

United for Rivers, a regional initiative dedicated to protecting 13 rivers across Southeast Europe, was launched today. By prioritizing the engagement of local communities, The Nature Conservancy and six partners from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and [Serbia](#) aim to safeguard the ecological, social, and cultural values of freshwater ecosystems in the region by establishing new river protected areas.

Southeast Europe is home to some of the last free-flowing rivers on the continent.

They are the lifblood of communities and ecosystems, providing clean water, supporting biodiversity, and sustaining livelihoods. Unfortunately, these priceless resources are under increasing threat from pollution, habitat destruction, unsustainable development, and climate change. This is a global problem with a local solution: since 1970, 83% of freshwater species populations and 30% of freshwater ecosystems have been lost worldwide.

“At the heart of our initiative is the conviction that engaging and empowering local communities in Southeast Europe is critical for effective and durable river protection”, says Dragana Mileusnić, Southeast Europe Programme Director at The Nature Conservancy. “We are collaborating with a wide range of stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations, governments, businesses, and local communities to develop holistic and long-term solutions to protect our rivers.”

The coalition of partners includes the Center for the Environment from Banja Luka, Association Dinarica, and Novi Val Youth Club in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ecological Association Rzav in Serbia, Eco-Team in Montenegro, and Eko-svest in North Macedonia.

United for Rivers is actively working to protect 13 rivers throughout the region, with the aim of inspiring new local river-protection actions. By investing time and effort in scientific research and understanding the needs and opinions of local communities, the United for Rivers initiative seeks to ensure early and transparent stakeholder engagement, while respecting the unique ecological, social, and cultural characteristics of each river.

Once protection is in place, and good protected area management is ensured, this will be a direct contribution to several important international commitments, including the EU Green Deal, [the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans](#), and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework adopted in December 2022.

The United for Rivers initiative invites individuals, organizations, and communities in Southeast Europe passionate about [protecting rivers](#) to join the cause. Together, we can improve the state of our rivers and protect these valuable resources for future generations.

Source: The Nature Conservancy