

113 hydropower plants projected in national parks

The Austrian company ENSO Hydro is currently constructing a hydropower plant in the midst of the Albanian Fir of Hotova National Park. © Roland Tasho

The Austrian company ENSO Hydro is currently constructing a hydropower plant in the midst of the Albanian Fir of Hotova National Park. © Roland Tasho

Vienna, Radolfzell, May 21, 2015. Next Sunday, on May 24th, is the “European Day of Parks” – a day to celebrate protected areas in Europe and advertise their values and benefits ([www.europarc.org](http://www.europarc.org)). However, particularly on the Balkans there is little reason to celebrate. On the contrary, a recent study on hydropower projects inside protected areas commissioned by Riverwatch and EuroNatur shows that 535 projects (of a total of 1,640 large-, medium- and small-scale hydropower plants that were examined) are currently planned within strict nature conservation areas, 113 of which in the midst of national parks – commonly with support from international companies and banks, particularly from inside the EU. “Not only are protected areas themselves being put at risk, but also the value of protection categories in general. What is the meaning of the National Park brand, if even the construction of hydropower plants is permitted on its territory?” says Ulrich Eichelmann from Riverwatch.

Protected areas are designated in order to preserve nature and its biodiversity. This is particularly true for national parks, in which any form of commercial utilization is prohibited. However, this is being ignored systematically and on a large scale by both EU member states such as Slovenia and Croatia as well as EU candidate states such as Albania. 535 hydropower projects are currently in the pipeline in the midst of National Parks, Biosphere Reserves, UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Ramsar Sites, or Natura 2000 areas. “Hydropower plants have no place in strictly protected areas, particularly in national parks. Banks, financial institutions, as well as the European Union must stop the funding of hydropower projects in protected areas immediately. Otherwise, they are useless and species extinction will continue”, so Gabriel Schwaderer from EuroNatur. The 535 projected plants will result in the destruction of protected areas due to dam and road construction, power lines, water diversion, etc.

Mavrovo NP in Macedonia: 19 hydropower projects are here in the pipeline, one is under construction. The photo shows the Mala Reka, a river on which a threshold power plant is projected. © Gabriel Schwaderer

Mavrovo NP in Macedonia: 19 hydropower projects are here in the pipeline, one is under construction. The photo shows the Mala Reka, a river on which a threshold power plant is projected. © Gabriel Schwaderer

Planned projects divided by protection category:

113 in National Parks

23 in Ramsar Sites, Biosphere Reserves and World Heritage Sites

131 in Natura 2000 areas

268 in national strictly protected areas (nature reserves, Emerald Sites)

Another 282 hydropower projects are planned inside less strict protection categories, such as protected landscapes or nature parks. Thus, if this category is included, a total of 817 hydropower projects are being planned inside protected areas on the Balkan Peninsula.

What is worse, many of the projects are being planned and implemented with the support of international companies and banks, particularly from inside the EU. This is the case, for example, in the Mavrovo National Park in Macedonia: 22 hydropower plants are projected within the territory of the park, some of which funded by the World Bank, the EBRD (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development) and the German Reconstruction Credit Institute. Another example is the Albanian Fir of Hotova National Park: with financial help by the Development Bank of Austria (OeEB) and the World Bank subsidiary IFC, the Austrian company ENSO Hydro is currently constructing a hydropower plant in the midst of this national park.

Find the full study here: [Hydropower Projects in Protected Areas on the Balkans](#)

The “Save the Blue Heart of Europe” campaign: The rivers on the Balkan Peninsula are threatened by a true dam craze. More than 630 new medium- and large-scale hydropower plants are currently projected between Slovenia to Albania. Taking into account all the small-scale projects, the actual number rises to about 2,000 hydropower plants. In order to counteract this spate of destruction, EuroNatur’ and ‘RiverWatch’ have launched the “Save the Blue Heart of Europe” campaign in cooperation with local partner in the respective Balkan countries.

source: [balkanrivers.net](http://balkanrivers.net)