

Work on the establishment of the “European Amazon” or biosphere reserve “Mura - Drava - Danube” officially began with the initiative of WWF in 2011, the signatures of the Ministers of Environment of all five countries on the declaration on the establishment of a transboundary biosphere reserve. Croatia and Hungary already protected their river landscape in 2012, and then Serbia 2017, Slovenia 2018 and Austria last year.

However, their joint nomination to UNESCO did not fully protect this reserve, the biosphere, primarily from “outdated ways of managing this area, especially in Serbia, Hungary and Croatia,” according to WWF Adria.

The “spine” of this biosphere reserve is the Drava River, which scientists claim is important as an example of changing the global concept of surface flow regulation. Its largest tributary is the Mura, an international river whose 480-kilometer-long course passes through Austria, Slovenia, Croatia and Hungary. The second longest river in Europe, the Danube comes from the Black Forest in Germany, through Austria, Slovakia and Hungary to receive the waters of the Drava, which in its lowest course separates Slavonia from Baranja.

Part of the European Amazon in Serbia is the biosphere reserve “Bačko Podunavlje”

It is located in the northwest of Vojvodina and represents one of the best-preserved wetlands on the entire course of the Danube.

Within the biosphere reserve “Bačko Podunavlje”, which covers the municipalities of Sombor, Apatin, Odzaci, Bac and Backa Palanka on an area of 176,635 hectares, there are four protected areas: Special Nature Reserve “Upper Danube”, Special Nature Reserve “Karadjordjevo”, Nature park “Tikvara”, natural monument “Šuma Junaković” and the protected area “Bukinski hrastik”, as well as the habitats of the national ecological network.

In 2017, UNESCO enrolled “Bačko Podunavlje” in its Biosphere Reserve Network, which at that time included 669 areas from 120 countries.

- This unique river landscape is an area of exceptional biodiversity and the center of rare natural habitats such as vast floodplain forests, islands, backwaters and sandy river banks. “Bačko Podunavlje” is also characterized by a very rich cultural heritage, which is a proof of the living past and the encounter of numerous peoples and cultures in this area. There are criteria established by UNESCO, and one of the basic ones is that the area has ecosystems that are important not only at our national level, but also at a wider biogeographical level. The second principle is that zoning can be done in accordance with national legislation, and the third is that in addition to protected areas, we must have areas that serve for support and areas that serve for development. We have achieved that on 176,635 hectares on which

the biosphere reserve is located – says Duška Dimović from the Belgrade office of WWF Adria.

She notes that the entry of Bački Podunavlje on the list of biosphere reserves has made a crucial and decisive step in further permeating nature protection and its sustainable use in the areas along the Danube and Mostong in Bačka.

– Now there is a lot of work ahead on the wise management of the area through cooperation with the managers of protected areas, users of natural resources, local governments and communities in the area of biosphere reserves – explains Danas’ interlocutor.

This biosphere reserve is home to many rare plant and animal species, and WWF Adria says that “almost 900,000 inhabitants depend on the Mura, Drava and Danube, because floodplains protect settlements from floods and ensure the supply of drinking water, while the attractiveness of rivers affects tourism “.

– In the “European Amazon”, thanks to the preserved dynamics of floodplains, the existence of natural alluvial forests and numerous wetland habitats, a large number of protected species of animals and plants find refuge. Dense, almost impassable marsh forests of autochthonous poplars and willows intersected by numerous backwaters are today almost of a relict character. Among the most important rare species of animals in this area, the white-tailed eagle, black stork, mallard duck, wild cat, otter, badger, as well as the largest population of European deer in Serbia, stand out. This area is the habitat of the largest population of white-tailed eagles in Europe, with as many as 140 pairs, but also an important area for more than 250,000 migratory birds – says Duška Dimović.

The biodiversity of the European Amazon is most endangered by man

The regulation of river watercourses for the needs of river navigation and agriculture in the last 100 years has destroyed 80 percent of natural floodplains along the Danube, as the most biologically productive habitats.

The disappearance of floodplains has threatened the functioning of ecosystems, which is why WWF, with the help of other institutions, has launched an initiative to rebuild floodplains along the Danube.

“The proclamation of biosphere reserves is an important departure from harmful projects such as the construction of new hydro-power plants or the exploitation of sediments.

Sustainable coexistence of people and nature is the direction in which we must go, if we want to mitigate the inevitable consequences of climate change “, pointed out WWF Adria.

– Additional support to the “Transboundary Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube” are projects with a total value of about 14 million euros, co-financed by the EU, and contribute



Austria, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia together for conservation of the “European Amazon”

to nature protection and development of the entire area. Thus, within this initiative, cooperation of protected areas of all five countries has been established, with the goal of cross-border management, while the focus of the project “European Amazon Bicycle Trails” is the establishment of a model of sustainable cycling tourism – says Duška Dimović.

Source: danas.rs