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Protection of Biodiversity of the Sava River Basin Floodplains

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The Sava River

The Sava river is the second largest tributary to the Danube River and is of biological significance because of its outstanding biological and landscape diversity. It hosts the largest complex of alluvial floodplain wetlands in the Danube basin and the largest lowland forests. The Sava is a unique example of a river where the floodplains are still intact, supporting both flood alleviation and biodiversity. The Sava River springs in Slovenia and runs through Croatia constituting the border with Slovenia and with Bosnia and Herzegovina, and discharges into the Danube in Serbia. The Sava River is considered by nature conservationists and scientists to be one of the "Crown Jewels" of European nature and has been selected as a focal region in the Pan European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (PEBLDS).

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Designing an Ecological Network

The overall objective of the project is to protect and manage the unique landscape and biodiversity along the Sava River by supporting Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia to: identify, protect and manage floodplain areas of importance for the landscape and biodiversity by applying the criteria of the Birds and Habitats Directives; design a coherent transboundary ecological network of the core areas, buffer zones and corridors; introduce land use practices that support the protection of the landscape and biodiversity; and to raise awareness on the need to protect and manage the unique landscape and biodiversity along the Sava through transboundary co-operation.

Photo: Vladimir Dobretic

Assessing Biodiversity

The Biodiversity Working Group seeks to identify species and habitats that are of European significance through assessment of data available in archives and databases and through additional field inventories in compliance with the EU Birds and Habitats Directive. The data gathered will serve as a base for the design and action plan of a transboundary ecological network along the Sava. Attention will also be given to the identification of flood plain areas that are capable of retaining flood waves to alleviate floods.

Creating a GIS Database - www.savasdi.org

The GIS Working Group is assisting in enabling the responsible authorities and scientific institutions in handling, managing and exchanging data on the ecological network both through capacity building and development of a GIS database, to be harmonized with and shared by the neighbouring Sava countries. One of the main challenges is to develop a harmonised database structure and procedures in accordance with the EU reporting requirements for the Natura 2000 and to incorporate the shared and individual needs of the Sava River neighbours.

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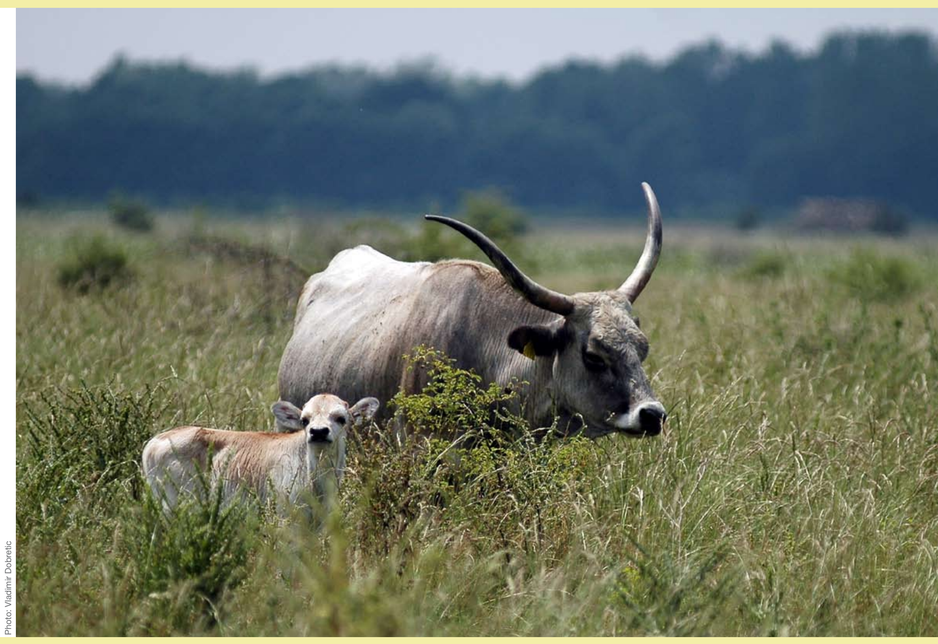

Photo: Vladimir Dobretic

Supporting Traditional Land Use Practices

The specific biodiversity features of the Sava floodplains are indissolubly linked to the traditional land use of grazing that has shaped the area for ages. Preserving the specific landscape and biodiversity implies the maintenance of some extensive livestock grazing. The Land Use Working Group was formed to assist the local communities sustain their traditional extensive agriculture, especially livestock grazing, and to adjust their farming practices to the protection needs of the floodplain landscape, biodiversity and retention capacities. Experiences on traditional and new grazing experiments elsewhere will be exchanged, analysed and recommendations given for sound land management that is in line with biodiversity protection and flood retention.

Raising Public Awareness

The Awareness Working Group aims at achieving public and political support for the project focusing on a transborder ecological network along the Sava River and at raising awareness of the importance of maintaining the diversity of natural structures of the river basin, with focus on the riparian wetland, riverine forests and floodplain areas and their functions as ecological corridors. Local stakeholders as well as the public at large are encouraged to support the project objectives through public awareness campaigns and demonstration of the positive effects of sustainable extensive agriculture and harmonised land use practices with the protection needs of the floodplain landscape.

The project is financially supported by the LIFE III programme and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). IUCN Regional Office for Europe together with Wageninagen International is responsible for the project management, while the partner institutions from the Sava countries - the Center for Ecology and Natural Resources of the Faculty of Science in Sarajevo, the Agricultural Institute of Republic of Srpska, the State Institute for Nature Protection of Croatia, the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia - are providing important expert inputs to the project in wide range of activities. An additional important expert contribution is provided by the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation.

For more info visit http://cms.iucn.org/southeasterneurope