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



# Living Danube Partnership FY2020 Report

June 2020



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# Summary

## Expected results by 2021:

# 5,996

hectares of wetlands restored

# 17.52

million m<sup>3</sup> of water replenished.



*As we head into the final year of the seven-year Living Danube Partnership (2014-2021), we are on track to achieve all of our targets for river and wetland restoration as well as communications and engagement. While the Covid-19 pandemic has caused delays and forced us to change plans particularly for awareness and engagement, we still expect to achieve all results by the end of June 2021 as planned.*

River and wetland restoration is completed in 5 projects, with another 3 to be finished within the next year and one more by 2022. Despite delays, the current pipeline of projects across six countries of the Danube basin is on track to deliver 17.52 million m<sup>3</sup> of water replenished by 2021 (16.53 million m<sup>3</sup> directly financed by The Coca-Cola Foundation, versus 12 million m<sup>3</sup> target) and 5,996 hectares of wetlands restored (vs 5,327 ha target).

Outreach and awareness activities are on track or have exceeded targets. Through the Living Danube Tour travelling exhibit and other events, to date we have reached more than 86,094 of the 120,000 people we plan to reach directly. Indirectly, via traditional and social media, we have reached over 56 million people to date, well in excess of our 5 million target, with another 12 million projected by the end of next year. Outreach and sharing lessons with decision makers, experts and stakeholders will be a major focus for the last year of the partnership.

Thanks to its long-term commitment and flexible approach, the partnership has helped raise an additional €7.65 million for wetland conservation and restoration directly, by co-financing EU-funded projects; and over €11.33 million indirectly, by providing staff time and support for development of further initiatives. Beyond this, the Partnership has inspired stakeholders to undertake additional restoration projects, e.g. of further soda lakes at Neusiedler See or at Kalimok in Bulgaria.



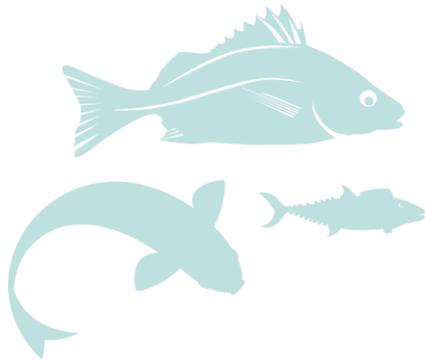
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# At issue: Danube wetlands

# 80%

of Danube wetlands have been lost – and with them many fish populations



More than 80% of wetlands and floodplains of the Danube River and its main tributaries have been lost, and with them the ecosystem goods and services they provide, from fish and wildlife to flood and drought management. Fortunately, there is a growing appreciation of rivers and wetlands, and government commitments to not only conserve what remains, but also to restore what we have lost. However, actually restoring these areas involves a painstaking process of stakeholder engagement that can take years before actual measures like breaching dykes can be undertaken. As a result, most commitments to wetland restoration in the Danube basin remain on paper and not realised in practice.

*The Living Danube Partnership addresses this challenge of implementation through implementation, advocacy and promotion.*





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# Living Danube Partnership



Our targets:

4,800

Olympic-sized swimming pools  
of water replenished

7,422

Football pitches of wetlands  
restored

The Living Danube Partnership brings together WWF-CEE, Coca-Cola with the support of The Coca-Cola Foundation and the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) to promote the conservation and restoration of wetlands in the Danube basin. Supported by a \$4.4 million grant from The Coca-Cola Foundation, the seven-year (2014-21) partnership is working closely with local stakeholders and relevant authorities to connect river stretches or floodplains to the river system by opening dams, installing sluices for water retention or by restoring water supply channels. At the same time, a regional movement is being created for wetland conservation and restoration, as well as good water stewardship.

