

WHAT IS THE DANUBE ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM?

The Danube Environmental Forum (DEF) was registered in 1999 as a Danube River basin wide platform of non-governmental organizations (NGO) to create a common approach in environmental protection of the Danube River. In addition, DEF will ensure NGO participation in present governmental forums (and programmes), such as the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), the Danube Program Management Task Force (PMTF) and the Danube Pollution Reduction Program (DPRP).

The Danube flows through numerous countries and the action of one country has a widespread impact upon the others. Therefore, co-operation and communication are vital and the DEF will reinforce this process among NGO representatives, governments, and other stakeholders. DEF assembles NGOs from 13 countries (Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Moldavia, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Ukraine, and Yugoslavia) to work towards environmental protection in water related issues.

DEF is a non-governmental, non-profit, politically independent organization that provides an opportunity for NGOs to exchange information and ideas in the preservation and conservation of the Danube River.

OBJECTIVES

- ❖ To promote international support for the future sustainable development of the Danube River region.
- ❖ To ensure future NGO participation in the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River and other Danube institutions.
- ❖ To promote sustainable financial mechanisms which would ensure a permanent NGO representation in Danube River related governmental programs.

ORGANIZATION

- ❖ *General Assembly* – It is the DEF's highest authority, responsible for determining policies and strategies and appointing committees and working groups.
- ❖ *The DEF National Focal Points* – NGO representatives from each country within the Danube region has a mandate to represent the DEF at the national level and serve as the DEF National Focal Point.
- ❖ *The DEF Board* – The board is elected by the General Assembly and has representatives from the DEF national focal points. The board has meetings to discuss the DEF's financial position and to decide upon major activities and projects
- ❖ *The DEF Speakers* – Elected at board meetings, the speaker's term is for two years and he/she represents DEF at international meetings.

FUTURE INITIATIVES

DEF will play an important role in influencing the future development of the Danube River region on issues such as ecosystems protection, land use, and environmental education.

DEF sees its future in:

- ❖ *Public Awareness Raising Campaign in the Danube River Basin* – DEF intends to provide easier public access to environmental information, increase public awareness, and encourage participation in environmental decision making activities concerning water protection.
- ❖ *Small scale wetland restoration program in the Danube river basin* – DEF has the potential for developing a small-scale wetland restoration program in the Danube region since it includes NGOs from the whole Danube River basin, and has its focal points in 13 Danube countries. The primary objective of the proposed project is the preservation of endangered small-scale wetland habitats in the Danube River basin.

The DEF's future looks promising as it gains international recognition and support. Many obstacles, such as financial support and continued NGO participation, will have to be surpassed, but DEF and its members is working hard to ensure a sustainable future.

THE DANUBE RIVER

The Danube River is Europe's second longest river with a length of 2,857 km. It runs through nine countries, has a basin which includes 13 countries. The basin covers 817, 000 km².

Protection of the Danube is of utmost importance as it is a natural habitat for a variety of species. It is also home to a number of endangered flora and fauna species. The river has undergone massive changes over the years, namely industrial developments, intensive agriculture, and the construction of dams and channels. Today the Danube is greatly endangered.

We share the same river, but the problems vary from country to country. The status of Danube restoration as well as the legal status of environmental protection and development differs in each country. The river, though, does not know these national boundaries.

If we allow the industrial lobby to continue damaging the valuable biodiversity of the Danube River basin, the beauty of the ecosystems will remain only in our memories. The only way to stop the destruction and negative impact upon natural resources and to help the unique ecosystems survive is to have a common approach in solving problems. If we combine our efforts, we have a chance to achieve sustainable use of the Danube River Basin.

DEF Secretariat is currently located in Bratislava, hosted by DAPHNE - Center for Applied Ecology. The tasks of the DEF Secretariat is to provide institutional support for the DEF development, to maintain information flow among DEF members, to organize the DEF board and the general assembly meetings and to participate in the management of the DEF's projects.

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