



WWF

ANNUAL
REVIEW

CEE

2021

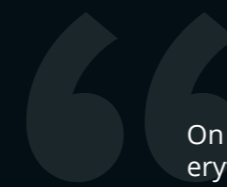
A NATURE-POSITIVE FUTURE FOR THE **GREEN HEART** OF EUROPE

2021 Annual Review for
WWF Central & Eastern Europe

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FOREWORD



On 24 February 2022, Russian forces invaded Ukraine. The war has changed everything – especially in Ukraine, but also in other countries of our region and beyond. In Ukraine, this senseless war has destroyed not only lives, homes and infrastructure, but also the environment, both directly and indirectly. The war and destruction are continuing as we write these words, with no end in sight.

This 2021 annual report pre-dates the grim milestone of the war. Already before the war, it was a challenging year for us and others in our region – the second year into a global Covid pandemic that has disrupted our societies, work and lives. From forests protected to wetlands restored, the pages of this report document the achievements made in spite of these challenges and disruptions.

Last year also marked our second year as “WWF-CEE” – the second year in our journey to establish the first multi-country, self-governing organisation in the global WWF Network and a strong catalyst for a nature- and climate-positive future for our region. As part of this effort, we continued developing our presence in Slovakia and Ukraine.

On top of the Covid pandemic, the war in Ukraine has presented an even greater test and challenge to us and our region. Rebuilding and restoring what has been lost in Ukraine will take years if not generations. But amidst the destruction, at least there is the opportunity to build back better, to ensure that investment is made for a better future, one that is climate- and nature-positive. We at WWF-CEE are ready to contribute to this undertaking – for Ukraine; for our region, the Green Heart of Europe; and beyond.

Sasha Bezuhanova,
Chairperson, WWF-CEE

Andreas Beckmann,
Regional CEO, WWF-CEE

FORESTS

The Green Heart of Europe

includes the largest remaining area of virgin and natural forests in Europe outside northern Scandinavia and Russia, including the primeval beech forests of Ukraine, Slovakia and Romania. Healthy, intact forests do not just represent standing timber and habitats, but offer nature-based solutions for climate change adaptation e.g. flood mitigation and other ecosystem services such as drinking water provision.

But these forests are threatened by illegal and unsustainable logging and infrastructure development. According to WWF-Bulgaria, a staggering 2.5 million m³ of timber, or roughly a third of total annual production, is lost annually to illegal logging in Bulgaria alone. In addition, climate change affects forest health, causing habitat degradation.

WWF AMBITION

Our vision for the next decade is to ensure that all old-growth and virgin forests in Central and Eastern Europe are protected, we see substantial expansion of forests under conservation management and illegal logging is under control.

Irene Lucius,
Regional Conservation Director,
WWF-CEE.

WE ARE WORKING TO:

- Identify and protect all old-growth and virgin forests in the Danube-Carpathian region through policy advocacy work
- Promote sustainable forest management practices through FSC certification and ensure the application of effective EU and national legislation
- Combat illegal logging through innovative technological tools, field monitoring inspections and involving the public in our mission.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

Virgin and old-growth forests preserve rich plant and animal diversity and represent a kind of Noah's Ark for many rare and endangered species. They are an incomparable living museum and laboratory that enables us to study and understand the ecology of healthy forest ecosystems and to use that knowledge, e.g. to increase the resilience of forests to climate change.

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE REGION

In 2020 and 2021 we continued our efforts to conserve many of Europe's largest remaining areas of old-growth and virgin forests. Through the work of the past year, we reached a total of 319,000 ha of old-growth forests under legal protection, 9,353,000 ha of forests under FSC and 2,060 FSC-certified companies. Those achievements are built on many years of work by WWF-CEE's forest team and its partners.

Our tool box for combating illegal logging has grown. WWF-Bulgaria has launched a mobile "Save the forest" application to help citizens send illegal logging alerts to the competent authorities. Our Forest GIS Platform serves us well with multiple layers of information, including old-growth forests, high conservation value forests, protected areas and logging permits. The WWF-Bulgaria GIS forest platform has an average of 97,500 viewings per day.

WWF-Romania created and launched the first tool involving video monitoring of timber transport leaving the forest. This could help the authorities to significantly reduce illegal logging by prioritising and improving the efficiency of their control activities. If applied on a large scale, it could help the Romanian authorities to address the infringement procedure initiated by the European Commission concerning the lack of efficient controls on operators transporting timber from the forest.

In a consortium with four other partners, WWF launched the LIFE Climaforce project. The overall goal of this project is to improve the management of forests in Central and Eastern Europe by fostering a transition to climate-smart forestry for the benefit of people and nature.

WWF experts also gained further experience in forest restoration and advocated for introducing a method for establishing a wood fingerprint to increase transparency of certified timber.

In addition, WWF-CEE offices advocated with some success for the inclusion of sustainable forest management and forest conservation measures into the national Recovery and Resilience Plans and Strategic Plans for spending the Common Agricultural Policy funds of the European Union. This complements national budgets which lack adequate funding allocations to address these issues.

80.760 ha

of old-growth forests received protected status in **Bulgaria**

9.000 ha

of old-growth forests received protected status in **Ukraine**

5.000 ha

of old-growth forests received protected status in **Romania**

FRESHWATER

The Danube River Basin

is the most international river basin in the world. On its 2,857 km journey from the Black Forest to the Black Sea, the river passes through 10 countries and drains all or part of 19 countries. The basin not only unifies and sustains a wealth of diverse cultures and traditions, but also supports unique habitats, such as large floodplain forests, river islands, gravel and sandbanks, tributaries, oxbow lakes, meadows and grasslands.

Over the past 150 years, the Danube Basin and its rivers and wetlands have been artificially altered. Due to economic development, climate change and the resulting pressures originating from unsustainable water use, the environmental threats increased rapidly. A large number of factors threaten freshwater biodiversity, from nutrients, organic and hazardous pollution to the impact of the river infrastructure.

WWF AMBITION

Our goal is to avoid future deterioration of rivers and floodplains, preserve their status and, where possible, to restore them for the benefit of nature and people.

Laurice Ereifej,
Regional Freshwater Lead,
WWF-CEE

WE ARE WORKING TO:

- Prevent new damage: in order to preserve the still high ecological value of this region, it is important to stop or at least mitigate the negative consequences of new infrastructure projects such as unsustainable hydropower, flood protection and navigation infrastructure development or sediment extraction from rivers.
- Restore: we promote, initiate and implement river, floodplain and wetland restoration in damaged river habitats.
- Improve the enabling environment: we influence governance frameworks and financial flows to set conditions to enable upscaling, larger-scale restoration and prevention of new threats.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

Approximately 83 million people live in the Danube River Basin and more than 20 million people depend directly on the Danube for their drinking water.

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

Total of
5,462 hectares

of river and wetland were restored from 2014 to 2021 with a capacity of approximately 13.45 million m³ of water: out of this volume, in 2021 a water retention capacity of 8 million m³ was developed via restoration measures implemented in Romania and Hungary.

5 dams

were removed, resulting in the reconnection of 430 km of rivers.

2 dams

in Slovakia were stopped by court cases that set important legal precedents; another 4 were suspended

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE REGION

After a 20-year process, the new Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve (MDD) has become Europe's largest protected fluvial area and a model region for nature conservation and sustainable development. The world's first '5-country biosphere reserve' covers 700km of the Mura, Drava and Danube Rivers and a total area of almost 1 million hectares in the so-called 'Amazonia of Europe'. The protected area was designated with considerable support from WWF, environment ministries, nature protection authorities, UNESCO Man and Biosphere Committees and numerous local conservation partners.

