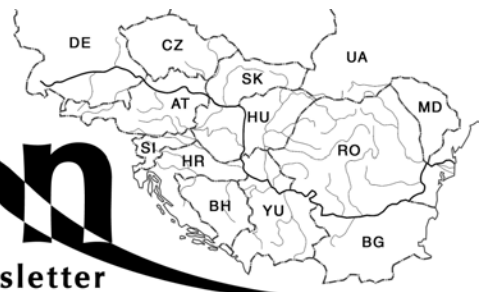




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December 2002

Bulletin

The Danube Environmental Forum Newsletter



What is DEF?

Danube Environmental Forum (DEF) was created in 1999 as a Danube River Basin-wide platform of non-governmental, non-profit, politically independent, environmental organisations, in order to establish a common approach for the environmental protection of the Danube river. Since 1999 the DEF has also had observer status with the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR).

DEF's efforts are based on:

- protecting the natural values of the Danube region and promoting and implementing ecological practices for the conservation and management of ecosystems
- raising awareness and providing access to innovative ideas and effective methods for pollution reduction and the wise use of natural resources in order to effectively conserve biodiversity

DEF members represent 13 countries from the upper, middle and lower regions of the Danube River Basin. The total number of organisations involved with DEF (including organisations from network organisations) is currently 96. Members are environmental NGOs working on various programs, projects and activities. DEF members work on environmental issues relating to the Danube in the fields of: public awareness and environmental education, environmental policy, restoration and management of wetlands agriculture (e.g.: organic farming, management), and nutrient reduction.

DEF National Focal Points (NFPs) are NGO representatives from each country within the Danube region and are the main contact points with a mandate to represent the DEF at the national level. NFPs act as co-ordinators of national activities and other DEF member organisations in each country.

The DEF Secretariat is currently located in Bratislava, Slovakia, hosted by DAPHNE – Institute of Applied Ecology. The Secretariat maintains information flow among DEF members, organises DEF meetings, participates in the management of DEF projects and provides assistance to DEF members.

National DEF Networks

Articles contributed by DEF National Focal Points (see relevant contacts)

DEF in Austria

Distelverein is the National Focal Point for DEF in Austria. Distelverein is an organisation for the protection and enhancement of the countryside. The idea for the Distelverein originated from unproductive discussions concerning the planned Danube-March-Thaya Floodplain National Park. Arguments between nature conservationists, farmers and hunters made people realise that the only way forward is through cooperation.

Since its formation in 1987, the Distelverein has jointly been supported by WWF Austria, the regional (Lower Austria) Wildlife Trust, the hunters association and the chamber for agriculture. Our decisions are made together with the people concerned. Distelverein does not oppose farmers, hunters or politicians, but want to achieve our aims with their help and experience. The protection of natural genetic heritage cannot be restricted to nature reserves alone. It is just as important to preserve or restore a network of semi-natural habitats within the intensively farmed arable land. A simple system of set-aside

strips is not sufficient, however. The individual patches of such a habitat network have to be carefully managed. This presents a new challenge to farmers as well as politicians: the production of varied cultural landscapes and the care for our land.

Distelverein has developed a wise-use concept based on the rationale of the Ramsar convention, funded by the Austrian Ministry for the environment and the federal government of Lower Austria. After that a *Ramsar management for the March-Thaya floodplains* was funded by the LIFE programme of the EU. At present the LIFE project *Waterworld March-Thaya-Auen* is set up. Within the last few years this project seeks to implement the restoration of large parts of the March and Thaya rivers. Moreover, it is concerned with the coppicing of willows (as practised previously), sustainable woodland management as well as the protection of important landscape elements.

DEF Members:

- Distelverein – NFP
- WWF International



DEF members exploring Danube beauties in Slovakia.

