

Nature Conservation in Europe: Approaches and Lessons

Annex BG.2. Results From 20 Years of Floodplain Forest Restoration Along the Lower Danube

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Natural riparian and floodplain forests along the banks and islands on the Danube are important habitats for birds, fish and other wildlife and provide significant ecosystem services, among which are protection from floods and riverbank erosion, and improvements in water quality. These forests are extremely sensitive to changes in the water regime of the Danube. Agriculture, forestry and transport have already reduced the extent of floodplains and forests by 68% (Hein *et al.*, 2016).

Starting in 1998, in recognition of the poor conservation status of the Lower Danube's forests, the Bulgarian National Forestry Board (NFB), the Ministry of Environment and Water (MoEW), the Green Balkans Federation NGO and WWF formed a Wetlands Working Group, to coordinate and support floodplain and wetland conservation and restoration in the Bulgarian part of the Danube basin. Green Balkans in particular were instrumental in the late 1990s, together with WWF, in supporting the development of a Strategy for the restoration of the Bulgarian Danube islands.

Forest landscape restoration (FLR) was initiated in Bulgaria in 1999, with attempts to create the right policy environment to support large-scale restoration and connectivity in the context of the Lower Danube. In 2000, a joint declaration was signed by the Environment Ministers of Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine and Moldova to establish a Lower Danube Green Corridor. This agreement committed the four countries to preserve a total of 935 000 ha, including enhanced protection for 775 000 ha of existing protected areas and additional protection of 160 000 ha; a goal to restore 223 000 ha of former wetland areas was also included.

In the subsequent 20 years, a large number of projects have been implemented in support of these commitments. Pilot projects have taken place across several sites in all countries, but primarily in Bulgaria and Romania, contributing to the wider vision and objectives committed to by the four governments in 2000. For example, projects focussed on the removal of dykes and the control of invasive alien species, such as *Amorpha fruticosa*. Monitoring has demonstrated that natural floodplain forest habitats are slowly making a comeback in the Lower Danube, as of 2012, 60 000 ha of floodplain had been restored or was undergoing active or passive restoration (Mansourian *et al.*, 2019).

References

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