Our 8-year Living Danube Partnership with the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River and the Coca-Cola Foundation and Company received the Reuters "Partnership of the Year" award for its complex long-term efforts to restore and promote rivers and wetlands in the Danube basin. In 2021 under the Partnership, restoration of the floodplain at Garla Mare in Romania was completed, as was the restoration of the Lankóc Floodplain forest under an EU LIFE project in Hungary at the Drava river, supported by the Partnership. A series of events was organised where we shared the lessons learned with experts and decision-makers.

Altogether 5 dams or weirs were removed in the CEE region (Lostunets, Hostovets, Dobryn and Medvezjek in Ukraine, and a weir on Hučava river in Slovakia) resulting in the reconnection of 430 km of river. Pipeline project development continued in both countries. Mapping began in Romania of dams that could potentially be removed.

In Bulgaria, an analysis of dam removal legislation was carried out. The analysis identified key gaps which proved that it is very difficult if not impossible to obtain legal permission to remove a dam, especially in cases of old or obsolete barriers without clear ownership, unless the structure poses a high risk of human casualties. On the basis of the results, WWF will prepare an intervention plan.

The National Recovery and Resilience Plans have been influenced by WWF CEE: in the last version of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan in Romania, funds amounting to EUR 160 million are allocated for wetland restoration, with a commitment to restore at least 1,700 ha.

In Ukraine, a draft law on no-go areas for small hydropower plants has been submitted and a 7.4 km pilot no-go area has been established.

WILDLIFE: STURGEONS

Sturgeons are iconic fish

of ancient origin, already present in the time of dinosaurs. They have become symbols of healthy and free-flowing river systems. In Europe, one of the very few regions still holding viable, naturally reproducing sturgeon populations is in the Lower Danube in Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine.

Not long ago sturgeons provided livelihoods for numerous fishing communities. But the disruption of migration routes and overfishing fuelled by high economic gains for caviar as a luxury product led to a collapse in their populations. In the Danube, historically six species existed. Two are believed to be already extinct and out of the remaining four species, three are critically endangered. The urgency for protection has been stated in numerous scientific and policy documents, but the implementation of conservation measures is slow.



WWF AMBITION

Our goal is to bring the remaining sturgeon species back from the brink of extinction.



Beate Striebel,
Global Sturgeon Initiative Lead,
WWF-CEE

WE ARE WORKING TO:

- Protect existing sturgeon spawning and feeding habitats from further deterioration: for any meaningful protection measures, it is critical for us to understand where these habitats are and to monitor the fish. We cooperate with researchers and involve fishermen in sturgeon protection activities such as monitoring.
- Stop poaching: WWF calls on the authorities to remain committed to combating this wildlife crime by developing various reports and training material to support this fight
- Support efforts to strengthen populations in the wild through conservation stocking

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

Most sturgeon species hatch in fresh water but then migrate to the Black Sea where they spend several years before maturing and migrating back to the spawning grounds in the river. Their average lifespan is 50 to 60 years and their first spawn may not occur until they are around 15 to 20 years old.

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

10,000

sturgeon released in Ukraine

700

sturgeon released in Romania

A WWF report released in 2021 shows

214 cases

of poaching-related incidents recorded by the authorities



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE REGION

Fishing for wild sturgeon and selling wild sturgeon products are banned indefinitely in Romania. The decision follows a long campaign by WWF and numerous other conservation organisations. Bulgaria remains the last country in the Black Sea Basin without a permanent ban in place, but it extended its temporary ban on sturgeon fishing in the Danube and the Black Sea area in January 2021 for another five years.

WWF-Ukraine releases 10,000 freshwater sterlets into the Danube. For the first time in Ukraine, re-introduction was organised as a complex process that was not limited to just releasing fish into the river. WWF-Ukraine conducted preliminary studies of sturgeon habitats in the Ukrainian part of the Danube, along with genetic analysis to ensure that the sterlets originated from the Danube.

Another 700 sturgeons were successfully released into the Danube in Isaccea, Romania. The Russian sturgeon (*Acipenser gueldenstaedtii*), a native sturgeon species from the Danube, can reach 2.35 m in length and weigh over 100 kg. But the sturgeons released now barely exceed 25 cm and 150g - the normal size for 6 month-old sturgeons. All of them were tagged so that they can be identified in the event of accidental capture or during scientific research.

WWF released a report on wildlife trafficking of critically endangered sturgeon. The report highlighted systematic violations in the lower Danube region, specifically in Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine. The survey shows that almost a third of the samples of sturgeon products bought through WWF's market survey were illegal and 214 cases of poaching-related incidents were recorded by the authorities.

In consortium with 12 other partners, WWF initiated the "Successful wildlife crime prosecution in Europe (SWiPE)" project funded by the EU LIFE programme. It aims to discourage and ultimately reduce the number of wildlife crimes, including those affecting sturgeons. The ultimate goal of the project is to improve the enforcement of EU environmental regulations and ensure that the criminal offenders are more successfully prosecuted.

WILDLIFE: LARGE CARNIVORES

Central and Eastern Europe

has maintained a relatively high density of large carnivores compared with the West of the continent. The Carpathian Mountains alone are home to approximately 4,300 wolves, 9,000 bears and 2,500 lynx. They are often keystone species, meaning that they play a significant role in the health of their ecosystem. Through hunting, carnivores prevent an over-abundance of herbivores and thereby protect vegetation from excessive grazing or browsing.

But these ecologically critical mammals are threatened by illegal hunting and increasing fragmentation and shrinkage of their habitats primarily caused by infrastructure development. Conflicts between people and large carnivores are increasingly frequent, as animals are driven out of their natural habitats and get accustomed to finding their food close to human settlements.



WWF AMBITION

Our goal is to ensure the long-term, sustainable conservation of the most emblematic species in our region by fostering human-wildlife coexistence, nurturing stakeholder cooperation and dialogue and maintaining ecological connectivity at the landscape level."

Cristian Remus Papp,
Wildlife and Landscape National Manager,
WWF-Romania

WE ARE WORKING TO:

- Secure critical corridors and conservation areas, e.g. in the Southwestern Carpathians (at the Lugoj-Deva motorway construction site) and in Maramures in Romania
- Promote public and stakeholder awareness regarding bears, wolves and lynx in order to increase appreciation and understanding of these magnificent animals and their vital role in managing ecosystems
- Help people avoid unnecessary conflicts with these animals
- Increase the prosecution of poachers

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

The brown bear is the largest predator still living on the continent of Europe. They can reach a weight of between 150 and 370 kilograms depending on age, sex and season. Despite their weight, the animals can cover short distances at speeds of up to 50 km/h.

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

We have helped

31 livestock

owners and beekeepers to protect their property from large carnivore attacks

We have influenced

9 policies

related to the conservation of large carnivores and conflict mitigation (Nature Conservation Act and funding policies for conflict mitigation measures)

We have secured wildlife connectivity in

4 landscape

areas by engaging with transport and spatial planning institutions



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE REGION

WWF-CEE, together with 12 other organisations, announced the official start of the SaveGREEN project. Linear transport infrastructures, urban development and intensive agricultural, forestry, and water management practices can intersect and disrupt ecological corridors, cause traffic deaths and lower the reproductive success of key species. WWF-CEE will address these vital issues as lead partner of the project to safeguard the functionality of transnationally important ecological corridors in the Danube Basin.

In 2021, WWF Romania and its local partners developed an integrated monitoring plan and used the qField mobile app for navigation, data recording and photography. The collected data will be synchronised into the Carpathian Countries Integrated Biodiversity Information System (CCIBIS), displaying the finished results in ready-to-use maps for decision making. The SaveGREEN programme is co-funded by the European Union (ERDF, IPA, ENI funds).

