

LIFE RESTORE FOR MDD

UNESCO Five-country
Biosphere Reserve

FACTSHEET

LIFE RESTORE FOR MDD: FIVE COUNTRIES, THREE RIVERS AND ONE PROJECT

The 'LIFE RESTORE for MDD' project is a joint initiative of Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary and Serbia to preserve and restore the largest contiguous riparian forests in the UNESCO Five-country Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube, also known as the 'Amazon of Europe'. The project, which is co-funded by the European Union's LIFE programme with 67%, started on 1 October 2023 and will run for five years. With a total budget of €20,024,000, the project is being implemented by 17 partners from all five countries.

Restoration measures are planned at 29 locations along the three rivers, covering an area of 2,100 km². In 17 Natura 2000 areas, the project partners are reconnecting river branches, widening river beds and converting poplar plantations into more natural floodplain forests. The restoration measures are supported by comprehensive public relations work, environmental education and continuous monitoring.



MURA DRAVA DANUBE

UNIQUE VALUE OF THE PROJECT

- Restoration of 336 ha of floodplain forest
- Reconnection of side channels and widening of the riverbed over a length of around 54 km
- Mobilisation of 966,000 m³ of sediments
- International cooperation and regional collaboration

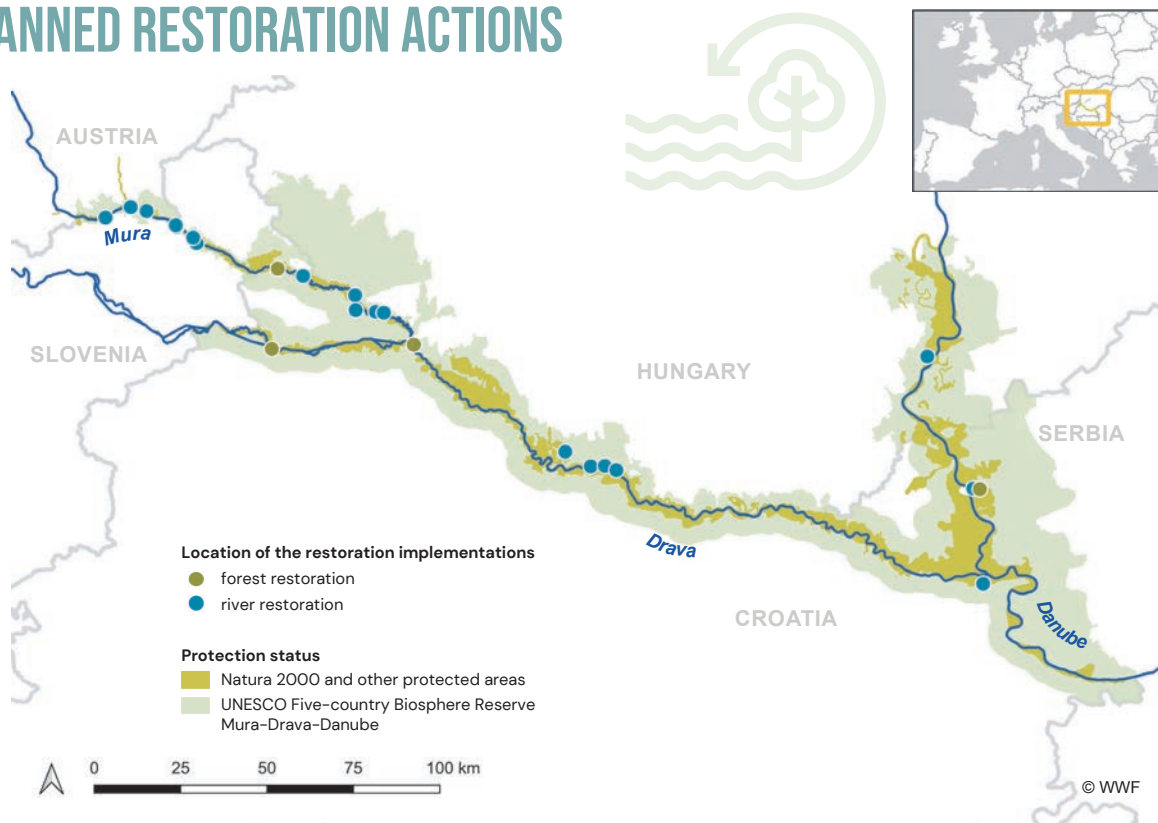


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PLANNED RESTORATION ACTIONS



THE CHALLENGE

The largest contiguous riparian forests in the Danube River Basin area need to be improved and protected. The floodplain forests (habitat types HT 91E0* and HT 91F0) are in a poor state of conservation, primarily due to river straightening, intensive forestry, the spread of invasive species, depletion of the gene pool and a lack of cross-border cooperation. In order to maintain the functionality of the core and buffer zone of the UNESCO Five-country Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube, joint cross-border measures are required.

THE MEASURES

In the long term, the river morphology is to be restored for natural forest regeneration at four project sites. At the same time, side channels will be connected to the river at 14 locations and oxbows will be restored in order to improve the conditions for floodplain forests. Natural forests are being preserved, improved or reforested at eleven locations. Integrative, cross-border planning of river restoration on three pilot river sections ensures the sustainability of the measures. The joint measures are reflected upon in working groups and together with stakeholders and written down in a long-term restoration plan for the UNESCO Five-country Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube.

HABITAT TYPES

Alluvial forests (HT 91E0* – Priority Habitat)

This habitat type consists of diverse alluvial forests, mainly along rivers and streams. These forests are characterized by trees such as White willow (*Salix Alba*), Black poplar (*Populus nigra*), Black alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) and Common ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*). All types occur on soils, which are periodically flooded, nutrient-rich and well drained. Alluvial forests are crucial for biodiversity as they provide habitats for a wide range of species, especially birds, amphibians, insects, and a variety of seasonal plants.

Riparian mixed forests (HT 91F0)

This habitat type is dominated by a mixture of Pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*), European white elm (*Ulmus laevis*), Field elm (*Ulmus minor*), and ash species like Common ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) or Narrow-leaved ash (*Fraxinus angustifolia*). These forests are adapted to periodic flooding along major rivers. They contain a rich herbaceous layer and are often mixed with other forest types. Riparian mixed forests provide habitats for a wide range of species, reflecting their ecological importance and diversity.

WHO ARE THE PROJECT PARTNERS?

Coordinating Beneficiary: WWF–Austria

Further project partners:

- Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation
- Duna–Dráva National Park Directorate
- WWF–Hungary
- Slovenian Water Agency
- Association for Nature and Environment protection Green Osijek
- Croatian Waters, Legal entity for water management
- University of Osijek, Faculty of Agrobiotechnical Sciences
- Office of the Styrian Government, Department 14 Water Management, Resources and Sustainability
- Public Institution for the management of protected parts of nature and the ecological network of Virovitica–Podravina County
- Public Enterprise 'Vojvodinašume' Petrovaradin
- Slovenian State Forests Ltd.
- Regional Management of Southeast Styria.Styrian Volcano Land
- Public Institution for Management of Protected Natural Areas in the Koprivnica–Križevci County
- Public institution for the management of the protected parts of nature in Varaždin County
- Međimurje Nature – Public Institution for Nature Protection
- Balaton–felvidéki National Park Directorate



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Project Advisory Board:

Steering Committee of the UNESCO Five–country Biosphere Reserve Mura–Drava–Danube, represented by the respective Ministries of Environment of the five countries and their nominated representatives (TBR MDD Steering Committee).

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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PARTNERS



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