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Agenda for today

- 1) Brief introduction to NaturaConnect Hildegard Meyer (WWF Central and Eastern Europe)
- 2) What do EU funds deliver for nature conservation currently? What role does public funding play? Auriane Flottes de Pouzols (IEEP)
- 3) Private funding leverage for nature conservation two examples from the Danube-Carpathians examples by Emöke Györfi (WWF-CEE) and Mihai Sorea (Foundation Conservation Carpathia)
- 4) What is next with the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028-2034? – Evelyn Underwood (IEEP) & Frank Vassen (DG-Environment)
- 5) Interactive session and report back to the plenum: Main challenges and action points for policymakers on the next MFF Evelyn Underwood (IEEP)
- 6) Open discussion and closing of the webinar Evelyn Underwood (IEEP) & Hildegard Meyer (WWF-CEE)



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Brief introduction to NaturaConnect

Designing a resilient and coherent Trans-European Network for

Nature and People (TEN-N)

July 2022 – June 2026

NaturaConnect co-develops

knowledge, tools and capacity

to support **countries** realizing the **EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 objectives**:

- 30% of land and sea protected
- 10% thereof strictly
- Establish TEN-N





Project consortium

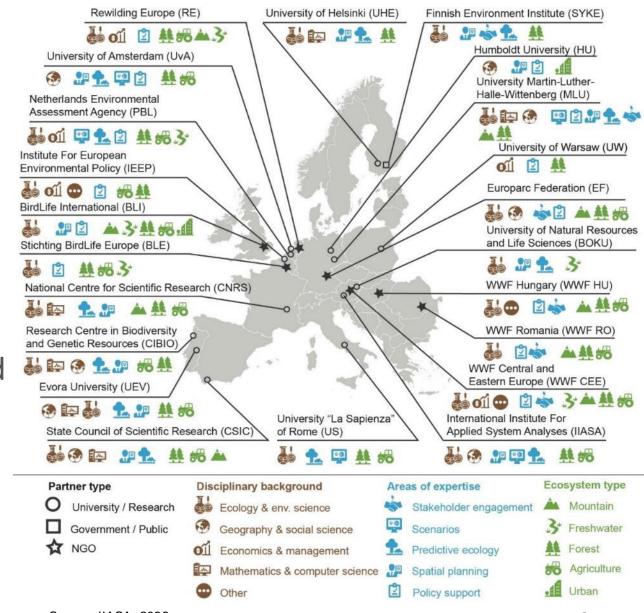
17 Research institutions

5 Policy and practitioner organisations

12 countries across Europe

Lead: International Institute for Applied System Analyses (IIASA), Austria

Co-lead: Martin-Luther-University, Germany





Source: IIASA, 2022

Case studies

Transnational case study

Danube-Carpathian Transboundary Region

National case studies

- Finland
- France
- Portugal

Regional case studies

- The Doñana Region in Spain
- Leipzig-Halle Peri-urban Floodplains, Germany





Results up to date

Towards knowledge

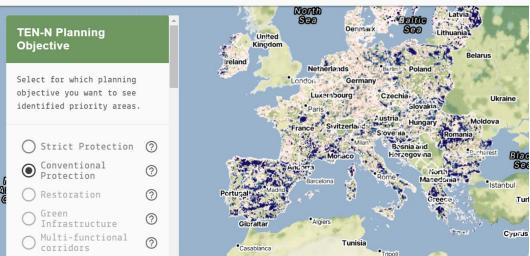
- Review of Protected Area and Ecological Connectivity Governance and Financing
- 11 Finance factsheets for public and private funding options
- GIS database across Europe for species occurrence and habitats

Towards tools

- Connectivity Guidelines, project database & maps
- Current & future natural capital and ecosystem services
- Scenarios for land use & climate change











Results up to date

Towards capacity building

- Competence assessment for nature conservation professionals working in protected areas and ecological connectivity
- NaturaConnect Learning Platform, freely available for all interested people
- Webinars and workshops on various topics, like financing TEN-N, models for the extension of protected areas, and ecological connectivity as part of the TEN-N, etc.

All results you can find at https://naturaconnect.eu under Resources





NaturaConnect Learning Platform

The project capacity building hub supports professional development to design and implement the Trans-European Nature Network (TEN-N).