WWF Bulgaria has taken on the challenge of starting the implementation of a holistic bear conservation programme, including the operation of a Bear Rescue Squad. The brown bear is strictly protected under the EU Habitats Directive and Bulgarian legislation. Despite its protection, the population of this iconic species is rapidly declining in Bulgaria. Our goal is to stabilise the bear population in Bulgaria and move towards harmonious coexistence between bears and people.

WWF-Ukraine won the United Nations Global Compact 2020 Partnership for Sustainable Development Award in the "Planet" category. The winning project is called Coexistence for Conservation! Sixteen electric fences were installed during the year to protect property, livestock and beehives from large carnivores as a means to promote co-existence and prevent human-wildlife conflicts. Since the fences were erected, there has not been any damage to the participants' property from large carnivores.

Carpathian governments have adopted an action plan on the conservation of large carnivores. The parties to the Carpathian Convention adopted a number of important documents to which WWF-CEE made substantial contributions, including an international action plan on the conservation of large carnivores and ensuring ecological connectivity and a strategic action plan (2021-26) for the implementation of the Protocol on Sustainable Transport, which integrates objectives of ensuring landscape connectivity for large carnivores and other wildlife.

WILDLIFE: BISON



Due to rigorous conservation efforts,

bison are slowly returning to European natural forest landscapes and contributing to a healthy and diverse ecosystem. While browsing in search of food, they help maintain a mosaic of forested areas and grasslands and increase biodiversity and natural resilience to the impact of climate change.

WWF AMBITION

Our goal is the creation of a viable population of bison in Romania's Southern Carpathians as a key step in safeguarding and fostering biodiversity in one of the last truly wild landscapes of Europe.

Marina Druga,
*Life-Bison Project Manager,
WWF-Romania*

WE ARE WORKING TO:

Reintroduce the bison to the Southern Carpathians of Romania. After a 200-year absence, this can not only revive populations of this threatened species, but also enrich and restore one of the last truly wild landscapes of Europe.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

Just a few years ago all of the approximately 2000 surviving European bison were descendants of just 12 individuals living in zoos in the 1920s.

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

28 bison

were released into the wild in Romania

Around

105 bison

are now roaming in the South-West Carpathians

The bison population in Europe has increased

to 6,819

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE REGION

In May and June 2021, the bison herd in the South-West Carpathian area in Romania was supported by three transports of 28 more individuals from Germany, Sweden and Switzerland to the rewilding area of Bison Hillock in Armeniș. The bison had spent up to nine months together in three different groups in the Springe Wisentgehege and Donaumoos Wisentgehege reserves in Germany and Avesta Visentpark in Sweden to get to know each other before being transported to their new environment.

We organised the first relocation of exclusively male European bison to the same area. The seven individuals have contributed to the genetic diversity of the rewilded free-range bison population under the LIFE RE-Bison project. Following these latest transports the herd now numbers about 105 individuals.

The Life-Bison rewilding project launched in 2016 by Rewilding Europe and WWF-Romania aims to create a viable population that breeds in the wild and supports the area's biodiversity, but also brings back a cultural value, a symbol that has allowed people in the local communities to rediscover the beauty of their surroundings and develop entrepreneurial activities based on their experience in the natural environment.

As a result of long-term conservation work including by WWF, European bison (*Bison bonasus*) are no longer considered a vulnerable species in Europe. The European bison population has increased from about 1800 in 2003 to over 6,800 today. This is why the status of the species on the IUCN red list was changed to the "almost threatened" classification. Romania is one of the few countries with bison roaming in the wild.

From 2016 until 2021, 14 transports were carried out in collaboration with 32 breeding centres and reserves in Europe. 28 individuals have been fitted with collars so that they can be tracked by GPS.

The EU LIFE funded project "Urgent actions for the recovery of European Bison populations in Romania" was implemented by WWF-Romania in partnership with Rewilding Europe.



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DRIVERS: GOVERNANCE, FINANCE AND MARKETS

EU policies

and legislation provide a key framework for governance across our region, not only for EU Member States, but also candidate and associate countries like Ukraine. Furthermore, regional governance bodies have a role and an added value when it comes to the additionality they can bring to the work of national governments. WWF-CEE is an active observer in several such regional structures: the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), the Carpathian Convention and the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. They present important regional policy frameworks that are particularly relevant for biodiversity protection, natural resource management and sustainable development in general.

WWF AMBITION

Our goal is to ensure that biodiversity conservation and climate action are at the core of policymaking and fund allocation, with approaches that strive to bring better outcomes for both people and nature.

Alina Blaga,
Regional Policy Lead,
WWF Central and Eastern Europe

WE ARE WORKING TO:

- Bring nature and the climate onto the agenda of national leaders
- Ensure that biodiversity/climate decisions are powerful enough to secure stable and resilient services from healthy ecosystems in the region.
- Advocate for decarbonisation scenarios that maintain biodiversity values
- Advocate for the prosecution and prevention of wildlife crime
- Bring nature-based solutions for carbon sequestration into the mainstream
- Improve public participation and quality assurance in environmental decision making

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE REGION

Advocating for a green and fair recovery in CEE countries: The Covid-19 pandemic and its immediate health, social and economic impacts required an urgent response from the European Union in the form of an economic recovery package: NextGenerationEU. In order to access the funds, Member States had to develop National Recovery and Resilience Plans in what was an unprecedented opportunity to promote long-term sustainable development and address the overarching challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss. Advocating for making these plans greener and fairer in CEE countries was at the core of our work.

Given the novelty of the fund, pressure had to be exerted on the governments to further open the process to stakeholders. WWF called for a transparent participation process both from the European Commission

and from the Member States, leading to some improvements. WWF also highlighted priority green investments, backing them with economic and scientific arguments. An example is the allocation of an additional €32 million for biodiversity in Bulgaria. Furthermore, we raised the issue of certain harmful investments both before the European Commission and governments. In a number of cases, the investments were reconsidered, e.g. investments in hydropower in Romania, which threatened to destroy watercourses with limited benefits in terms of clean energy.

WWF established coalitions in Bulgaria and Romania and took part in strategic partnerships in Hungary and Slovakia in order to influence decision makers to include ambitious investments in the recovery plans. The "For a Green Restart" coalition is a partnership be-

tween WWF-Bulgaria, Greenpeace Bulgaria, MOVE.BG and the Circular Economy Institute that focuses on climate, energy and biodiversity issues. Moreover, WWF established an advocacy group in Bulgaria together with Za Zemiata, Greenpeace Bulgaria, E3G and Fridays for Future to advocate against fossil fuel subsidies and fossil gas funding. Similarly, in Romania we joined the "Tomorrow is Decided Today" coalition to raise pressure for a green and fair recovery.

WWF also worked intensively to influence the CAP National Strategic Plans in which CEE countries set out how they will implement the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) until 2027. We took part in working groups set at the government level and proposed investments that were included to a certain extent in the draft plans in countries such as Romania and Bulgaria.

We joined the WWF European network in advocating for a CAP that benefits farmers and rural communities and produces a variety of healthy and nutritious food for people while protecting our finite natural resources.

WWF-CEE contributed to WWF network positions on key EU policies such as the 2030 Biodiversity Strategy, the new Nature Restoration Act, the 2030 Forest Strategy and revision of the Environmental Crime Directive. With support from the European Climate Foundation, we established a research partnership with Think Tanks in Bulgaria (Centre for the Study of Democracy) and Romania (Energy Policy Group) to develop decarbonisation scenarios for 2050 that maintain biodiversity values.

YOUTH



Young people are demanding change.

Globally and in our region, the so-called generation Z ("Gen Z") are concerned about the state of the world they are inheriting. More than 70% of young people in Bulgaria and Romania are aware that climate change is a real problem and more than 70% see its consequences in their countries. They are also increasingly active in addressing their concerns: as communicators, entrepreneurs and influencers (e.g. Greta Thunberg). We aim to empower and work with this new generation of change makers.