DEF in Bosnia & Herzegovina

In 1998, a NGO workshop was held in Zenica, which emphasised the importance in solidifying involvement in the Project for the Reduction of Pollution in the Danube River. The involvement in this project was an opportunity to revitalise the DEF network, and for the network to be a means of raising public awareness in the whole Danube region. Participating NGOs were from both B&H entities (from Serbian Republic and from Federation B&H).

Currently the DEF network (in the entire B&H catchment area) is being re-established and strengthened. The first phase has produced updated information about NGOs. A national meeting has been prepared which will introduce NGOs to DEF strategy and activities; this will also provide the opportunity for NGOs to participate in the DEF and for DEF to gain their support.

There has already been some initial contact with NGOs and they are expressing their interest in the DEF.

DEF Members:

- *Center for Environmentally Sustainable Development – NFP*
- *Young Researchers of Banja Luka*

DEF in Bulgaria

The Danube Environmental Forum is represented by 6 member organisations in Bulgaria. All are full members and the Centre of Environmental Information and Education has been the National Focal Point (NFP) since 1999. The member organisations keep in close contact and develop common activities concerning Danube issues in the framework of the DEF. They also communicate and co-operate with local groups from the entire Bulgarian region of the Danube Basin, local authorities and institutions in the region, as well as with the Ministry of Environment and Waters.

DEF members:

- *Balkani Wildlife Society*
- *Green Balkans Federation of Nature Conservation NGOs*
- *The National Movement of Ecoglasnost*
- *The Environmental Management Training Centre*
- *Centre for Environmental Information and Education (CEIE)*
- *Eco-Club 2002*

DEF in Croatia

DEF Network in Croatia consists of the NGO- Green Action, as the NFP, as well as other environmental NGOs. Most of these NGO's are part of an organisation called The Drava League. There is also

one additional NGO working in the Sava basin, Vidra (Otter) Pokupsko.

All of these NGO's communicate through one national environmental network "The Green Forum". Additionally there is a bulletin newsletter where our activities are regularly followed by the public.

The Drava League members are NGOs which are in the area of the River Drava. They are very active in pledging for the foundation of "Danube-Drava-Mura Biosphere Reserve". Most of these members participated in the DEF preliminary meeting, together with others in the joint effort to create the DEF Network.

In the autumn we plan to strengthen the network with better mutual communication, meetings, and workshops.

DEF Members:

- *Zelena Akcija/Green Action- NFP*
- *"Otter" Pokupsko Hrvatska*
- *Zastitarsko-ekoloska organizacija Nobilis-ZEON*
- *The Drava League*

DEF in Czech Republic Activities of the NGOs network – Union for the Morava river

In addition to being the NFP for the DEF we also represent a network of Czech NGOs, many of which are working on Danube related problems and issues.

The network is continuing to monitor damages at streams caused during the flooding 1997. We have focused on participation at the official decision process level, concerning repair measures. Technical approaches regarding river regulation measures were endangering the flora and fauna in the river beds and the floodplain. It is necessary that the existence of endangered and highly endangered species is proven in this area. This would increase the chances of their protection. We are continuing with our involvement in the decision making process with the hope of changing current water management practices. To further our river protection initiatives we have published a handbook "Rivers for Life" which highlights positive river management practices.

DEF Members:

- *Union for the Morava river – NFP*

DEF in Germany

The DEF-Network in Germany is focused on Bavaria, the main section of the Danube-Basin in Germany. The NFP is the "Bund Naturschutz in Bavaria (BN)", an independent association for

the protection of nature. The main activities are projects concerning the conservation of nature, public information, policy and lobbying. Topics range from the protection of nature, land use, traffic and waste. These issues are addressed from the local level to the international level. For many years, one of the main aims concerning the Danube has been to protect one of the last long free flowing sections of river between Straubing and Vilshofen in Germany. Here and as in other projects, the BN is working closely with other NGOs. There are also other networks, like the "Lech-alliance", the "Isar-Alliance", the "Inn-Alliance", the "ALS (Action community Living space Salzach)", that focus specifically on protecting these great Danube-tributaries. Within these networks helpful and interesting information about the DEF is spread. Another network for spreading information is the working group "water" within BN. This is a unique group of water-experts with specialised expertise, some being, drinking water, river-ecology as well as the legal instruments of the EU-Water-Framework Directive.