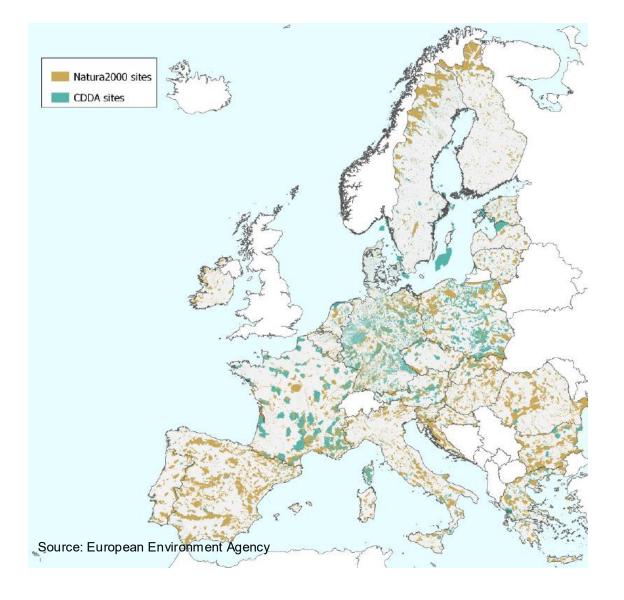
It provides easy access to training modules and learning resources for stakeholder engagement, spatial conservation planning and more.



What the Trans-European Nature Network (TEN-N) is

The TEN-N builds on the existing
Natura 2000 network and
national designated protected areas
and connecting these areas using the
green infrastructure landscape
elements important for delivering
ecosystem services.

The coherent TEN-N will include ecological corridors "to prevent genetic isolation, allow for species migration, and maintain and enhance healthy ecosystems".





What do EU funds deliver for nature now?

Auriane Flottes de Pouzols, Institute for European Environmental Policy



The EU Biodiversity Strategy

ONE VISION

By 2050, all of the world's ecosystems are restored, resilient, and adequately protected

ONE GOAL

Put Europe's biodiversity on the path to recovery by 2030 for the benefit of **people**, the **planet**, the **climate** and our **economy**

FOUR PILLARS



Expand protected areas to 30% of the EU's land and sea, and put a third of these areas under strict protection



Restore Nature

Restore nature and ensure its sustainable management across all sectors and ecosystems



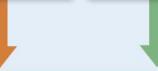
Enable transformative change

Strengthen the EU biodiversity governance framework, knowledge, research, financing and investments



EU action to support biodiversity globally

Deploy EU external actions to raise the level of ambition for biodiversity worldwide, reduce the impact of trade and support biodiversity outside Europe





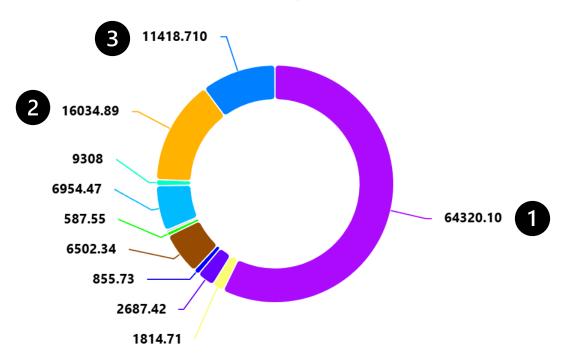


European Commission, 2021



ACTIONS AND COMMITMENTS TO 2030

Total: 112,429.1



- Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)
- European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF)
- Programme for Environment and Climate Action (LIFE)
- Just Transition Mechanism (JTM)
- Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument Global Europe (NDICI)
- Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III)
- Other
- Horizon Europe
- European Space Programme
- Regional Policy (European Regional and Development Fund and Cohesion Fund)
- Recovery and Resilience Facility





LIFE Programme

2

European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg)

3

European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF)