WWF AMBITION

Our goal is to ensure that the new generations become active environmental stewards, positive influencers and policy advocates for a nature-positive future in the Green Heart of Europe.

WE ARE WORKING TO:

Empower, inspire and mobilise young people, who are a formidable force for achieving a sustainable future of harmony between people and nature.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

The first 100% biodegradable and fully compostable laminating film was invented by two young people in Bulgaria: Gergana Stancheva and Angela Ivanova. Their start-up project is named Lam'on and their innovative product made of corn is already on the market.

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

49 young

people were trained in WWF leadership, communications and campaign planning under the "Climate Heroes" programme

4 countries

hosted the training sessions (Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and the Czech Republic)

20 climate-

related initiatives were launched by youth programme participants in "Climate Heroes"



HIGHLIGHTS

Climate Heroes

In 2020 we launched "Climate Heroes", a programme for empowering young people in our region to take action against climate change. The programme is based on a partnership of WWF offices, youth networks and mentors from Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and the Czech Republic and is financed by EUKI. The programme includes workshops for green solutions, climate-friendly lifestyles, media and communications and policy advocacy.

Youth Survey

For the first time this year we undertook a youth survey among 300 young people across our region to better understand their perspectives, interests and motivations. The most important finding is that the young generation considers policy and regulatory change as the most important impact that WWF can deliver. Nature conservation and awareness raising were also ranked high, but policy change was at the top. Focus group discussions revealed that for young people in our region, activism is not enough. Individuals by themselves do not have the power to make a real difference. Young people in the CEE region are looking for meaningful change in public policies, education and business practices and they look to WWF and other civil society organisations to help make this happen.

INNOVATION



The challenges we face have never been greater. We need to find new ways to solve these challenges more quickly than ever. We need groundbreaking solutions and unusual partnerships and we must think out of the box.

In 2021, we further developed our Panda Labs incubators and established an innovation “A-Team” with members from across our offices to contribute to our strategic planning and develop the first initiatives for promoting innovation across our organisation.

Panda Labs is a pillar of the global innovation community at WWF, supporting WWF teams around the world to develop and test local models for applying innovation methodologies and to find solutions to intractable conservation challenges by forming co-creation partnerships and to scale solutions. The innovation programme focuses on accelerating and amplifying emerging technologies with positive social and environmental impacts. In 2021, we established a new Panda Lab in Bulgaria in addition to the existing one in Romania.

HIGHLIGHTS

WWF Begins Work on WeWilder, the First Rural Co-Working Campus in Romania

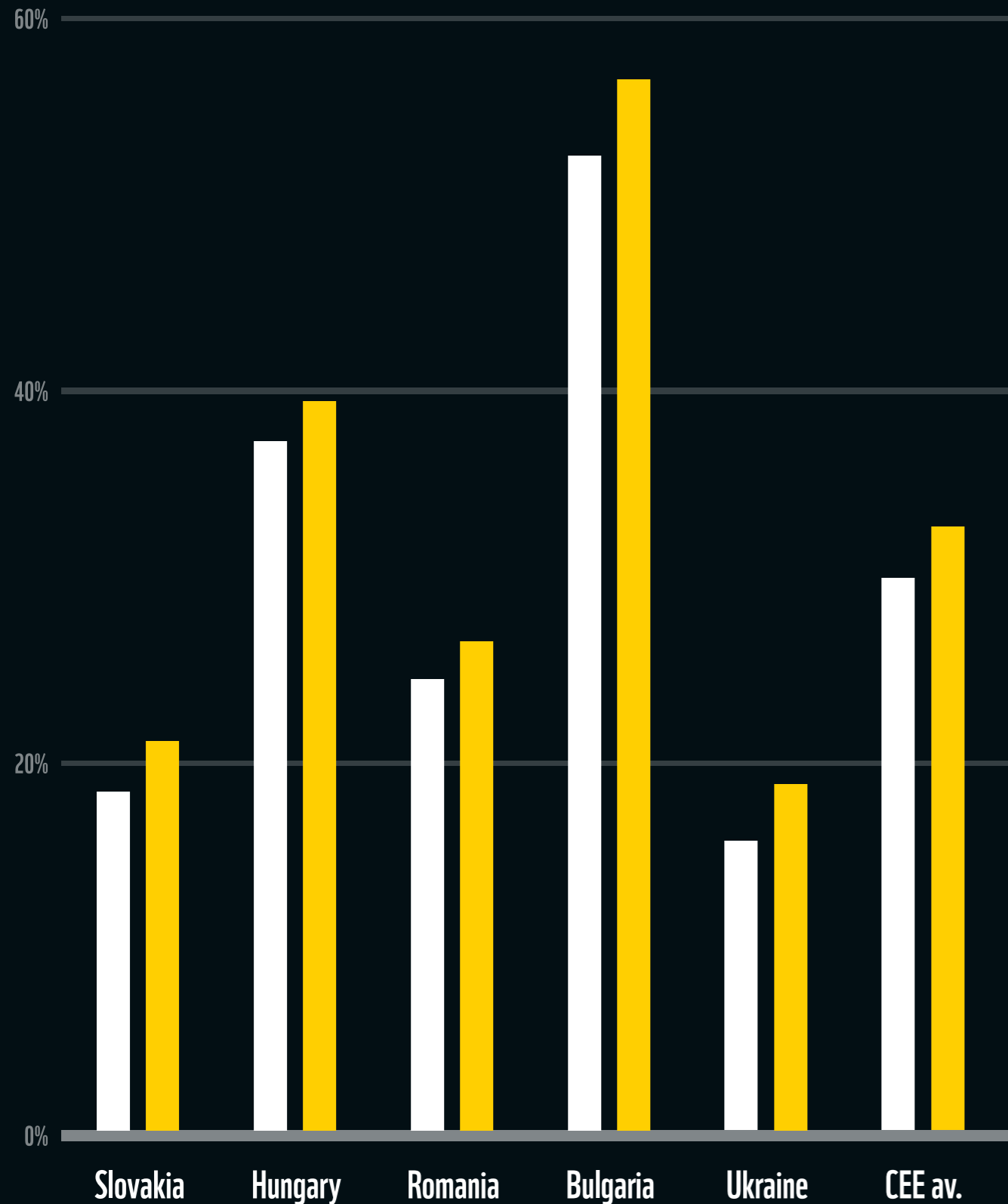
WWF-Romania, together with the local community of Armeniș and innovators in sustainable architecture, started work on the first urban-rural collaboration campus in Romania. Known as “WeWilder,” the centre aims to be a meeting place for freelancers, teams from companies, artists, entrepreneurs and local residents and to nurture sustainable local development in this rural area. With 100,000 USD of funding received from the global company Flex, based in Timișoara, WeWilder aims to set an example of green architecture and to be a model for the implementation of a micro green economy which can reverberate throughout the region.

Over 230 students have searched for sustainable business solutions at Panda Labs

We strongly believe that empowering young people can make them advocates for sustainable development. This is why in 2021 we established the WWF Panda Lab in Bulgaria. More than 230 young people from over 20 cities took part in 9 days of hackathons, 3 weeks of master classes and shared the experience of over 45 lecturers. These events resulted in the implementation of three ideas in the areas of waste, food and mobility: heating pellets made from coffee and other residual material; a bio-alternative pesticide made from garlic and nettles; and a proposal for electrification of old cars for a shared travel service.

