

Summary of Agenda Item		6.1
Title:	LIFE WILDisland – The Danube Wild Island Habitat Corridor (LIFE20 NAT/AT/000063)	
Progress/Status of work (agreed actions and follow-up):		
<p>LIFE WILDisland aims to strengthen the ecological connectivity, to promote the Danube WILDisland Habitat Corridor, to preserve the natural wilderness in the heart of Europe, to promote river dynamics and intact sediment regime and to demonstrate good practice for cross-sector and cross-border cooperation. Across all Danube countries, a total of 34 islands will be restored.</p> <p>The LIFE WILDisland project officially started in September 2021 and will take place between 2021-2027. Over 70% of the project budget of € 14.2 Mio are dedicated to concrete conservation and restoration measures: best-practice restoration of islands in Upper Danube sections altered by hydropower; optimization of waterway infrastructure in the Middle Danube; sediment management measures in the Lower Danube. In total, over 48 km of waterbodies will be re-dynamized, more than 1,200 ha of floodplains will be restored. Together with transnational stakeholders, LIFE WILDisland develops a conservation strategy and prepare the multilateral WILDisland RAMSAR Regional Initiative, with new (strictly) protected areas on 196,7 ha, and establishing, step-by-step, wilderness sites and non-intervention management. As Europe’s first “river-based” and world’s 21st Ramsar Regional Initiative, the Danube WILDisland Ramsar Regional Initiative aims to promote coherent management of protected areas and Ramsar sites, and to foster ecological connectivity and Danube-wide cooperation along the Danube River.</p> <p>The LIFE WILDisland kick-off conference (Vienna, 10 May 2022) – supported by the ICPDR with a welcome speech (Executive Secretary) as well as with a keynote (on expert level) – resulted in a Communiqué signed by the ambassadors of the delegations to Austria of nearly all Danube countries, to stress the importance of Danube-wide cooperation, the key role of transnational nature conservation projects such as LIFE WILDisland, and to support the establishment of a future Danube WILDisland Ramsar Regional Initiative. At the same time, the project elaborates a Danube-wide awareness and communication campaign. The official project website will allow to track the project activity and overall progress at: https://wildisland.danubeparks.org.</p> <p>The first inventory of the Danube islands took place in 2018, carried out within the DANUBEPARKSCONNECTED project, funded by the Interreg Danube Transnational Programme. It covered over 900 islands comprising an area of 138,000 hectares along the Danube Wild Island Habitat Corridor. A total of 147 of the islands were identified as the most natural, representing some of the rare “wilderness areas” in Europe. The EU Nature and Biodiversity Directors nominated WILDisland as best practice for EU Green and Blue Infrastructure and stressed its contribution to the overall coherence of the Natura 2000 network and to the objectives of the Biodiversity Strategy 2030. In order to secure the preservation of these unique riverine sites, the LIFE WILDisland Project was submitted to the LIFE financial mechanism of the EC, uniting the efforts and experience of a total of 15 partners from the nature conservation, the waterway, the hydropower and the forestry sector, covering 8 countries along the Danube (Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, Austria, Germany). The partnership is led by the Donau-Auen National Park (Austria), co-financing is provided by the Ministry of Agriculture (Hungary), the Federal Ministry for Agriculture, Regions and Tourism (Austria), the Energy Efficiency and Environmental Protection Fund (Croatia) and the fishermen associations from Lower Austria (NÖ Landesfischereiverband, Fischereivereinverband II).</p>		
Document(s):		
Joint Communiqué of the Danube countries on Danube-wide cooperation		
Action and/or Proposed Resolution (to be confirmed by the ICPDR):		
a) Following the Joint Communiqué signed by the Ambassadors of the Danube countries in May 2022, the ICPDR welcomes and supports the preparation of a Danube WILDisland Ramsar Regional Initiative by DANUBEPARKS.		