Success for the last free flowing section of the Bavarian Danube

In June 2002 the German federal assembly under the red-green government passed a historic movement in favour of aiding the protection of rivers and waterways in Germany. In the conflict between shipping interests and the protection of nature in the free flowing area of the Danube between Straubing and Vilshofen, the government decided to protect the unique nature of this area of river. Consequently, this 70 km long, free flowing section of the German Danube may not be destroyed by one or three dams and a side-channel. Only nature-compatible measures for the improvement the shipping will be allowed. In addition to the benefits of conservation, this solution is cheaper and more quickly to realise than the building of dams. This solution is the only one acceptable within the EU-Water-Framework Directive and the EU-Directives for the protection of birds and fauna, flora and habitats, because this section of the Danube has been identified as a central area for the network Natura 2000.

This is a great success for the wide alliance of NGOs working together and the local people.

DEF Members:

- *Bund Naturschutz in Bayern e. V. – NFP*

DEF in Hungary

Just recently joining the DEF in 2002 was WWF Hungary, also the National Focal Point. WWF has started work with establishing the national network and beginning communication about DEF projects within Hungary.

The challenges of the recent flood and draughts poised brought to the public attention the consequences of transforming our environment in the past. Experts from different fields (water management, flood prevention, agriculture, nature conservation, rural development) are such as these are becoming more interlinked. The extreme floods of recent years put pressure on governmental flood prevention departments. The concept of “giving more space to the river” seems to be partially accepted, unfortunately there is still emphasis on faster discharge/drainage of water during floods. The WWF concept and other NGOs work on floods offers large scale solutions for problems with flood, draught, farming and nature conservation. This concept (*landscape rehabilitation*) is based on the natural potentials of the area and the promotion of site-adapted land use. The main idea is to widen the floodplain and convert intensively used areas to semi-natural and/or extensively used areas within the floodplain.. Traditional land use is re-established and in this way local people find income. The other side of dykes (in the former floodplain) intensive farming can remain where circumstances make it possible. It is important to note, that the current practice for agriculture subsidies should be changed – in Hungary and the EU’s Common Agriculture Policy as well. WWF also participates in projects that elaborate on a system of subsidies which support site adapted nature friendly land use instead of artificially subsidised production of a few crops. The concept of changing the land use is implemented on selected model sites. Habitat restoration, flood water retention, traditional land use, minimising chemical usage are subsequently achieved. Experiences from these model sites will be incorporated into the comprehensive landscape rehabilitation plan.

DEF Members:

- WWF Hungary – NFP

DEF in Moldova

DEF National Focal Point in Republic of Moldova is Ecological Movement of Moldova (EMM). EMM is a voluntary and non-governmental environmental organisation committed to restoring the natural balance between the environment and the population of Moldova through



DEF General Assembly 2002 in Vinicne, Slovakia.

sustainable development, conservation of natural resources and the preservation of important ecological sites.

EMM acts as an umbrella organisation for a total of 10 territorial branches and 17 affiliations with more than 15,000 members. Every EMM’s territorial branch has the right to be a legal entity. The territorial branches act according to local environmental concerns and their field of ecological expertise.

Concerning the fulfilment of DEF objectives the following projects have been accomplished with great success:

- EMM’s project to preserve the natural monuments of the Superior Prut-zone and the Inferior Prut-zone from the cave ‘Emil Racovita’ to the ‘Suta de Movile’ (100 hills of Moldova);
- “Water Lilly” – project by the territorial branch of Cahul to investigate the bio-diversity of the Prut swamps in order to inform the population and local authorities of the existence of any rare species in danger of extinction;
- “Pearls of the Prut River” – first ecotouristical mobile expedition on the Prut River; participants were 22 pupils and students. This project was realised by EMM central office and “Princely Forest” affiliated group in 1999. This expedition was financed by UNDP Moldova (United Nations Development Program);
- “Pearls of the Prut River” – an ecotourism oriented mobile expedition on the Prut River; participants were 30 pupils and students. This project was implemented by EMM central office and was financed by REC Moldova.