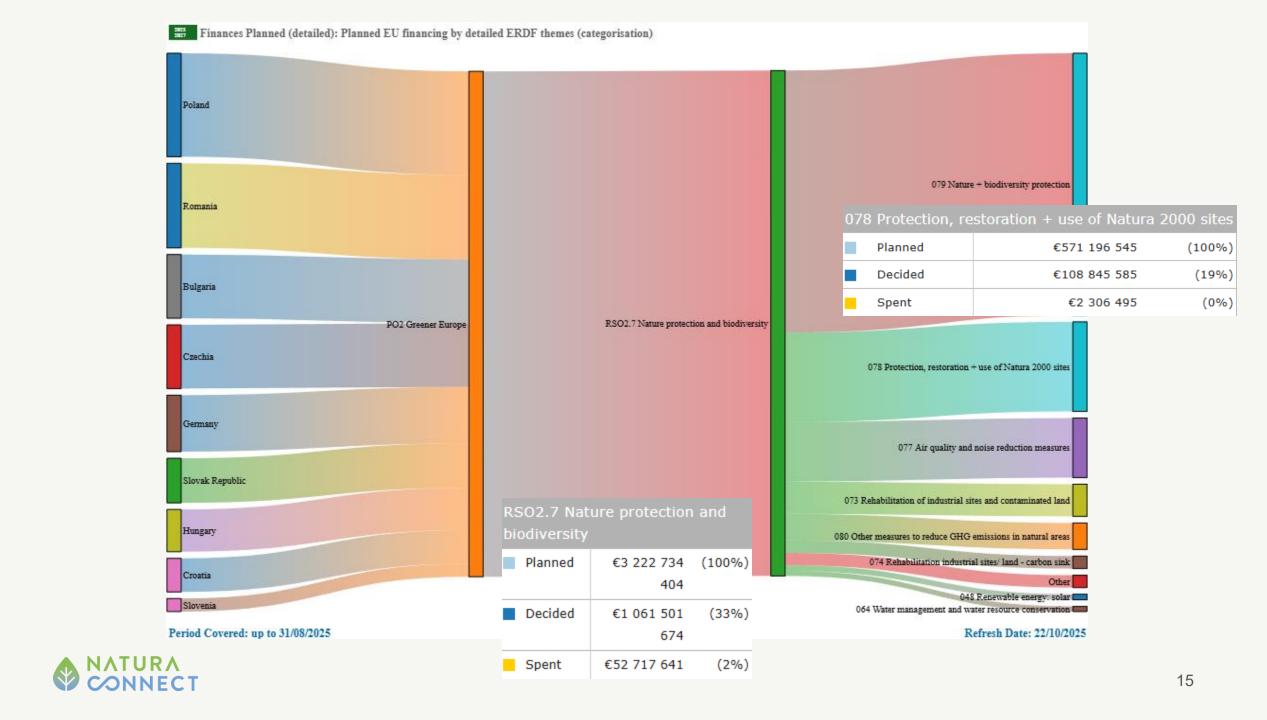
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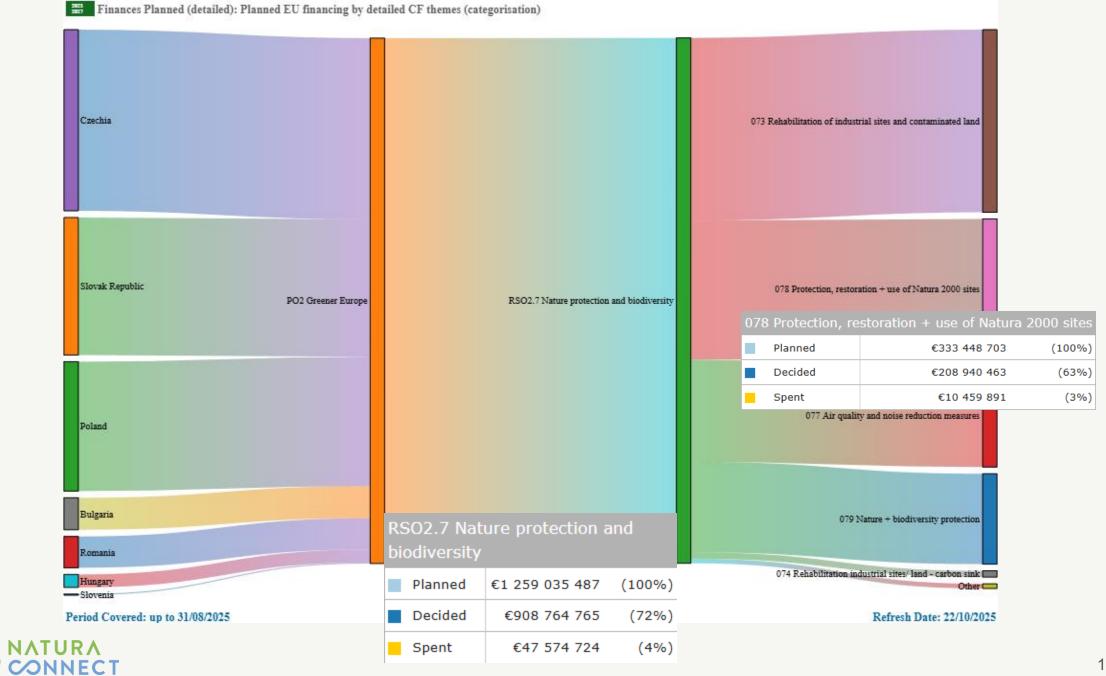
Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)



European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Cohesion Fund (CF)







Examples: CAP and Interreg











LIFE Programme 2021-2027

About LIFE sub-programmes



NATURE & BIODIVERSITY



The Nature and Biodiversity sub-programme aims to protect, conserve and restore Europe's threatened habitats, species and wildlife. Projects under this sub-programme help support the EU Directives on <u>Birds</u> and <u>Habitats</u>, the <u>Nature Restoration</u> Regulation, the <u>Natura 2000</u> network and the <u>EU biodiversity strategy</u> for 2030 as part of the <u>European Green Deal</u>.



CIRCULAR ECONOMY & QUALITY OF LIFE

Projects under the Circular Economy and Quality of Life subprogramme promote the transition to a sustainable, circular, toxic-free, energy-efficient and climate-resilient economy whilst enhancing the quality of our environment. Projects tend to focus on the SRs for sustainable growth: Rethink, Refuse, Reduce, Reuse and Recycle, as well as environmental governance.



CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION & ADAPTATION

Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation projects support the shift towards a sustainable, climate-neutral and resilient economy. Projects encourage sustainable farming, forestry, peatland and tourism, as well as promoting liveable cities, sustainable infrastructure, better water management and dealing with extreme weather events.



CLEAN ENERGY TRANSITION

The Clean Energy Transition sub-programme supports the EU's ambitious plans for self-sufficient, renewable energy, in particular the European Green Deal and the 2050 long-term decarbonisation strategy. Projects encourage innovative technologies and training, public-private partnerships and new financing models, with a focus on local solutions and getting citizens involved.

What's the difference between Standard Action Projects and Strategic Projects?

	Standard Action Projects	Strategic Projects
Scope	One or several priorities under the LIFE environment and climate action sub-programmes.	Specific areas of intervention related to certain strategic plans related to nature, biodiversity, air, water, floods, marine strategies, waste, circular economy, climate change adaptation and mitigation.
Geographic scale	Local, multi-city, regional, multi-regional, national or transnational.	Regional, multi-city, multi-regional, national or transnational.
Link to a plan or strategy aligned with EU/national legislation	Optional.	Yes. Projects must contribute to fully implementing such a plan or strategy.
Mobilisation of complementary funds	Not required.	Yes. Project must mobilise at least one other relevant EU, national or private funding source.
Stakeholder involvement	Expected.	Compulsory.
Average project period	1 – 5 years.	5 - 10 years.
Type of projects	Pilot, demonstration, best practice or information, awareness-raising and dissemination projects.	Best practice that can be combined with pilot, demonstration and information, awareness-raising and dissemination aspects. A capacity-building element is mandatory.
Consortium requirements	1 participant may be sufficient.	At least 2 participants.

Source: EC, 2023. Link



LIFE Strategic Nature Projects

- SNaP aimed at supporting full implementation of
 - Prioritized action frameworks for Natura 2000
 - Other plans or strategies to implement EU nature/biodiversity policy with measurable actions and clear timeline/budget
- SNaP requirements
 - Mobilisation of funding from other EU and national funds
 - Capacity building
 - Map implement direct conservation measures
 - Nature authorities must be involved







Private funding leverage for nature conservation



The Living Danube Partnership

Emöke Györfi

Water Stewardship Manager

WWF Central and Eastern Europe



A Foundation for a Nation - the Future Story of Făgăraș National Park, Romania

Mihai Sorea

Education Specialist

Foundation Conservation Carpathia







What is next with the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028-2034?

Evelyn Underwood, Institute for European Environmental Policy



Next EU multi-annual financial framework MFF

From 2028 to 2034 – Commission proposal July 2025

Global Europe

€ 200 billion

European Competitiveness Fund

€ 410 billion

Managed by Commission

- LIFE climate & circular economy strands;
- Horizon Europe; Erasmus+; etc
- Connecting Europe Facility; etc

Others*

National and Regional Partnership Fund

€ 865 billion

National and Regional Partnership Plans

- Cohesion; ERDF (& Interreg);
 European Social Fund; EMFAF;
 CAP
- LIFE Nature strand

Horizontal regulation with 'do no significant harm' (DNSH) principle



National and Regional Partnership Fund

National and Regional Partnership Plans and Interreg plan

- Flexibility: MS can move budget between funds (except CAP ringfencing)
- Five objectives: do not mention environment (subobjectives)
- Rules for future cohesion funds and future CAP funds
 - Regulations under the overall fund rules and plans / programmes
- Performance / results: milestones (like RRF)
 - Mainstreaming target 43% of NRPF to climate & environment (climate, environment, circular economy)
- Performance framework: horizontal regulation
 - Do No Significant Harm principle
 - Intervention fields to track funding
- 'Coherent' with national nature restoration plan & national climate & energy plan



Will next MFF mainstream nature?

Objectives, mainstreaming target, intervention fields and indicators

- Objectives nature and biodiversity appears in:
 - Sustainable prosperity subobjective
 - Quality of life subobjective
- Competition for funds within governments and between sectors
 - Coherence with national restoration plan how?
 - Push for policy reform milestones for environmental legislation?
- Environment & climate mainstreaming target of 43% of NRPF
 - Intervention fields for nature and biodiversity
 - Lack of results and impact indicators for nature and biodiversity
 - Co-efficients: 100%, 40%, 0% high and wrong allocations
 - What leverage effect?
- CAP environment mainstreaming concerns



MFF negotiations – what is happening?

Start of negotiations – and positions

- ENVI Council (environment ministers)
 - positions: majority push for LIFE,
- General Affairs Council
 - Positions: core against periphery but little focus on environment

What can you do?

