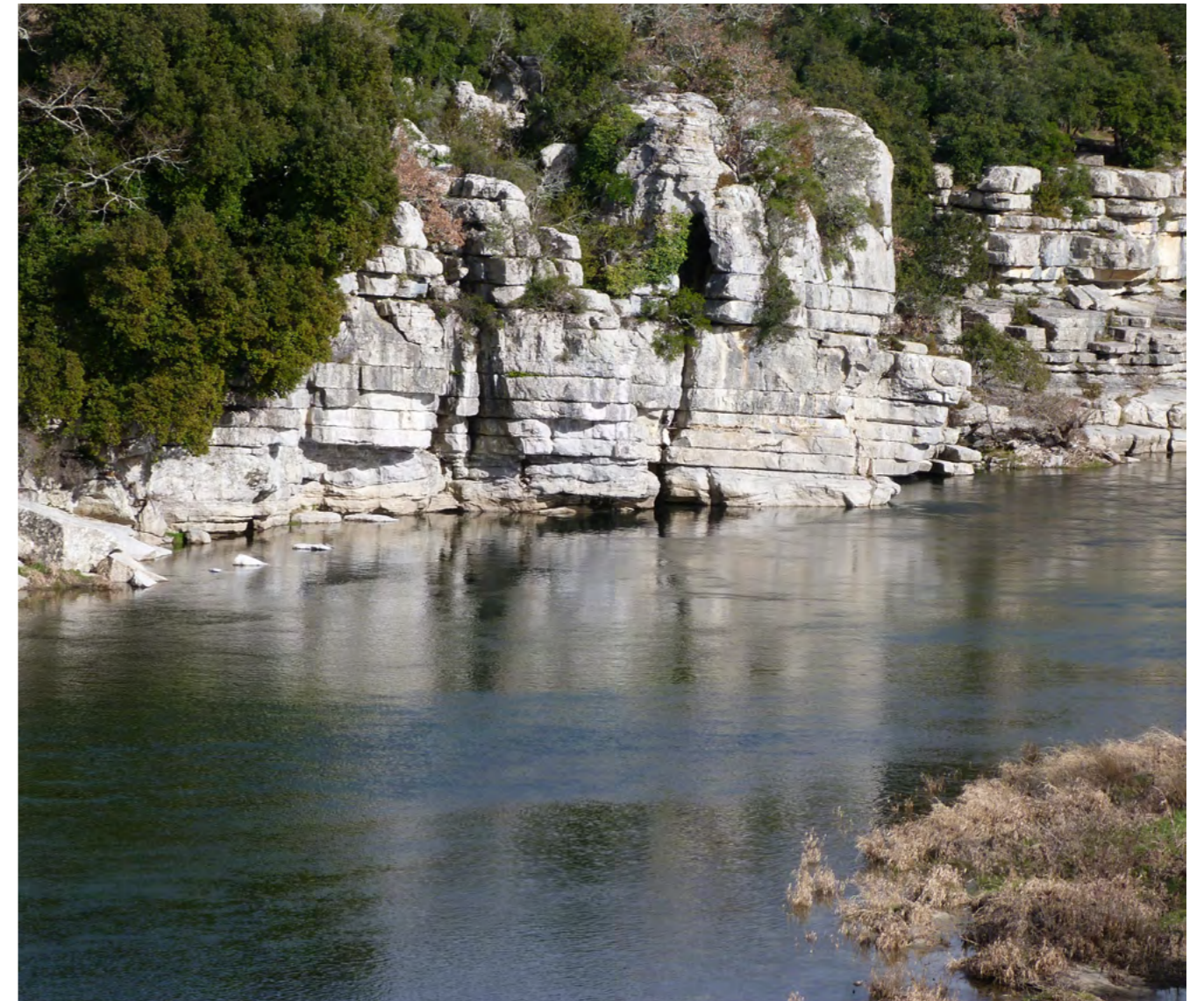


10. GREEN-BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE NETWORK

FRANCE

In 2007, France established the “trame verte et bleue” (green and blue framework) which is enforced in the existing law and maps all the Green Infrastructure elements (existing, or to be restored). It consists of Natura 2000 areas and other sites that jointly aim to enhance biodiversity as well as to recover the “good ecological status” or “good potential” of surface waters. The “trame verte et bleue” is a framework and a major tool

for spatial planning and for the ecological restoration of the territory in France. It stemmed from collaborative work involving the state, local authorities and a large number of stakeholders, which, from 2011, must be translated into concrete actions. Local authorities cooperate in monitoring, and fundraising for joint restoration or conservation projects.



One such example of cooperation between nature and water authorities is the removal of the Fatou dam on Beaume river. This old and unnecessary structure, originally intended for the production of hydroelectric power and abandoned for a long time, needed to be demolished. Leveling of the dam aimed to re-estab-

lish the downstream-upstream connection and the free movement of migratory fish, especially trout. The reconstruction of the minor bed of the Beaume, on a gravel substrate, also made it possible to reconstitute areas favorable for spawning of trout, in place of the reservoir.



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AUTHOR:

Monika Kotulak

CONTRIBUTORS:

Biljana Aljinović

Arthur Combes

Olja Radlović

Ágnes Zólyomi

DESIGN BY:

Linda Szabó

PHOTO CREDIT:

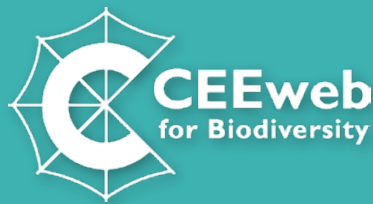
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Széher út 40



+36 1 398 0135



www.ceeweb.org



office@ceeweb.org



+36 1 398 0136



CEEwebEurope



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