

FIVE COUNTRIES, THREE RIVERS AND ONE PROJECT:

LIFE RESTORE FOR MDD

PRESERVING AND RESTORING FLOODPLAIN FOREST HABITATS

ALONG THE MURA-DRAVA-DANUBE RIVERS



MURA DRAVA DANUBE

THE UNESCO FIVE-COUNTRY BIOSPHERE RESERVE MURA-DRAVA-DANUBE

The Mura-Drava-Danube rivers form the state borders of Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary and Serbia. With its rich biodiversity, the world's first Five-country Biosphere Reserve is not only Europe's largest protected river habitat, but also stands as an example of transboundary cooperation.

These natural values are protected by a chain of 12 major protected areas with a size of around 280,000 hectares, forming the core and buffer zones of the TBR MDD. Both are surrounded by a transition zone of about 650,000 hectares, which is inhabited by around 900,000 people. For many of them, the intact river and floodplains are vital for their livelihoods, natural flood protection, clean water for drinking, fisheries, traditional forestry and agriculture as well as recreation and sustainable business practices. The rivers are part of their rich multi-ethnic cultural heritage.

WORLD'S FIRST FIVE-COUNTRY BIOSPHERE RESERVE

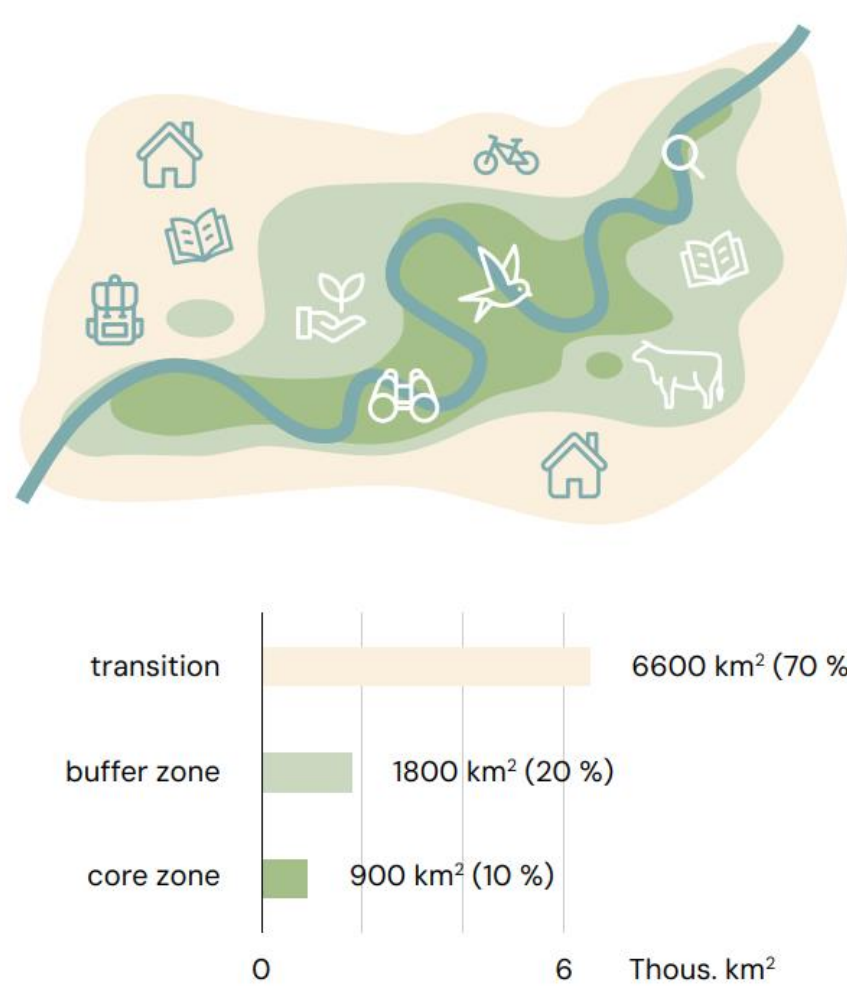
with
150
breeding pairs of white-tailed eagles
Continental Europe's highest breeding density

12 major protected areas
including Natura 2000 sites,
a regional park, a national
park, special nature reserves
and nature parks

Resting and feeding place for more than
250.000
water birds

Europe's largest protected riverine area:
**930.000 HA
ALONG 700 KM**
including Danube's largest floodplain forests,
most intact floodplain areas and most
important fish spawning areas