- Sign and send letter about LIFE: agencies from Member States request that the <u>LIFE</u> program be reconfirmed as a stand-alone funding mechanism in the future MFF
- Make proposals about policy reform milestones and investments
- Better environmental legislation implementation and enforcement
- Build capacity in govt and agencies to absorb and deliver biodiversity funding
- Make proposals about objectives, needs and policy targets, indicators and weightings



Links to MFF proposal & EU agencies

- **European Commission** proposal for the next MFF https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/long-term-eu-budget/eu-budget-2028-2034_en
- European Commission: Questions and answers on the next long-term budget
- European Parliament monthly digest on the post-2027 MFF October 2025 https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2025)777942
- Interreg Europe: https://www.interregeurope.eu/news-events/news/proposal-for-eu-budget-2028-2034-is-out



Responses from civil society & think tanks

- NGOs: Future of LIFE programme https://www.wwf.eu/?19380941/The-future-of-LIFE-in-the-next-EU-budget
- Europarc Federation call to save LIFE funding: https://www.europarc.org/news/2025/09/is-life-over-as-we-know-it/
- Bankwatch: https://bankwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/2025_10_14_The-future-of-biodiversity-financing_Wh...
- **WWF**: Getting National and Regional Partnership Plans right https://www.wwf.eu/?19327266/An-EU-budget-that-delivers-on-climate-and-nature-Getting-National-and-...
- **WWF**: Performance Regulation in the next MFF https://www.wwf.eu/?19067441/A-more-impactful-EU-budget-Performance-Regulation-in-the-next-MFF
- **IEEP**: MFF and post 2027 CAP https://ieep.eu/publications/the-post-2027-cap-and-mff-proposals-for-the-eu-first-reflections-on-their-environmental-implications/





Interactive Session 3 Breakout Groups 20 min



The Main Challenges & Action Points for Policymakers on the Next Multiannual Financial Framework

Group 1 Mainstreaming nature priorities in the next MFF

• Chair: Evelyn Underwood, IEEP; Notetaker: Marit Schnepf, Europarc Federation

Group 2 Overcoming bottlenecks to accessing EU funds for nature

 Chair: Hildegard Meyer, WWF-CEE; Notetaker: Elena Fischer, Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention

Group 3 How to use EU funds to leverage private financing?

 Chair: Sofie Ruysschaert, BirdLife Europe; Notetaker: Aurian Flottes de Pouzols, IEEP



Group 1 Mainstreaming nature priorities in the next MFF

- How can the new national investment and reform plans set an objective or milestone for the TEN-N? How can this be linked to a national strategy or priority area mapping
- How can funding in the new national and regional partnership plan be earmarked to TEN-N?

Group 2 Overcoming bottlenecks to accessing EU funds for nature

- How can we make EU biodiversity funding more accessible to small NGOs and SMEs?
- How to improve understanding, streamline processes and build capacity to develop, assess, and implement biodiversity projects?

Group 3 How to use EU funds to leverage private financing?

- What are your experiences in using private finance for TEN-N?
- How can nature credits or nature certificates fund TEN-N?



Report back from breakout groups







Next steps

- Recording, presentations and post-workshop briefing will be made accessible on the NaturaConnect website. Participants will be informed!
- Launch of the Learning Platform Module 'Financial instruments', End of October 2025 https://tinyurl.com/ENA-NC
- Webinar 'Linking Blue and Green Infrastructure in the Danube-Carpathians: Prioritising Rivers, Wetlands, and Landscapes: An Integrated Connectivity Approach', 11 November 2025, 9:30-12:30
- Stakeholder event 'From Science to Action: Strategic Planning for the Trans-European Nature Network (TEN-N)', Brussels, Belgium, 26 & 27 November 2025





Connect with NaturaConnect!

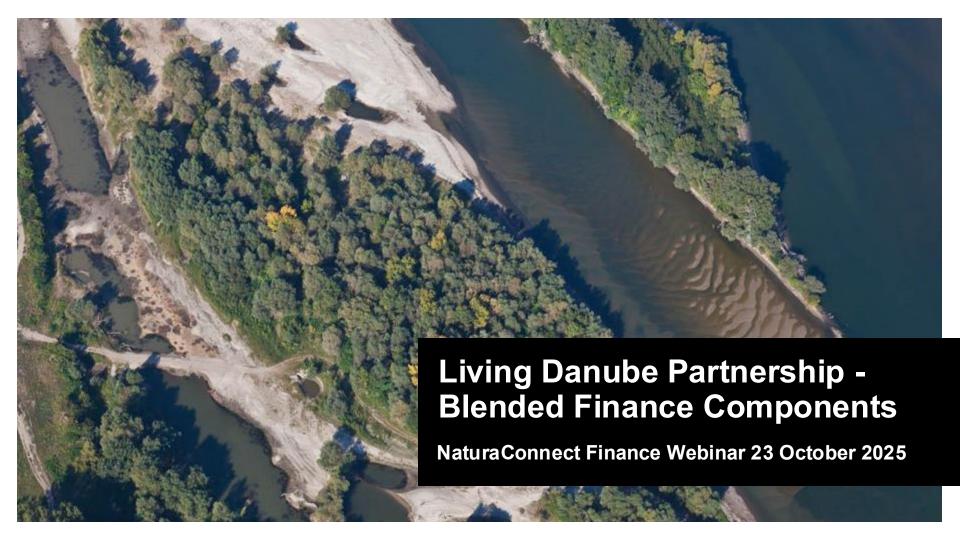
- www.naturaconnect.eu
- □ naturaconnect@iiasa.ac.at
- % facebook.com/NaturaConnectProject
- % linkedin.com/company/naturaconnect/
- https://bsky.app/profile/naturaconnect.bsky.social



