

## Hutovo Blato Nature Park, Neretva and rivers from its basin endangered due to new hydropower projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The realization of the “Upper Horizons” project began in the former Yugoslavia in 1956. By the beginning of the war, the first phase of this project was completed – the hydro power plants were built: Trebinje I, Trebinje II, PHE (pump hydro power plant) Čapljina and HPP Plat. The first two hydropower plants are now part of Elektroprivreda Republike Srpske, HPP Čapljina is part of Elektroprivreda Herceg Bosne in the Federation of BiH, and HPP Plat is part of Hrvatska Elektroprivreda. The energy project called “Upper Horizons”, which is being implemented in the south of Herzegovina, involves the diversion of waters from the Trebišnjica river basin and already has negative impacts on the natural environment in the Neretva Valley. If the project is completed, rivers from the Neretva basin, such as the Buna, Bunica and Bregava, will be completely devoid of indigenous species, and the Hutovo Blato Nature Park is threatened with complete destruction.

Nikola Zovko, director of the Hutovo Blato Nature Park, points out that the signing of the project brought great negative consequences for Hutovo Blato.

“When the Čapljina hydro power plant was put into operation and when all interventions were made on the river Trebišnjica in Popovo polje and when the abysses there were isolated, Hutovo blato has since lost 50% of water coming from the ground, ie underground and through source zones.”, Zovko points out and adds:

“Since then, Hutovo blato has started to change a lot, and now what is missing is water, and it is not just a problem that is missing, but that mud is rising. We have water meters and battens that we have been monitoring for years, and now the mud on Deransko Lake has risen over one meter and that is now a problem. Through some of our action plans in cooperation with the World Fund for Nature Protection, we worked on an action plan where all Electric Power Companies should be involved to finance this plan, ie to do manually and mechanized in Deransko Lake what water has done for years for free. We now have over 80 ravines that have healed and that are practically invisible and we only have them on the maps. This should be cleaned up and Elektroprivreda should be involved to help, as this is a consequence of their work, and we should start working together as partners and start recovering Hutovo blato, because otherwise it is failing and the threat is to completely change Hutovo blato. ”, said the director of the Hutovo blato Nature Park.

Drastic reduction of bird population, endangered spawning of endemic bird species due to the lack of water, the habitat of flora and fauna has changed. Lake Svitav had the river Matica, ie the river Krupa had its tributary – another river Matica, which came out and had its source and was an island of the Svitava natural lake. Zovko points out that two Elektroprivreda, EPHZHB and EPRS can solve this problem if there is good will.

The negative sides of the “Upper Horizons” project are also known to the representatives of

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the “Our Birds” Ornithological Society.

“We are familiar with this project and have been trying to point out its negatives for a long time. Unfortunately, insufficient action is still being taken and the consequences of the realization of this project are being pointed out, which allows it to be quietly realized phase by phase. This project could have a major impact on birds in Herzegovina. On the one hand, it endangers floodplain meadows, habitats that are very important for birds during migration, which can lead to a drastic reduction in the number of birds in Hutovo blato and the permanent extinction of certain species. On the other hand, the accumulation that would occur would certainly be inhabited by some other species, but it would certainly not be worth comparing with the diversity that we have today in the areas of karst fields, which would be destroyed by this project, “said Dr. Dražen Kotrošan, President of the Ornithological Society “Our Birds”.

This project could permanently destroy the biodiversity of Hutovo blato, and Kotrošan agrees with this fact. “Yes, the loss of water would certainly greatly affect the entire living world of Hutovo Blato, but also the wider area of the Trebišnjica and Neretva river basins. Certainly, many species would disappear permanently, and the overall picture of the area would change completely “, concludes Kotrošan.

Preservation of the biodiversity of Hutovo blato Marinko Dalmatin, a graduate biology engineer, points out that much has been said and written about the issue of the “Upper Horizons” project, and very little has been done. “The responsibility lies with the management of the Hutovo Blato Nature Park, which, in accordance with the information, should have implemented and taken measures to protect and preserve the biodiversity of Hutovo Blato, and not look for the culprits to the associations - Elektroprivreda. The “Upper Horizons” project began in the 1960s and extensive studies, studies, and projects were made that provided an overview of all possible negative impacts on the Hutovo Blato ecosystem and beyond. In addition, solutions have been provided for the preservation of the biological diversity of Hutovo blato and the Neretva delta. What does not affect anyone and no measures are taken should be asked by the authorities, and above all by the management of the Park.

Hutovo Blato Nature Park was formed in 1994. in order to protect, preserve the rational use of this sensitive area, and all the omissions in the last twenty years since it was formed should have been a priority of the Park. The protection and preservation of the biodiversity of the Hutovo Blato Nature Park and the Neretva Delta lies in the final solution of the Upper Horizons, the construction of a dam on the Neretva near Dračevo. This problem will still be discussed and appropriate actions will be taken, “said Dalmatin.

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The inquiry sent to Elektroprivreda HZHB to give their opinion regarding the “Upper Horizons” project and what they believe could and should be the solution, in order to preserve this protected area, was answered in the shortest possible way. The answer was sent by Marija Buntić, Head of the Corporate Communications Sector, and the answer is: “ Any contract concluded by EP HZ HB d.d. Mostar, is of interest to our company, and is completely legal, including the Agreement on Business Cooperation with EP RS. In addition to protecting the interests of our company in the contractual relationship, we fully implement all laws that regulate certain matters and do not conclude harmful contracts “, said Marija Buntić, Head of the Corporate Communications Sector of EP HZHB.

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