DEF Members:

- Ecological Movement of Moldova – NFP

DEF in Romania

DEF Romania is an informal Network consisting of 5 DEF full members and 19 applicants, presently a total of 24 NGOs.

The Eco Counselling Center Galati (ECCG) has been the NFP since 1998. We keep the network active thanks to the financing provided by

- the Ministry of Environment from Luxembourg the ‘Baia Mare Task Force’ Project (DANCEE), and the
- REC funded project ‘Sustainable Danube River and the Non –Governmental Environment Alliance’. ECCG was the leading NGO.

A current project that the ECCG has developed is “NGO Networking and Institutional Development”. This project is focused on the development of the DEF (for Romania as well as river basin-wide), and the development of the Eco Counselling Network Romania. This project is also in partnership with the Black Sea NGO Network, the European Environment Bureau (EEB) and the European Water Group.

The ECCG is involved in the “Danube Pollution Reduction Program” and also in components of the River Basin Council for the PRUT-BARLAD rivers and the Danube Regional Project. The ECCG recognises that it is vital to keep NGOs interest and commitment alive by

- Constantly updating and maintaining the information flow;
- Providing summaries of the meetings’ reports and minutes,
- Providing translations into Romanian of the network/ projects related issues

and documents, of the press releases, news, etc

- Participating at, organising workshops, conferences, and making presentations within such events.
- Organising press conferences, and
- Regularly using the electronic and regular mail, fax, and the ECCG web site.

DEF Members:

- *Eco Counselling Centre Galati – NFP*
- *Information, Education and Resources Centre for the Black Sea (Mare Nostrum-Cier)*
- *Dobre Tudor Orienteering and eco tourism club*
- *Speleological and Ecological Club Amonit*
- *Friends of the Danube Delta Foundation*

DEF in Slovakia

The DEF in Slovakia consists of 5 member organisations. DAPHNE Institute for Applied Ecology is the National Focal Point. DAPHNE is implementing projects focused on the conservation of grassland and wetland ecosystems throughout Slovakia. Expert teams determine optimal restoration and management plans, which are implemented with the close co-operation of local people. An important part of DAPHNE projects is influencing national and local policy towards nature conservation and making environmental issues easily understandable and accessible. Each member organisation has a contact person that deals with DEF related issues. The diversity of projects that each organisation has allows the DEF to access a broader range of problems and issues. Future plans include the strengthening of the network and improving communication within the network. Thus far the network has been working on a ad hoc basis, co-operation successfully increasing as it is needed.

DEF Members:

- *DAPHNE – Institute of Applied Ecology – NFP*
- *People and Water*
- *Working Group on Research and Protection of Birds of Prey and Owls*
- *Society for the Protection of Birds in Slovakia*
- *SOSNA*

DEF in Slovenia

The Society for Bird Research and Nature Protection (DPPVN) is a non-governmental and non-commercial charity organisation and the NFP for Slovenia. DPPVN (Slovenia) actively works in the field of nature conservation, public awareness and related research awareness.

DPPVN elaborates and carries out special programs of conservation and restoration for endangered animals (e.g. birds, amphibians, reptiles, dragonflies),

plant populations and their habitats. The society also takes part in the elaboration of wildlife conservation legislation, and proposing the establishment of protected areas.

In October we actively participated (by contributing chapters) to the production of a book about nature in a part of Dravsko polje (Drava field). At this moment we are intensively working on a guide about rare and endangered flora which will be published this month (November). Moreover, we have contacts with similar societies about co-operation in DEF. It seems likely that at least two other societies will participate in DEF network activities soon.