Evaluation survey for this webinar: Share your feedback with us!



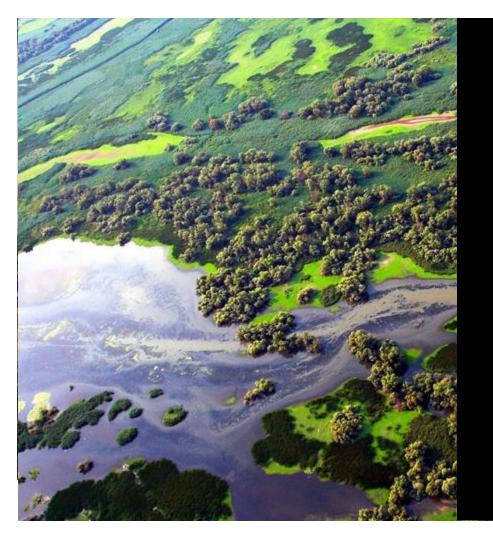




Topics

Long-term partnership setup Results Funding Learnings Outlook





Living Danube Partnership

Cross-sectoral partnership

Identifying and demonstrating solutions

Climate resilience

Leading the conversation

Collective action

Leverage

Awareness raising

Engagement

Advocacy

Living Danube Partnership Setup

Long-term: "Living Danube Partnership (LDP)"

Living Danube Partnership 1.0 2014-2021

Pilots:

9 field pilots

"Bridge" Projects 2022-2023 (2024)

Pilots:

1 field pilot

Living Danube Partnership 2.0 2024-2026

Pilots:

- 8 pilots (4 field)
- 3 water stewardship pilots

River & wetland restoration | Awareness & Engagement

Advocacy

Multiple baseline studies

Water risk studies and water stewardship potential studies for selected regions and Danube Basin level

Climate resilience & NbS Improve agricultural livelihoods









Living Danube Partnership Pilot Partners

Long-term: "Living Danube Partnership (LDP)"

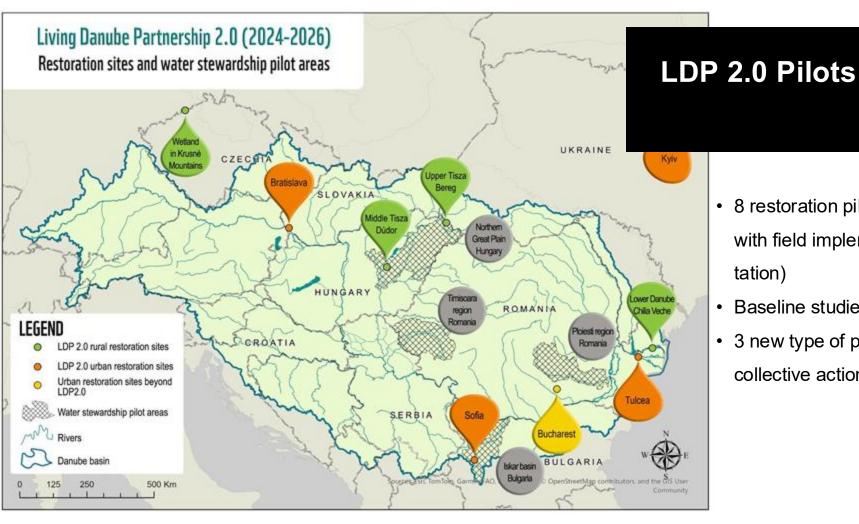
LDP Basin Level	International Commission for the Danube River Basin (ICPDR) The Coca-Cola Foundation (TCCF) Since 2024: TCC Company Europe, CC Hellenic Bottling Company
Pilot- or national levels:	Ministries (e.g. Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture, Croatian Ministry of Environment, Austrian Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, etc.) - content- or co-funding support Water Management Authorities (HR, HU, AT, RO) - national or watershed level entities Protected Area Management authorities, e.g. Danube-Drava National Park Directorate (NPD), Persina NPD, Croatian County Nature Protection Institutions, etc. Municipality or County Administrations Other NGOs (BROZ in Slovakia, BirdLife, etc.) Consultancy companies