Brand awareness

FY20 FY21



AWARENESS, ENGAGEMENT AND MOBILISATION

2020

2021

Contactable supporters

673000 VS 749000

Unique visitors

779 000 VS 1 009 635

Media hits

11 000 VS 14 000



WWF-BULGARIA

“2021 WAS A YEAR FULL OF ASPIRATIONS AND CHALLENGES, BUT ALSO OF INCREDIBLE EMOTIONS AND SIGNIFICANT SUCCESS STORIES.

Now when we take stock, we can say without hesitation that, despite the difficulties, every effort made in the name of the natural environment has been worthwhile because it has brought us closer to our aim - a world in which nature and people thrive. But none of what we achieved so far would have been possible without you - our friends and supporters. So I would like to take this opportunity to express my immense gratitude to you all!”

**Vesselina Kavrakova,
CEO, WWF-Bulgaria**

SUCCESS STORIES



© WWF Bulgaria

WWF-BULGARIA SURVEYED THE DANUBE USING SONAR AND CONTINUED OUR STURGEON CONSERVATION WORK

The summer season was a period of intense work to protect critically endangered sturgeons. Our team spent many days in the waters of the Danube. We carried out a sonar survey of the river to locate the spawning sites so that we could protect them. During the survey we came across 14 baby sterlets, one baby sterlet / stellate sturgeon hybrid and a baby Russian sturgeon brought to us by a fisherman from Vetren. The Russian sturgeon is the first wild fish of this species that we have identified since 2013 (when we started working on sturgeons). This gives us hope that the combination of the ban on fishing, our restocking work and our cooperation with fishermen and institutions is already bearing fruit.

WE TOOK PART IN THE FIRST PHASE OF THE CREATION OF NEW FORESTS IN SOUTH-WESTERN BULGARIA

In the next three years, 450,000 pubescent oak saplings will be planted. For this purpose, together with partners, we organised several acorn gathering campaigns. They are now stored in a nursery garden at a controlled temperature and are ventilated and moistened several times a week. In the spring they will be planted by hand in special containers. Afforestation with container saplings protects their root systems from damage and drying during transport and increases the number of successful saplings.

WE PROTECTED A FURTHER 4832 HECTARES OF OLD-GROWTH MUNICIPAL FORESTS FROM LOGGING

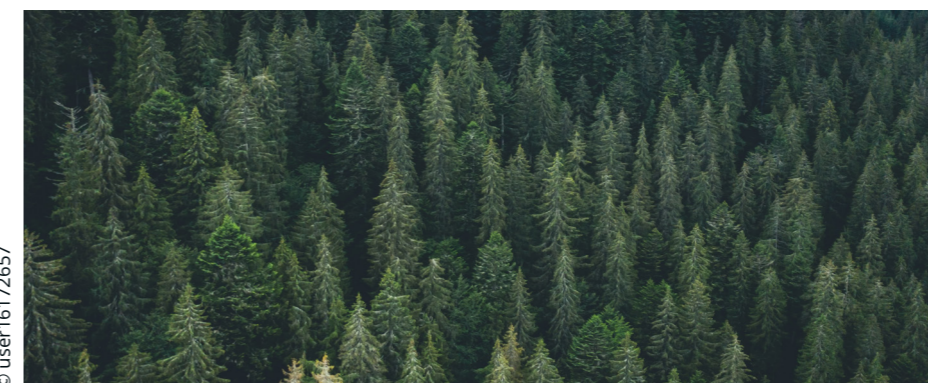
The protection of old-growth forests is one of the most important roles of WWF in Bulgaria. We are proud to report that our work has been successful and a number of municipalities have preserved some of these valuable habitats. In recent years, we have conducted surveys in 62 municipalities across the country. We submitted the results of our research to the respective municipalities and invited them to take specific action to protect the old-growth forests - the last resorts of wildlife unaffected by man. As a result of our dedicated work, 10,844 hectares of old forests have received protected status in the last two years.



© Wikimedia

BEAR RELOCATION

In November 2021, we relocated a young male bear from the town of Gabrovo to a reserve in the Central Balkans National Park. The bear had a record of causing damage to domestic animals and property, but did not show any signs of aggression towards humans. Currently the bear is moving inside the park and keeping a good distance from human settlements.



© user16172657



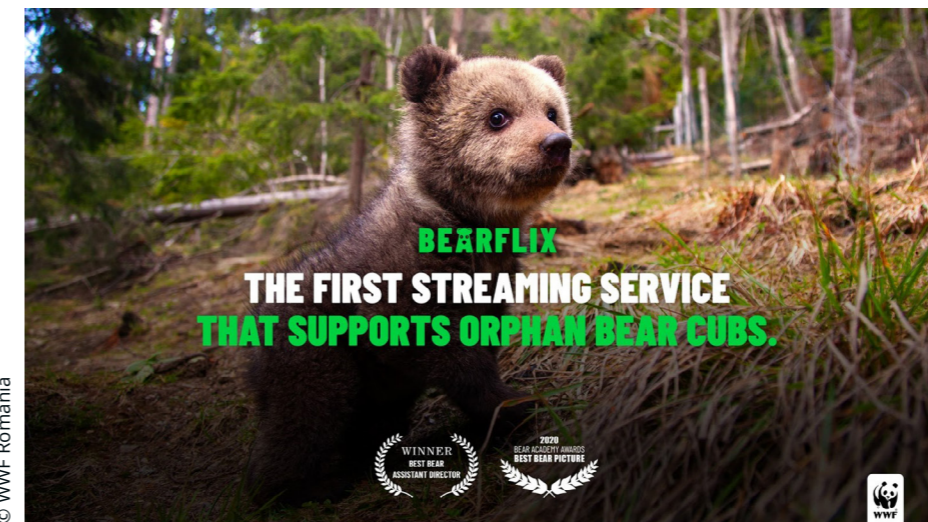
WWF-ROMANIA

2021 WAS ABOUT RESILIENCE AND HOPE.

Despite the challenges related to Covid-19 we managed to overcome the obstacles and find solutions to continue delivering conservation impact. We strengthened our ambitions to move ahead with our plans and projects. We were present on the ground to finalise old growth forest identification and wetland restoration and our efforts involved virtually engaging stakeholders and the public. Our team's motivation, our joint efforts and our hope for a better future were the drivers behind our results."

Orieta Hulea,
General Director,
CEO, WWF-Romania

SUCCESS STORIES



© WWF Romania

BEARFLIX

BEARFLIX is the first video streaming platform that supports orphan bears. If you visit wwf.ro/bearflix you will see that all the videos are with and about bear cubs and the subscriptions are nothing but monthly donations to sustain Bear-Again, the rehabilitation centre for orphan bears from the Hășmașul Mare mountains in Romania. The video content is constantly updated and is filmed at the rehabilitation centre itself, capturing the activities in progress there

FORESTS IN THE NRRP (NATIONAL RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLAN)

Following six months of intensive advocacy activities, we managed to secure the inclusion of three key forest-related aspects into the NRRP:

The authorities have to include the National Forestry Strategy in the NPPP, as WWF requested. The government decided to implement crucial monitoring mechanisms promoted by WWF, such as video monitoring and the digital footprint of timber transport. These mechanisms are crucial for combating illegal logging. The government has agreed to identify strictly protected areas according to the European Biodiversity Strategy. WWF has repeatedly expressed its intention to ensure protection of 10% of the Romanian forests.

VIRGIN FORESTS

The number of hectares included in the National OGF Catalogue increased by almost 40% in 2021, up to 70,000 hectares.

A key achievement for WWF is that the national catalogue, in which WWF played a key role in identifying and including these forests and in drafting the required legal framework, is now operational.

RESTORATION SUCCESS

The first restoration project in the ecological corridors identified in the county of Maramures where 10 hectares of grassland now produce more and better food for the wildlife has been finalised. We planted suitable tree species for local environmental conditions and installed 10 access barriers in the area.



