

National protected areas have strong protection and are particularly relevant in non-EU countries. Out of the 331 HPPs in those protected areas, 26 are operating or under implementation and 305 are projected (268 out of which do not overlap with higher categories). Emerald areas serve mainly as official „planning areas” for future Natura2000 areas in potential EU candidate countries. The Emerald network partly consists of already protected areas but mostly proposed and planned areas.

2,667 km of large rivers are located in this category.

Many new projects are planned in the Kosovo (e.g. on the Lepenica border river to MK) and in Serbia along the Visocica River, which originates from Stara Planina (border region to BG), but also within Emerald areas in ME, MK and BA. Sometimes entire river valleys, such as the Lim River valley, are affected by new plans.

Other protected areas such as protected landscapes or nature monuments and other officially delineated areas and hydropower projects

Of the 712 hydropower plants in other protected areas, 616 are not yet being constructed. Only 282 out of these 616 projects do not also fall in one of the higher categories. These are mainly landscape protection areas but also natural monuments or nature parks with a weaker protection status.

In total, 3,711 river km are located within other protected areas, which is quite significant (the overlap with rivers in Natura2000 and NP areas has already been considered).

Nine new projects are planned along Ibar River in RS. Furthermore, two huge dams projected in the free-flowing lower Drina fall under this category – a river stretch that would most definitely be covered by the Natura 2000 network in an EU country.

On the Balkan Peninsula, strict protected areas cover about 10-15% of the total working area. They include wilderness areas in all forms of mountain terrains as well as coastal area and selected areas, wetlands and river corridors in the low lands.

The protected area network is still rather inhomogeneous among SI/HR on the western side and BG/GR on the eastern side due to different implementation of European directives (Natura 2000 network). Many

SEE: Strictly protected areas as well as EMERALD areas, mainly in non-EU countries, and hydropower projects

rivers, narrow valleys and gorges are still not protected in the central Balkans, and protected area planning is often inconsistent with other planning. There are all in focus for hydropower development.

The fact that 32% of all new hydropower projects are planned in strictly protected areas and up to 17% additionally in less protected categories shows that this practice is in contradiction to guidelines and master plans for hydropower, highlighting protected sites as “no-go areas”. Considering that river valleys are often still not included in protected areas, hydropower seems to be focusing on river stretches with high ecological values (mountain ridges, larger rivers from gorges to lowland). In fact, a significant number of hydropower plants can already be found in protected areas today, deteriorating habitats and having strong impacts on whole river catchment as well as downstream sections of rivers, including related protected areas (see high number of existing plants in Natura2000 areas).

The results prove that even in national parks the harmful development of hydropower is an ongoing threat, not only for the park areas itself, but also for downstream areas in the long run. The construction of hydropower plants within even strictly protected areas is not the exception but rather the rule. In areas with the highest protection status even small hydropower are not acceptable as a sustainable solution.

Source: Euronatur & RiverWatch