LDP 1.0 Pilots

- 9 field pilots
- Baseline studies

e.g. Floodplain Restoration Potential for Lower Danube



- 8 restoration pilots (4) with field implementation)
- Baseline studies
- 3 new type of pilots: collective action



WORKING TOGETHER FOR A LIVING DANUBE





LDP 1.0 Results

Living Danube Partnership Phase 1

2020 Reuters "Business Partnership of the Year"

PARTNERSHIP IMPACTS



ACROSS SIX COUNTRIES



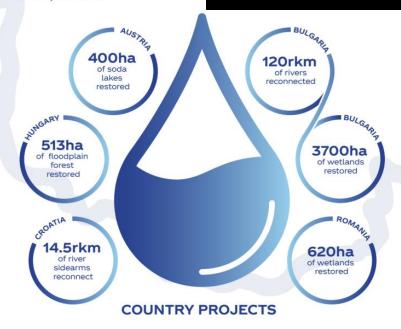
CUBIC METERS OF FRESH WATER REPLENISHED



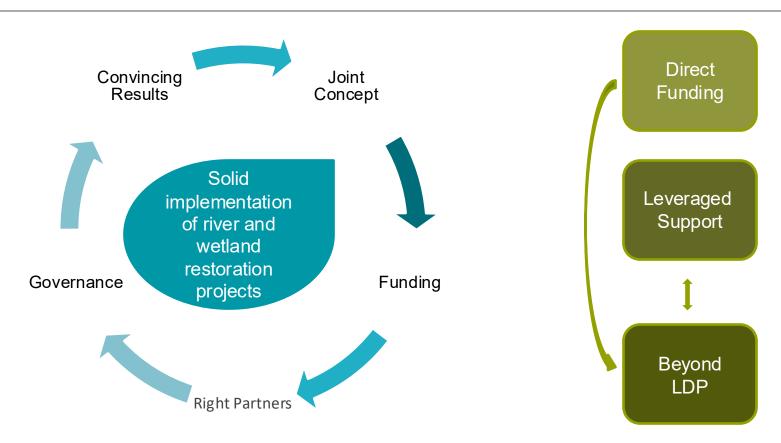
HECTARES OF WETLANDS AND FLOODPLAINS RESTORED



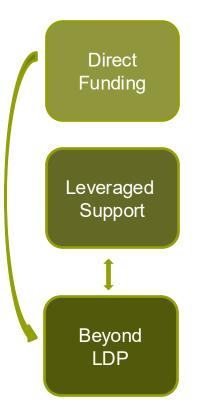




Partners and Funding



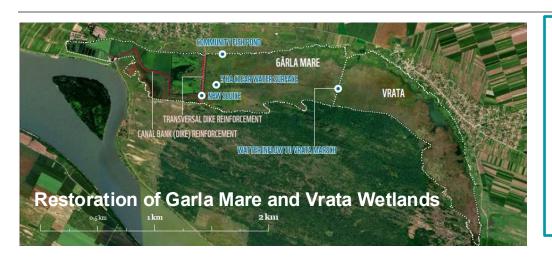
Partners and Funding



- Complete cost coverage of certain pilots by TCCF
- Co-funding of public-sector-funded projects or pilots by TCCF

- Staff time for additional effort complementing public-sector funded projects, funded by TCCF
- Staff time or external support for applying for new public sector projects, or further baseline studies funded by TCCF
- Staff time for preparing new projects beyond LDP phase duration funded by TCCF
- Inspired partners applying for follow-up projects by themselves or with further partners

Examples: Direct Funding



PROJECT FACTS:

Location: Garla Mare and Vrata sites, RO (Lower Danube Green Corridor)

Duration: 2014 – 2021

Lead and Key Partners: WWF-RO (lead), local

landowners and land users

620 ha
OF MARSHLANDS
IN THE DANUBE



Funding: € 1,366,000 total budget from TCC Foundation (100%)

Outcome:

- > 5 ha open water surface, dredging of the reed bed for habitat diversification; rein-forced dikes, new sluice for water inflow.
- Improved flood retention capacity.

Examples: Leveraged Support

176 ha

OF WETLANDS RESTORED ON THE Drava river





Funding: € 834,000 from EU LIFE Nature program and WWF co-funding share from TCC Foundation

Outcome:

- > Joint search for a viable technical solution under the given conditions
- ➤ Installing a bottom weir with a fish-pass at the outflow and limited dredging the oxbow bed
- Planting of native tree species to improve the forest biodiversity
- > Removing abandoned angling platforms and installing fewer new ones.