© WWF Romania

NOBODY'S FORESTS

Romania has about 500.000 hectares of new forests, which have grown on abandoned pasture land and which account for 7% of the country's total wooded area. However, the law does not recognise them as forests and even provides financial incentives for the owners to cut them down to restore the pasture land. In the end, owners have been felling the forests and taking the money, but have failed to restore the pastures. WWF has included the first 100 hectares of Nobody's Forests into the national forest land reserve at Nocrich in the county of Sibiu. From now on they will be protected by national forestry legislation. We also contributed to the well-being of the local community by developing a recreation area used by the public for picnics and/or promoting and selling their traditional products.



© WWF Romania



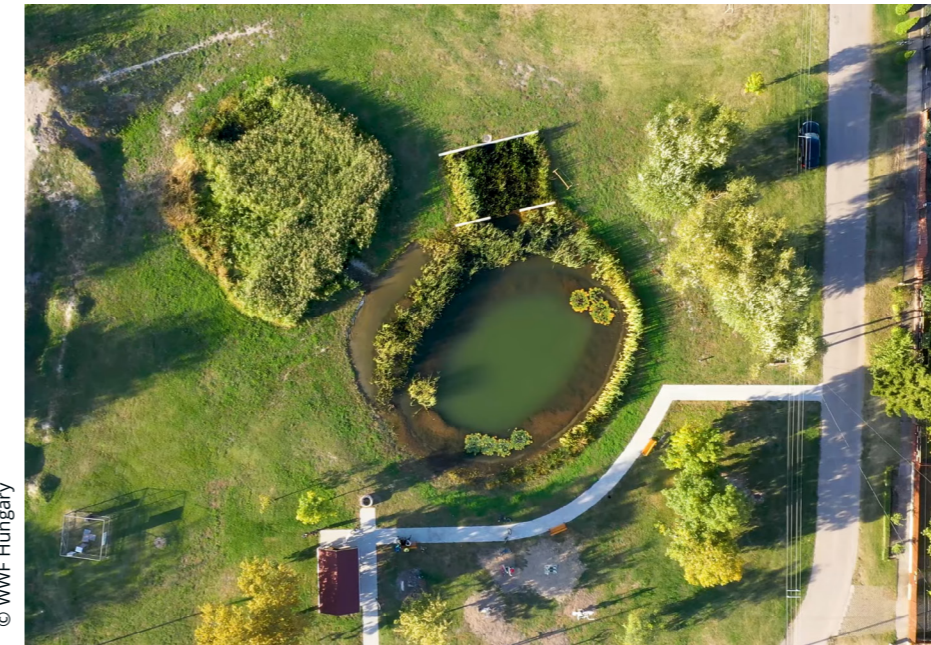
WWF-HUNGARY

“ALTHOUGH THE COVID19 PANDEMIC OVERSHADOWED THE CLIMATE AND NATURE CRISIS OF THE 21ST CENTURY,

we are facing natural and climate disasters all over the planet and embarrassing hesitation at the highest decision-making levels in taking the necessary steps to achieve a meaningful green transformation. In Hungary, we have experienced how the popular voice can block harmful decisions and we believe the same voice can push forward progressive green developments. Nature and the climate need our active support more than ever!”

Katalin Sipos,
CEO, WWF-Hungary

SUCCESS STORIES



© WWF Hungary

SAVING THE HAJÓGYÁRI ISLAND

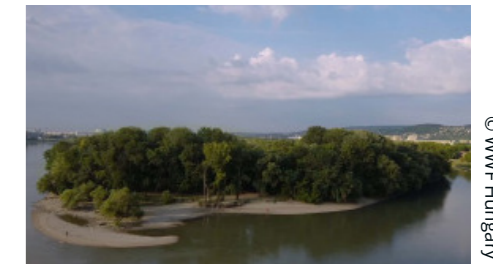
During the summer of 2020 a dam was planned on Hajógyári Island. This would have led to the destruction of the island's most valuable flood plain habitats and the conversion of the natural river bank, including cutting at least 1000 alluvial forest trees. WWF Hungary launched a petition which was signed by 10,000 people in a week, after which the Hungarian Water Management Directorate withdrew its application for the project. A detailed proposal was also submitted to the Mayor of Budapest requesting that the island's alluvial forest be granted protected status.

FIRST WWF THEATRE IN EDUCATION IN EUROPE

WWF Hungary and the Káva Theatre and Drama for Education Foundation together established the first “environmental education theatre” programme in Europe. The project was financed by a community fundraising campaign and the Káva artists together with the professionals of WWF Hungary created a story that makes participants (the students) face a sustainability dilemma. The drama is followed by an environmental education class and discussion. So far we have reached approximately 180 students and 6 other classes are planned for this season.

BIOBLITZ ON A MUSIC FESTIVAL

In 2021 WWF Hungary organised Bioblitz, an event that focuses on finding and identifying as many species as possible in a particular area over a short period of time. It was a result of a successful grant application to the Hungarian Cultural Fund. In the course of the event we organised a 24-hour long citizen science event at a popular summer music festival called “Fishing on Orfű”. With the help of 13 professionals and a group of volunteers, we encountered 493 different species. This was the most outstanding Hungarian Bioblitzes event so far.



© WWF Hungary

CLIMATE ACTION THROUGH HABITAT RESTORATION

WWF Hungary has developed habitat restoration projects within the country to offer an alternative to carbon credit purchasing. After committing to a 30% cut in CO2 by the end of 2023 and contemplating a target of 80% reduction by 2025, the National Bank of Hungary, has funded a reforestation project on 27 hectares of land managed by the Körös-Maros National Park. Beyond its capacity to sequester an estimated 4600 tons of CO2 by 2050, the restored oak forest will bring additional benefits in the area of biodiversity conservation, water retention and climate adaptation. Similarly, the organisers of TEDxDanubia Countdown funded the restoration of a 1.5 hectare alder forest.

PARTNERSHIP WITH HVG

Regarding media, we have built strong cooperation with one of our top 10 media named HVG, which was the first in Hungary to publish an article on the Living Planet Report in 2020. In addition, jointly with WWF-Hungary's campaign, it co-produced a video on the dam on Hajógyári Island that was planned at the time and co-organized and published a WWF Corner round table with us.



© WWF Hungary



WWF-SLOVAKIA

“THE YEAR 2021 BROUGHT CONSIDERABLE SUCCESS FOR WWF SLOVAKIA AND IT’S NATURAL ENVIRONMENT.”

We took big steps in old-growth forest conservation, enforcing year-round wolf protection and initiating a river revolution by removing the first dam on a mountain river. All these successes confirmed the benefits of uniting in a spirit of “together possible”. We teamed up with other organisations and members of the public who supported our efforts and petitions. More and more of us want a better future for the planet and for our children and that gives us strength.”

Miroslava Plassmann
CEO, WWF-Slovakia

SUCCESS STORIES

© Jerguš Tesák



WOLF HUNTING FINALLY BANNED IN SLOVAKIA

In a coalition with other NGOs, WWF Slovakia jointly secured the passage of new legislation banning wolf hunting in Slovakia. The grey wolf became a fully protected species in Slovakia as of 1 June 2021. The campaign for full Wolf conservation was supported by 31 NGOs and the joint petition was supported with more than 51,000 signatures. As apex predators, wolves play a vital role in maintaining the balance of nature and we must protect them along with their habitats and migration routes. They are threatened not only by illegal hunting, but also by increasing fragmentation and shrinkage of their habitats brought about by the construction of roads and other infrastructure.

