

DANUBE WATCH

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6 THE RED SLUDGE TRAGEDY

On 4 October, a dam broke at an aluminium production facility spilling 700,000 m³ of red sludge.

26 FINDING ROOM FOR NAVIGATION AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Can sustainable waterway infrastructure projects create win-win solutions for the environmental needs of the river?

29 MILESTONE NEAR FOR LAUNDRY DETERGENTS!

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International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River
Internationale Kommission zum Schutz der Donau



At Persina Nature Park in Bulgaria, a Natura 2000 area and the biggest Ramsar site in the country, a model payment for economic services (PES) scheme will be set up based on the potential and economic efficiency of producing biomass from wetlands. *Credit: Ivanov*

Promoting Payments for Ecosystem Services in the Danube Basin

Arranging payments for the benefits provided by forests, fertile soils and other natural ecosystems is a way to recognise their value and ensure that these benefits continue well into the future.



The Iezer and Ciocanesti fish ponds are protected areas in Calaras county, Romania, and included in the Natura 2000 network. In this area much of the former mosaics of wetlands and natural channels, reed beds and patches of natural floodplain forest have been lost, but some remain, especially around the fish ponds. The fish ponds are among the most productive along the Lower Danube, but they are also valuable in biodiversity terms, for many of the birds and other species of fauna and flora are listed in the Bern Convention, and the EU Birds and Habitats Directives.

The WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme, as part of a major UNEP GEF-funded project focusing on ecosystem services in the Lower Danube, is developing a model scheme to encourage river basin administrators to maintain and eventually introduce water management practices, supporting biodiversity and preserving the natural landscape. The model scheme will ensure that land managers are paid as providers of these invaluable services.

Funding opportunities for this payment for ecosystem services (PES) scheme are seen in tourism activities, green labels for fish production, as well as in the Fisheries

Operational Programme of the EU, and in the cost recovery principle of the EU Water Framework Directive. If successful, local people and the local economy will benefit greatly from this scheme.

“The dependency of human society on ecosystem services makes the loss of these services a serious threat to the future well-being and development of the world. This project promotes and supports land managers who help us sustain the benefits that we all get from nature,” says Project Manager Maya Todorova.

ABOUT PAYMENTS FOR ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) is an innovative approach to nature conservation and includes a variety of arrangements through which the beneficiaries of environmental services – from watershed protection and forest conservation to carbon sequestration and landscape beauty – reward those whose lands provide these services with subsidies or market payments.

Arranging payments for the benefits provided by forests, fertile soils and other natural ecosystems is a way to recognise their value and ensure that these benefits continue well into the future.

Across the world, environmental conservation is critical to secure the flow of ecosystem services that are essential for people and nature. With funding for natural resource management dwindling, a variety of PES schemes have emerged as potential sources of sustainable financing for conservation.

PES encourage the maintenance of natural ecosystems through environmentally friendly practices that avoid damage for other users of the natural resources. In addition to preserving natural resources, this method improves rural areas and rural lifestyles.

Using nature's own capabilities. Rusenski Lom, another model site for the Danube PES project, is a nature park and a Natura 2000 site situated along the lower stretch of the Danube in northern Bulgaria. What environmentalists would most like to see here is the improvement of the water retention capacities of the rich riverine habitats. The ecosystem service potential in this area relates to nature-friendly flood risk management and sustainable tourism. The model PES scheme will encourage riparian land owners and users to maintain and even restore the natural grass or wood cover along the river.

“Essentially, the goal of the project is to promote the concept and practice of Payments for Ecosystem Services

in Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia and Ukraine, and to serve as an example for other international river basins”, says Todorova.

Policies to support change. Most of the schemes that will be set up under the Danube PES project will require the institutional framework to be changed to launch them in practice. The state, businesses and the civil sector in participating countries will all need to be stirred to action to promote this novel approach to nature conservation. The project starts at a time of critical policy debate at European level.

“The replacement of the Lisbon Strategy – the so-called EU 2020 strategy – will place more emphasis on sustainability issues and will be reflected in the EU financial framework discussions already under way”, said Todorova. “Industrial policy, research policy, agricultural policy and so on are all affected by these moves towards an eco-efficient economy.”

The model scheme in Iezer and Ciocanesti fishponds, protected areas included in the Natura 2000 network in Calaras county, Romania, will be designed to accumulate funds to protect bird species. Funding opportunities for this payment for ecosystem services scheme are seen in tourism activities, green labels for fish production, as well as in the Fisheries Operational Programme of the EU. *Credit: WWF DCPO/Lucius*



The project also comes at a time of growing awareness of climate change, requiring the urgent and adequate reactions of all countries. For example, at Persina Nature Park in Bulgaria, a Natura 2000 area and the biggest Ramsar site in the country, a model PES scheme will be set up based on the potential and economic efficiency of producing biomass from wetlands.

“To me, it is also obvious that it is in the interest of businesses to maintain ecosystem services, because most businesses depend on the provision of natural resources to operate”, says Todorova. “It makes sense for businesses to support activities that help our ecosystems and, at the same time, to work towards minimising the negative impact on nature.”

For more information, please visit: <http://wwf.panda.org/dcpo>.

Olga Apostolova is the regional communications officer for the WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme.