

The Blue Heart of Europe are the last wild rivers in Europe stretching from Slovenia in the West to Turkey in the East.

For millennia, these rivers have been central to trade, community and culture. They are also home to diverse and unique plants and animals – making them a global hotspot for biodiversity. Despite covering less than 1% of the Earth's surface, freshwater ecosystems are home to approximately 10% of all species – globally. There are an estimated 70 fish species living in the rivers of the Balkans that are found nowhere else on Earth.

However, the Blue Heart of Europe is under threat from the exponential expansion of hydropower energy projects. To date, there are 1,480 hydropower plants in the Balkans, many without proper environmental assessment. This number is set to more than triple in the coming years.

From species extinction and habitat damage, to human displacement and a loss of people's livelihoods, hydropower projects can have an irreversible impact on biodiversity and local communities.

Alongside, we have been taking action to safeguard the Blue Heart of Europe. Together, we have brought legal actions to protect rivers in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania and successfully halted the construction of two hydropower plants on the Vjosa River.

But there is more work to be done.

A lack of law enforcement and increasing corruption around investments means the threats to this region are growing – rapidly.

We will continue to work with national lawyers throughout the Western Balkans to empower their legal and environmental work and build future capacity. We are also bringing legal complaints at the local, national and international level to put an end to unsustainable hydropower investments.

Over the coming years, thanks to your support, we will continue to work to ensure Europe's last wild rivers can thrive.

Source: clientearth.org