© Tomáš Hulík



FREE-FLOWING RIVERS

The beautiful Hucava river has been released from a weir and a new space for wildlife was opened. WWF Slovakia actively addresses the issue of free-flowing rivers in its water policy work. Our team is contributing to the preparation of national water conservation measures, promoting nature-based solutions and raising awareness of the importance of free-flowing rivers. Removing old and useless dams is the best way to free rivers and improves their ecological status. Other benefits are related to restoring the function of the river landscape, including water retention and addressing the climate crisis.

A successful crowdfunding project helped us to raise funds for the first river weir removal on the Hucava River in the Polana Biosphere Reserve. The obsolete weir on the Hucava was removed in cooperation with the Slovak Water Management Company, initiating the long-term process of river restoration. WWF Slovakia and its partners are continuing to assess other dams and weirs that could potentially be removed.



© Rob_Kleinjans

ESTABLISHMENT OF NATIONAL OLD-GROWTH FOREST NATURE RESERVE

WWF Slovakia's campaign to save valuable old-growth forests helped to establish the National Old-growth Forest Reserve. In September 2020, WWF Slovakia and the NGO Prales submitted a petition with more than 30,000 signatures supporting the declaration of the Old-growth Forest Reserve to the Slovak Minister of the Environment and the Minister of Agriculture. The petition was the last step in long-term efforts to protect the remaining old-growth forests in Slovakia. The efforts had begun years earlier with mapping and identification of old-growth forests and continued through numerous negotiations and the preparation of the conservation proposal itself. The old-growth forest nature reserve was established in 2021.



WWF-UKRAINE

“ THIS YEAR WE GREW AS A NATIONAL TEAM AND ENHANCED OUR IMPACT ON DECISION MAKING REGARDING NATURE CONSERVATION IN THE COUNTRY.

Despite the Covid pandemic, a new practice was launched: Climate, focusing on nature-based solutions for climate resilience. I believe there is a great potential to broaden WWF's work in Ukraine to cover agriculture and food in the coming years. In the 2021 financial year we laid the ground for creating a national vision referred to as Climate Smart Ukraine on the basis of nature restoration and nature-based solutions.”

Bohdan Vykhor
CEO, WWF-Ukraine

SUCCESS STORIES



© Vasyly Dyachuk

MORE THAN 500 KILOMETRES OF CARPATHIAN RIVERS RESTORED

The Freshwater team pursued the Free Flowing Rivers programme by dismantling 3 non-functioning dams, restoring more than 500 kilometres of Carpathian rivers.

POLICY SUCCESSES

As a result of fruitful cooperation with state institutions and major stakeholders, the National Forest Strategy 2035 initiated by WWF-Ukraine was adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. Over the year, an area of 6047.5 hectares of old-growth forest was granted the highest nature conservation status from the state. We also managed to initiate the development of a Biodiversity Strategy for the period until 2030, the structure of which was approved on the basis of a proposal from WWF experts.

We developed national conservation plans for large endangered carnivores: the lynx and the bear, which were adopted at the state level, and we will provide support for their implementation in the country. More than 30 traditional Ukrainian highland farms in the Carpathians coexist peacefully with large carnivores with the help of electric fences provided by WWF-Ukraine.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

WWF-Ukraine has formed a pool of strategic partnerships at the national and international levels, including with Ukrainian ministries, government agencies, Ukrainian Railways, law enforcement agencies of Ukraine and Interpol, WWF-Sweden, WWF-Poland and others. During the year we took an active part in improving national legislation.

COMMUNICATIONS AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

More than 6 million Ukrainians have been reached through social media channels owned by WWF-Ukraine, with a petition for old growth forests, tips on sustainable living, tourism and other campaigns.

A Youth Programme in Ukraine was launched to provide a Leadership Development Course for young leaders and a modern online training course on NBS and sustainable choices.



© Bogomaz

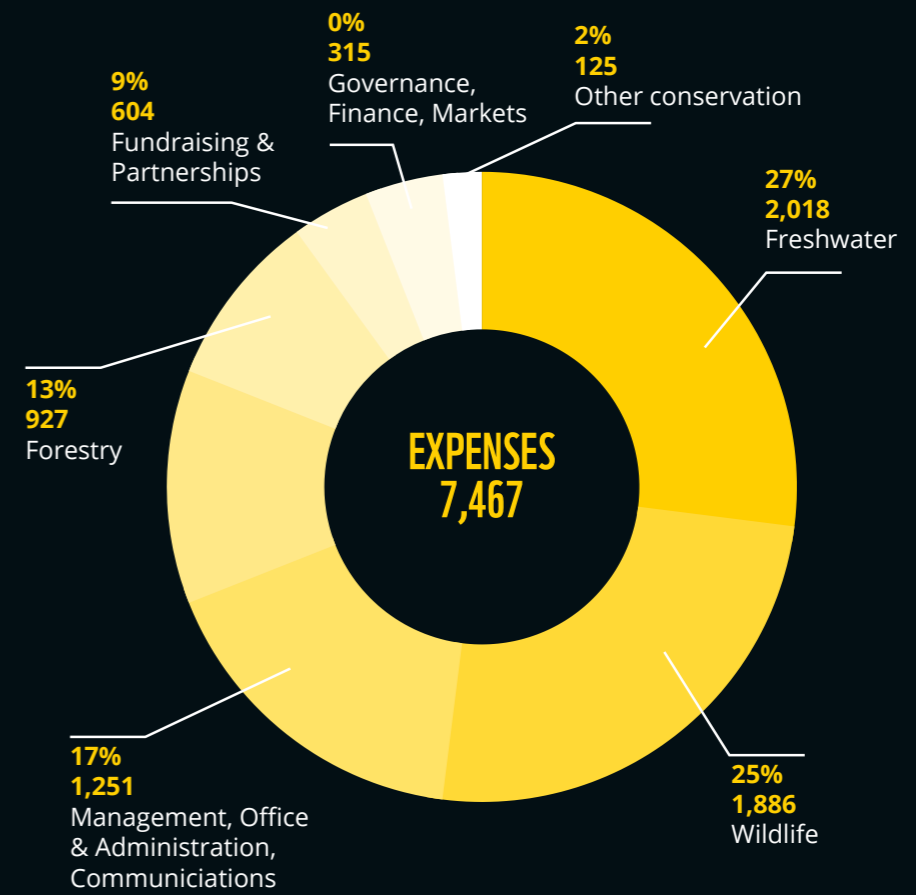
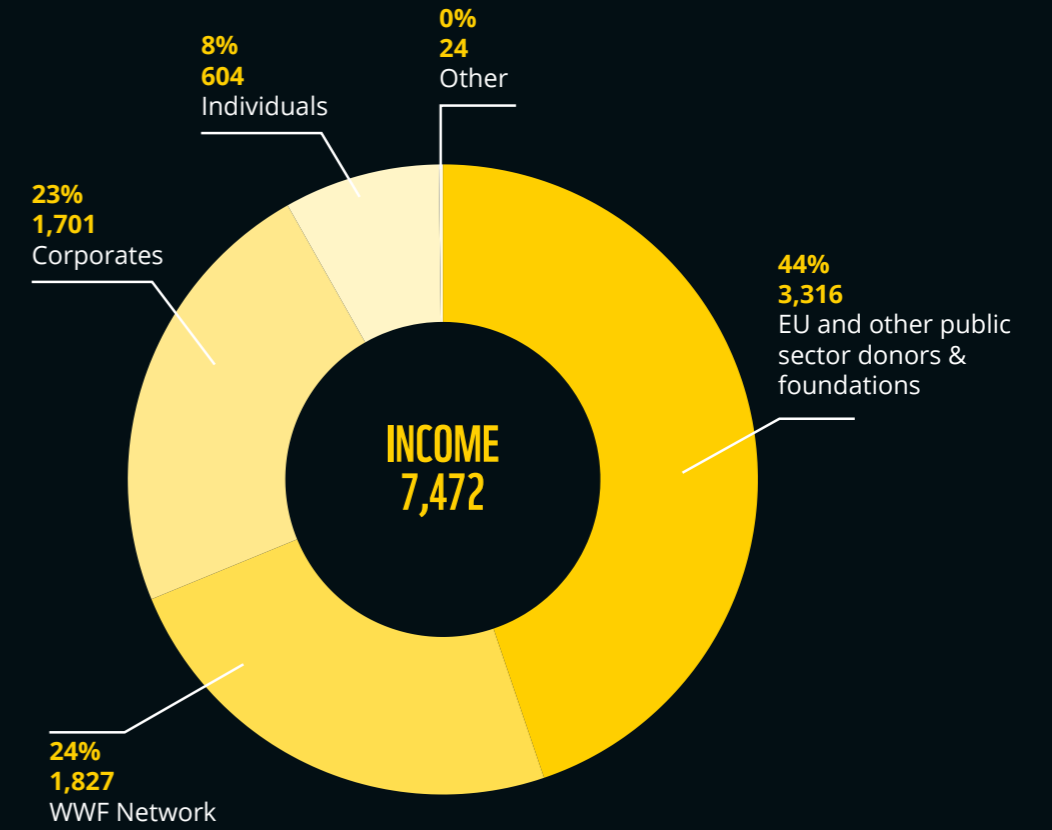