DEF Members:

- *Society for Bird Research and Nature Protection – NFP*

DEF in Ukraine

Established in 1992, The Western Center of the Ukrainian Branch of the World Laboratory (WCUBWL) is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation with the goal of protecting the environment, promoting public health and improving the quality of life for the people of Western Ukraine.

The Western Centre is a scientific and research centre primarily involved in activities related to clean environmental technologies and pollution prevention in the industrial sector, as well as renewable energy technologies; participation in development and realisation of regional, national and international projects.

Concerning DEF we have contact with organisations we have worked with since 1998 within the program for pollution reduction in the Danube and informed them about the general assembly.

We plan to organise two meetings: 1 – in Carpathians region at the end of November and 2 – in region Dunaisky Plavni at the end of December.

DEF Members:

- *The Western Center of the Ukrainian Branch of the World Laboratory*
- *TISZA EcoCentre-Western Branch of the National Ecological Centre of Ukraine*
- *Ecocentre Delta*
- *Carpathian Ecoclub Ruthenia*
- *Transcarpathian Ecology Club “Edelweys”*

DEF in Yugoslavia

Danube Environmental Forum Yugoslavia is a network of ecological NGOs active in protecting the Yugoslav part of the Danube watershed area. Presently there are 46 members of the network, approximately one third of the total number of ecological NGOs in Yugoslavia. The main tools for communication and exchange of information among DEFYU members are e-mail distribution and a discussion list, the web site www.defyu.org.yu, and a bulletin “Dunavski”, where members have the opportunity to present and promote their environmental activities. The main area of DEFYU members’ work are biodiversity, environmental education, water pollution, environmental legislation, etc.

DEF Members:

- *DEFYU – NFP*

For the complete list of DEFYU members please see the website.



DEF General Assembly 2002 – fieldtrip to Morava River floodplain.

The Danube Regional Project – Why and What?

By Paul Csagoly, WWF International Danube-Carpathian Programme

There are many organisations working to protect the environment in the Danube River Basin – home to over 80 million people and numerous species of plants and animals. However, there have been times in the past when some of these organisations didn't know exactly what some of the other ones were doing. Or they couldn't do all they wanted because of a lack of capacity.

The good news is that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), with support from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), recently launched the next phase of its long-term commitment to achieving environmental health in the Danube Basin with new support for organisations already working there, including the Danube Environment Forum (DEF).

This new phase, the *Danube Regional Project (DRP)*, was launched on December 1 2001. Its main goal is to strengthen many of the structures and activities already in place in the basin, building on what is there and lessons learned, and facilitating a regional approach.

A key focus is strengthening the capacity of the *International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR)* and Danube countries to fulfil their legally binding commitment to implement the *Danube Convention*. This now includes the development of a *River Management Plan* in line with the EU's *Water Framework Directive* – a landmark act (perhaps the best in the world) that holistically enhances water resource management and pollution control by valuing the ecological integrity of the river as a living and dynamic entity. All eyes will be on the Danube as it is a test case for implementing the new directive throughout Europe.

Key targets of the project include reducing nutrient pollution and supporting trans-boundary co-operation. Already well under way, the *DRP* is an umbrella for some 80 activities. These are aimed at providing river basin management tools and protecting wetlands, strengthening agricultural and industrial policies, improving water supply and other water services, among others. The project will be carried out over 5 years with a total budget of 15 million USD.

The *DRP* is actually one of three components of the 95 million USD *GEF Strategic Partnership for Nutrient Reduction in the Danube / Black Sea Basin*

– GEF's largest and perhaps most ambitious water-related project in the world. It will support the intermediate goal of the Commissions for the Danube and Black Sea to reduce nutrient and toxic loads to the Black Seas to mid-1990s levels, and their long-term goal to reduce nutrients and toxic substances to the levels necessary to allow Black Sea ecosystems to recover to conditions in the 1960s.