PROJECT FACTS:

Location: Old Drava oxbow near Barch on the Hungarian-Croatian border (Mura-Drava-Danube Transboundary Biosphere Reserve)

Duration: 2014-2018

Lead and Key Partners:

Danube-Drava National Park
Directorate (lead), WWF-HU,
Anglers Association of Somogy
County, Pitomaca Municipality,
Regional Development Agency of
Virovitica-Podravina County,
National Conservancy of
Virovitica-Podravina

Examples: Direct Support and Beyond LDP



PROJECT FACTS:

Location: Persina and Kalimok wetlands, BG (Lower Danube Green Corridor)

Duration: 2017 – 2020

Lead and Key Partners: WWF-BG (lead), Persina Nature Park Directorate, Rusenski Lom Nature Park Directorate

3700 ha

OF DANUBE FLOODPLAIN MARSHLAND WITH BETTER WATER SUPPI



Funding: € 318,000 total budget from TCCFoundation (100%)

Outcome: Pilot that builds on existing infrastructure from a from a previous World World Bank-funded project

- > Pre-feasibility study; selection of the above two sites for piloting
- > Technical & management measures (electric propulsion mechanisms for sluices)
- > Remote control at one of the sluices & real-time water level monitoring system
- Operating manual for the optimal management of the wetlands
- Bird nesting platform

Beyond LDP:

The National Park
Directorate applied, after this
project's success, for further
sluice modernisation and
restoration funds

Getting Beyond LDP

Introducing concepts such as NbS, integrated river management, ecosystem services into discussions with national and regional authorities





Demonstrating restoration and NbS solutions in cooperation with local landowners, land users and national authorities



Building on success stories and know-how from many similar projects Europe-wide



Ongoing cooperation and exchange with other projects with similar or complementary aims



Incentivising private sector (banks, insurance, corporate) to invest in NBS

Boost for climate adaptation in Europe as EIB and WWF join forces to develop Naturebased Solutions at scale

Learnings about Partnership and Funding

Joint Concept. Focus on overarching objectives and targets --> flexibility needed to realize technically complex and through their nature, uncertain wetland restoration pilots.

Solid
implementation
of river and
wetland
restoration
projects

Governance (LDP): long-term commitment and trust between partners WWF, ICPDR, TCC Foundation.

Partners (pilots). Ensuring the continuity of activities beyond the project; working towards leverage:

- (1) Water management authorities (HU, RO, HR)
- (2) Protected area management authorities (BG, HU, RO, HR
- (3) Landowners, land users, anglers, forest management

Stepwise achievement of **convincing results**, with benefits for nature and communities supported both the trust and the adaptability.

Outlook

Long-term: "Living Danube Partnership (LDP)"

- Continue building on long-term, ambitious partnerships based on trust and driven by a
 jointly formulated set of overarching objectives
- Scale up the partnership and continue to leverage funding
- Continue to place benefits for nature and communities at the centre of the partnership









How did everything start?

- Foundation started in 2009- Christoph&Barbara came to study wolves in the early 2000's- they saw huge natural capital here,
 especially in the Făgăraș Mountains- the first bussiness started: Equs Horseriding Center
- In Romania a lot of illegal ecological actions were taken-logging, trophy hunting, habitat loss-the need for buying and administrating the land appeared
- In 2014, the retribution law came and all the forests confiscated in the communist time would go back to the people-big problem because corruption and private investors got a lot of forests in order to do illegal logging-BIG NEED FOR US TO START BUYING LAND
- Since 2009 the foundation has huge infrastructure- 28.000 ha, 1 educational center, 2 visitors centers (soon 3), logistic buildings,
 Travel Carpathia infrastructure, cars, projects such as: huge wildlife reintroduction,















Example of a big project: Ecological reconstruction

- 6 tree nurseries
- Over 5 millions saplings plated
- Hundreds of kilometres of exploitation roads restored
- Old very important native plants reintroduced to alpine meadows (sweet pine and dwarf pine)
- Extracting patches of monoculture forests and creating open areas for native plants
- *Important note: the reintroduction of beavers and European bisons is also helping with the ecological reconstruction program.





National/Romanian financing sources

- Grants from the Government
- Private Romanian donors that gives us money from our campaigns (adopt a beech tree, adopt a bear) or monthly subscriptions to our newsletters/projects
- Private Romanian companies that donate money for specific projects (Ursus beer- for mitigating the human-wildlife relationship) or they can give us 20% from tax profits instead of giving the government



International financing sources

- Big international foundations that have similar interests with us
- Private investors and international companies that want to protect the Romanian natural capital
- Big European grants such as LIFE and SUPERB
- *Some partners are very restrictive, they give us money only for specific actions and projects
- *Some partners are with us or with Christoph & Barbara since they were just researchers (Jack Wolfskin)
- *We maintain a close relationship with all of our partners (fieldtrips, wildlife tours, info trips, newsletters)



Our own funds

- Food Hub
- Travel Carpathia experiences (wildlife hides, mountain huts)
- Biodiversity Farms
- Private educational programmes
- Public events











