



WWF Hungary

Németvölgyi út 78/b
1124 Budapest
Hungary

Tel: +36 1 214 5554
Fax: +36 1 212 9353
brigitta.bozso@wwf.hu
www.wwf.hu

Sturgeon 2020

initiative for providing habitats for sturgeons, in co-operation with experts along Danube

Objective of the project is to provide suitable living- (environment and nourishment), reproduction- and migration conditions for sturgeons, with special regards to the EU Water Framework Directive (good ecological status) in the Danube.

Project target:

By 2020, due to improved ecological state of the river beluga (*Huso huso*) and other sturgeon species find appropriate habitats on the upper stretch of the Danube.

Background

Sturgeons live in the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov, the Aral Sea and the Caspian Sea and connecting rivers. In spawning-season (springtime) they swim up to lay their eggs onto the gravelly bottom of the fast-flowing section of the rivers. Sturgeons had extensive habitats along the rivers of Central Europe, also in Hungary in the rivers Danube, Tisza, Maros, Körös, Vág and Dráva. Unfortunately thanks to increased human impact during centuries (overexploitation, river regulations and inland navigation) they become extinct in Hungary and on the upper stretch and are critically endangered on the downstream, as well.

The sturgeon is a perfect indicator of the ecological status of the rivers – their living conditions match the needs of ecological river management:

- Decreased human impact balanced conservation activities
- No physical barriers in the rivers lengthwise and across
- Appropriate flow and sediment conditions
- Diverse and naturally changing river system



Providing suitable habitat for the sturgeon therefore means achieving the goal articulated in the EU WFD: a relatively undisturbed system, good ecological status and chemical of the rivers. For this purpose sustainable river basin management is essential integrated within the whole catchment area. The project proposal was initiated by the VIZA/STURGEON 2020 Research and Developing Company established in 1998.

Activities

The project is divided into 3 (3-year long) phases:

Phase 1.

1. Baseline survey– threats, existing populations, migration, fishfarms, existing fish-ladders, etc.
2. Species conservation plan – action plan (co-operation with nature conservation authorities, lobby)
3. Species’ reintroductions – with strong communication aspect
4. Habitat restorations (to create a sufficient network of floodplain areas)
5. Survey of migration with radio-tagging, genetic studies of different populations
6. Establishment of core propagation farms
7. Investigation of the illegal fishing and trading activities, mapping of the main threat zones
8. Building partnerships, cooperation with NGOs and relevant governmental bodies along the Danube
9. Communication, Lobby

Phase 2.

1. International campaign for facilitation of fish migration at the Iron Gate
2. Habitat restorations (to create a sufficient network of breeding areas, elimination of threats)
3. Reintroductions from propagated species
4. Monitoring, (tagging, radio-telemetry)
5. Continuing efforts to eliminate threats from illegal fishing and trade
6. Communication and lobby work

Phase 3.

1. Realisation of fish-bypass or other solution on the dams
2. Proposal for sustainable fishing regulations and enforcement
7. Continuing efforts to eliminate threats from illegal fishing and trade
3. Monitoring of key stocks and reintroduced specimen
4. Water quality improvements

Organisational framework

WWF Hungary is taking the lead organising international co-operation with **VIZA/STURGEON 2020 Research and Dev. Comp.**, NOs DCPO and other organisations involved along the river Danube.

Co-ordinator of the program: Brigitta Bozsó, Natura2000 Officer WWF Hungary