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© Vasyly Derdiuk

FINANCIALS 2020/21



SURPLUS 5

FINANCIAL SUPPORTERS FY2021

(1 JULY 2020 - 30 JUNE 2021)

Public Sector donors

above 250k	European Commission
100-250k	GIZ
25-100k	US Forest Service KfW
< 25k	Norway funds State Ministry of Baden-Württemberg

Foundations and non-profit donors

above 250k	The Coca-Cola Foundation
100-250k	None
25-100k	America for Bulgaria Flex Foundation Pancivis
< 25k	European Climate Foundation Friedrich Ebert Foundation Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Mohammed bin Zaed Online Giving Foundation

Corporate partners

above 250k	Budapest Bank
100-250k	Garanti Bank
25-100k	H&M IKEA (via WWF-Sweden) JYSK Kaufland Lidl Revolut
< 25k	ALD ALDI AMC Networks Avery Dennison Bearing Point Beetroot Benevity Bolton Food Books House Boyden Castle of Ice Statues (FO Bondarenko Volodymyr) CEC Bank Cimbru Liliana (Zumm) Cisimpex Coca-Cola European Partners Darwin Deneris Trade (Isara) DONATION PONTVELEM DONATION PREMIUM ONK NYUGDÍJP

WWF offices

above 250k	WWF Belgium WWF Netherlands WWF Austria
100-250k	WWF Germany WWF International
25-100k	WWF Poland WWF Switzerland
< 25k	WWF Denmark WWF Greece

Over 15,000 individuals

604k	in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine
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DONATION SYSDATA PSE KFT Dreamix Ekopak ESRI Eurohandball Fabrica de Bere Buna (Zaganu) Finced Refined Groupama Headway HELLO EVENT KFT IBTT (WWF toys royalties) iCard InfoSapiens Kind Challenge Medfusion Media Advertising Morshynska Netopia NValue Energy P&G	Pendant sales (FOP Kon- dratenko) PEOPLE TEAM Platfor.ma Playtech Printoteca Quickweb RG Design Rimi Rogalski Damaschin PR Sage Olive Comm SAT Health Syncro Soft Taylor Wessing law firm - in kind donation Velux Vodafone Vodafone Foundation XcoSports Bulgaria Yavlena EOOD
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**BOARD
MEMBERS**

ABOUT US

WWF-CEE is active in seven countries of Central and Southeastern Europe. It includes legal entities in five countries (WWF-Romania, WWF-Hungary, WWF-Bulgaria, WWF-Slovakia and WWF-Ukraine) and an Austrian-registered association serving as secretariat. It also manages WWF engagement via consultancies and partner organisations in the Czech Republic and Moldova. WWF-CEE also provides overall leadership and coordination for WWF's engagement in the Danube and Carpathian eco-regions, including engagement with the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSD), the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) and the Convention for the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathian Mountains (Carpathian Convention).

WWF-CEE BOARD

As part of the transformation of the WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme into a self-governing member of the WWF network, in April 2019 a new board drawn from WWF supporters and local leaders assumed strategic guidance and decision-making for the new WWF-CEE.



Sasha Bezuhanova

Chairperson, left a 20-year executive career at Hewlett-Packard to devote herself to supporting social prosperity through innovation, education and collaboration by means of organisations and initiatives such as MOVE.BG.



Jean-Paul Paddack

Deputy Chairperson, is Executive Director of Network Development WWF International and oversees the management of WWF's offices in the Pacific, China, Korea, Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and the Mediterranean



Andrea Johanides

Chairperson of the Finance Committee, has been CEO of WWF-Austria since 2013. Prior to that she was head of finance from 2005. Before coming to WWF, she held a number of finance controller positions in various private sector companies.



Antoine Lebrun

has been CEO of WWF-Belgium since May 2015. He came to WWF-Belgium in 2011, first as People & Organisation Director and then as Marketing & Communications Director.



Dr Ladislav Miko

was Head of the European Commission Representation in Slovakia until the end of 2021. He has had a number of senior positions in the European Commission and served as Czech Minister of the Environment and Deputy Director of the Czech Environmental Inspectorate.



Anna Vronskaya

(from April 2020), an international lawyer by training, is a judge on the Ukrainian Supreme Court. She is the former Deputy Minister and interim Minister of the Environment of Ukraine.



Mihai Stanescu

is a psychologist and anthropologist who has been working as a coach and consultant since 2000. He is the founder and CEO of RoCoach, through which he has provided over 10,000 coaching hours in individual, team and organisational sessions to leaders in business and other organisations.



Katalin Szomolányi

until recently headed Corporate Sustainability at Magyar Telekom. She founded Planet Fanatics' Network, the sustainability consultancy to support companies and organisations in their strategy and performance development. She has experience in international projects (e.g. ETNO-WWF climate project), co-operating in multinational environments and also in organising sustainability festival-conferences.



Jürgen Schmidt

is a major shareholder of memo AG, a company that specialises in eco-products for businesses, advises businesses on strategy and management as a "Sustainable Business Angel" and is a partner at the Terra Institute. Until 2020, Mr. Schmidt served as Board Member of WWF-Germany.

OUR REGIONAL MANAGEMENT

Andreas Beckmann
Regional CEO

Péter Baráth
Regional Marketing & Partnerships Director

Dr Orieta Hulea
CEO, WWF-Romania

Irene Lucius
Regional Conservation Director

Vesselina Kavrakova
CEO, WWF-Bulgaria

Dr Miroslava Cierna-Plassmann
CEO, WWF-Slovakia

Angelika Beranek
Regional Operations Director

Katalin Sipos
CEO, WWF-Hungary

Bohdan Vykhov
CEO, WWF-Ukraine

OUR WWF SUPPORTERS

WWF-Austria
WWF-Belgium
WWF European Policy Office
WWF-Germany
WWF-Netherlands
WWF-Poland
WWF-Sweden

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WWF-Romania ● wwf.ro
WWF-Slovakia ● slovakia.panda.org
WWF-Ukraine ● wwf.ua
WWF-Adria ● adria.panda.org
WWF-Serbia ● wwf.rs

OUR TEAM

177 STAFF

(115 conservation, 21 fundraising, 41 management and operations)

10 OFFICES IN 6 COUNTRIES

The report covers WWF-CEE fiscal year 2021: from July 2020 till June 2021.

WE GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGE FUNDING SUPPORT FROM THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION.



All content and options are solely those of WWF.