900.000
PEOPLE LIVING IN THE AREA



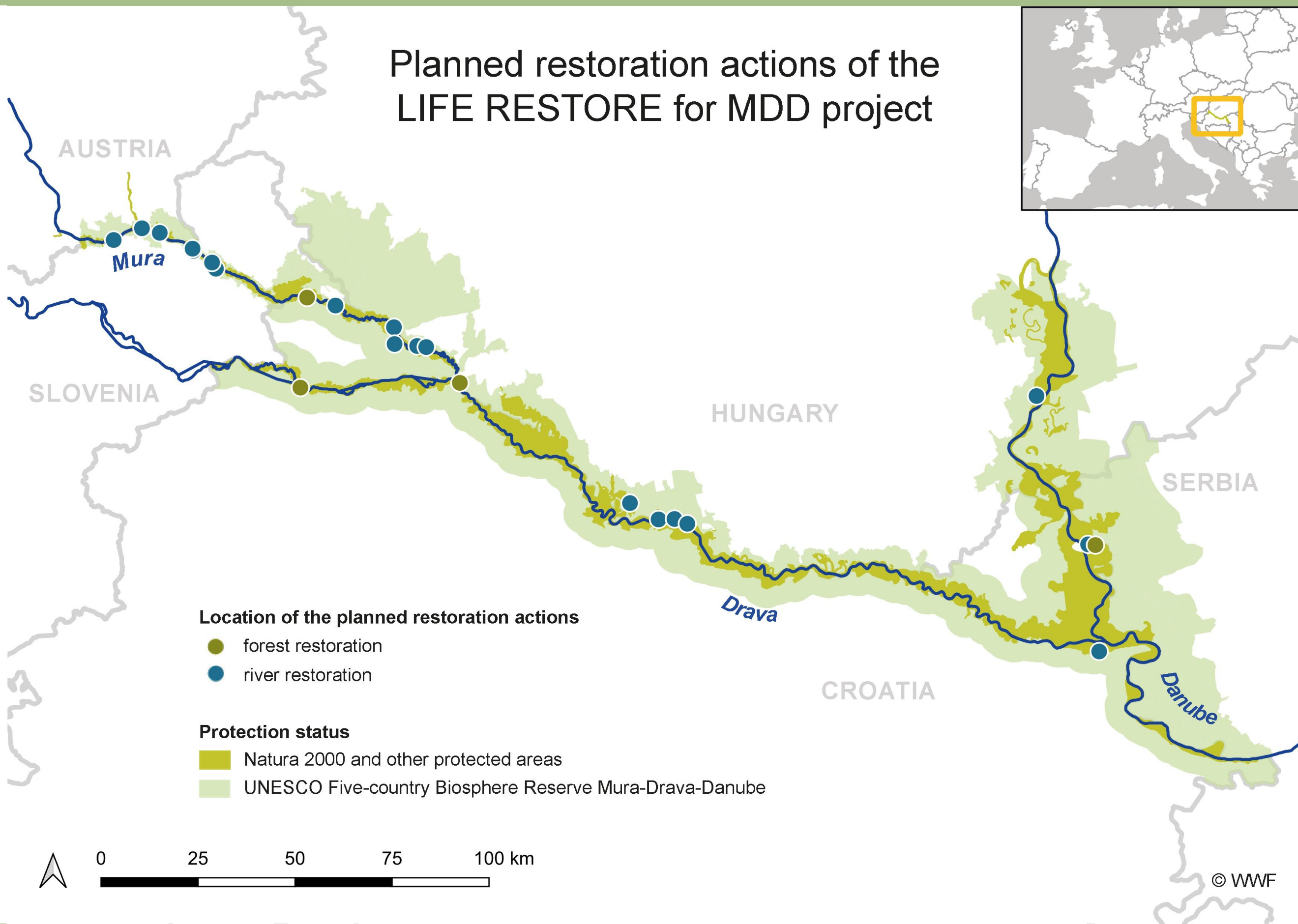
The Biosphere Reserve is divided into three different zones: The core zone strictly protects nature. The buffer zone promotes traditional land use such as extensive agriculture and forestry, whereas the transition zone supports sustainable regional development such as ecotourism and provides scientific support to the reserve.



THE LIFE RESTORE FOR MDD 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.



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

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 91EO*/Alluvial forests and HT 91FO/Riparian mixed forests) are in a poor state of conservation.

The primary threats are 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.

TRANSBOUNDARY COOPERATION

promoting cooperation across political boundaries is crucial for nature conservation and concern for one's own habitat. The TBR MDD serves as an example of successful transboundary cooperation in environmental stewardship and is a significant milestone in global conservation efforts. However, declaring a biosphere reserve is only the initial step towards creating resilient natural areas in the face of mounting environmental pressures.

The effectiveness of transboundary cooperation in tackling global challenges, such as habitat destruction, the climate crisis, and the decline in biodiversity, is exemplified by projects like 'LIFE RESTORE for MDD', a cooperation, which benefits both nature and people in the Five-country Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube.

SOURCE: Maier, J., Mohl, A. and Böck, K. (2024): The Amazon of Europe: Past and future of the Five-country Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube. Danube News No. 49, p. 2. International Association for Danube Research (IAD). Stumberger, B., Mohl, A. and Schneider-Jacoby, M. (2021) 'Mur, Drau und Donau – Leben durch Flussdynamik. Naturerlebnisführer durch eine einzigartige Flusslandschaft am südrand mitteleuropas', EuroNatur Service GmbH, Radolfzell.

PARTNERS



CO-FINANCING