It includes two regional projects – the *Danube Regional Project* and its sister project based in Istanbul – the *Black Sea Regional Project*. Both will strengthen the respective Commissions and will assist countries in their efforts to adopt necessary policy, legal and institutional reforms.

The third component is the *World Bank-GEF Nutrient Reduction Investment Fund*, entailing direct investments aimed at concrete reductions in pollution, primarily nutrients, at the national level that can then be replicated throughout the Danube and Black Sea region.

The *DRP* is of global interest to GEF and other water basins that require international management. Concrete results are expected. This is especially true for reducing nutrient pollution – a common problem in water bodies world-wide. Ultimately, the project could become a progressive model for expanding public awareness of the threats from nutrient pollution.

The project is also unique because of its many links to the local level, including activities related to public participation, communications, local pilot demonstration activities and a grants programme for NGOs. These are activities specifically geared towards involving different groups who have a stake in the Danube River Basin ecosystem.

WWF is involved in three projects. These include: assessing the capacity of wetlands to remove nutrients; encouraging land-use policy favourable to wetland conservation; and the development of a communications strategy to raise general awareness about the Danube Basin and the *DRP* and possibly more targeted awareness related to a specific Danube environmental issue. Regarding this third project, it is hoped that the *DEF* will become one of the key implementers of the communications strategy at the national level.

For more information:

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DEF Activities within the DRP

- The communication inside *DEF* network but also between *DEF* members and various stakeholders/target groups will be improved by publishing *DEF* newsletter (and its translation into 11 national languages), translation of the *DEF* leaflet, regular updating of the *DEF* webpage and its translation into national languages of *DEF* member countries.
- To spread the information about *DEF* Network initiatives, the *DEF* Secretariat will be responsible for a *DEF* contribution to the Danube Watch and other existing publications on Danube issues.
- To enhance the essential co-operation in the area of Danube River Basin new partnerships with other NGO networks and international organisations will be established.
- *DEF* expert database will be developed and *DEF* experts in various fields will be identified. This will ensure proper representation at *ICPDR* expert group meetings and other international organisations.

DEF Membership

How to become a Member

Membership is open to all NGOs in Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Ukraine and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Membership is possible via:

- 1) Any member of *DEF* may nominate a candidate for membership through a written notice sent to the Secretariat at

least 60 days before the forthcoming General Assembly. The General Assembly shall decide upon admission to the membership.

- 2) New members can also be accepted by the *DEF* Board via email conference. A NFP should nominate the potential member. Potential members must complete the appropriate registration forms that are available through the *DEF* Secretariat. Organisations considering membership should contact the National Focal Point in their respective countries.

Membership to the DEF is free.

• 2 General Assemblies and 3 Board Meetings will be organised by the DEF Secretariat within the framework of the DRP.

• DEF member NGOs skills and knowledge of water pollution reduction issues will be increased through the organisation of consultation meetings and training workshops on nutrients reduction.

• The preparation of a special NGO publication on nutrients reduction in 11 national languages of DEF member countries.

• Training courses focused on the improvement NGO's expertise in selected fields will be organised by the DEF Secretariat and Board.

DEF General Assembly 2002

The 1st General Assembly brought together NGO representatives from 13 countries. The General Assembly was successful in establishing DEF's development strategy and deciding on upcoming actions.

It was decided that DEF/NGO actions in the coming year should at the national level raise awareness about problems related to the Danube and encourage other national NGOs to contribute to the protection of the Danube.

DEF International Training 2002

Following the General Assembly, a two-day International Training Session was held. The International Training was held for NGO representatives from 11 countries in order to increase their capacity to address nutrient pollution issues and boost their wetland restoration skills. As a follow-up, countries will have national training sessions in the spring of 2003.

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Celebrating successful General Assembly with Slovak festivities.