

Croatia; Drava River and UNESCO Cross-border Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube Endangered by Construction of Two Large Hydropower Plants

Drava river, which is part of the Natura 2000 network, the Mura-Drava Regional Park and a significant part of the UNESCO Cross-border Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve, is under the great threat of the construction of two large hydroelectric power plants - Molve 1 and Molve 2. From its source in Italy, the Drava is under pressure of 22 hydro power plants, which 3 are in Croatia, but in the upper reaches. The proposed location for Molve 1 and Molve 2 hydroelectric power plants is in the very heart of the "European Amazon" - the most watched and ecologically most valuable part of the Drava River along its entire course. The project for the construction of the hydropower plants at Drava, Molve 1 and Molve 2 was the idea behind the resignation of the construction of the HPP Novo Virje, but the impact on nature and the environment was not diminished, since building two accumulation, the total length of almost 30 km was destroyed the most valuable part Drava River. WWF and other associations of the Drava League therefore call for a re-consideration of this political decision on the construction of the hydro power plant in Drava, as the idea of these hydro power projects originated before the EU accession and the proclamation of the European Ecological Natura 2000 network in Croatia before the establishment of the Mura-Drava Regional Park proclaiming the UNESCO Cross-border Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve with Hungary.

"WWF is committed to sustainable hydropower and systematic and integral planning of hydropower projects, but opposes the construction of energy facilities within protected areas. It is really important to think strategically when it comes to energy facilities. Modernization of existing hydro power systems and their regular maintenance would also increase the capacity of electricity generation. By constructing the Molve 1 and Molve 2 hydropower plants, the landscape of this area would have completely changed from the natural river flow to a series of accumulation," said Ivana Korn Varga of WWF Adria. WWF believes that all sectors of agriculture, environmental protection and nature, tourism, forestry, water, spatial planning and the non-governmental sector should be included in the planning of new energy facilities at the national level in order to reach a common strategy for development and use of natural resources through joint collaboration.

"We are concerned about the future status of the river Drava and the downstream of these two dams. Due to the additional flooding of the river basin, the groundwater level would further decrease and negatively affect agriculture, forestry and living in the area. The same accumulation will have a negative impact on Repaš forest and forestry in that part, and would destroy the habitat of numerous plant and animal species. The local population, the Dravska League and WWF organizations want to preserve the natural Drava, our river pearl and our treasures," added Korn Varga.

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The protection of 'European Amazons' is one of the main priorities of WWF Adria, and with numerous partners from state institutions and non-governmental sector, several projects are being carried out to improve the state of the Mura River, the Drava River and the Danube River. WWF Adria is implementing two EU projects in the field of "European Amazons". In the DRAVA LIFE project with the Croatian Waters, they are working on the reconstruction of the Drava River habitat, and through the MDD project, the foundations of joint management are planned under UNESCO's Cross-Border Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube and cooperation between the protected areas of all five states. There will also be a network of schools along the rivers where local people and tourists can learn more about the area and the species they live in.

"The area of the Mura, the Drava River and the Danube, of exceptional and untouched rivers, with floody forests and swamps, offers a home to many protected and endangered species, such as otter and beaver, eagles, oyster or danavian salmon. Although strangers already know this region in exceptional nature, we should more appreciate our nature and seriously understand the obligation of its protection. We can greatly benefit from European Union funds, which can be used to co-finance investments in river reconstruction, the establishment of cross-sectoral cooperation and tourism promotion, thus ensuring the sustainable management of the rivers for the well-being of people living alongside them and the kind they depend on," concluded Korn Varga.

Source: [croatia.panda](http://croatia.panda.org)