## A unique, cross-sectoral partnership

*The Living Danube Partnership harnesses the mandate of the ICPDR, the capacity and resources of Coca-Cola and The Coca-Cola Foundation, and the facilitation and expertise of WWF-CEE to promote river and wetland restoration in the Danube basin, for people and nature.*



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# Restoring rivers and wetlands



Drava River side arms



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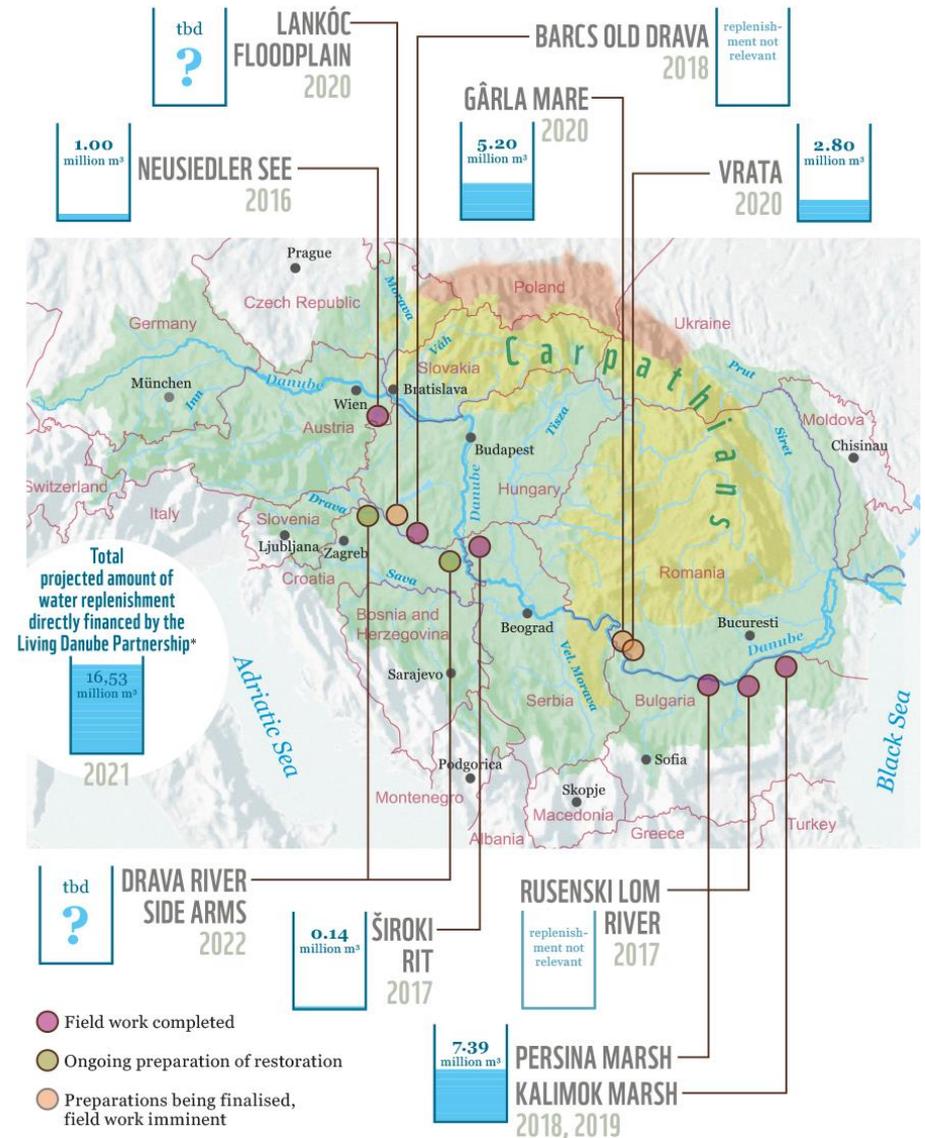
ICPDR IKSD International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River

# River and wetland restoration

Most of the restoration projects directly supported through the Living Danube Partnership have been completed. Three are expected to be completed in 2020 or in spring 2021: Garla Mare, Vrata and restoration of the Lankoc floodplain forest. A final project focused on restoring a number of side-arms of the Drava River in Croatia, where the Living Danube Partnership has leveraged significant EU support, will not be completed until 2022.

# 6,9

The Living Danube Partnership includes river and wetland restoration initiatives across 6 countries, 9 projects and over 20 individual sites.





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# Results: Restoration & replenishment

We expect to exceed our original targets for both wetland restoration and volume of water replenished. The greatest areas and volumes will be delivered by completed restoration projects at Persina and Kalimok marshes in Bulgaria and by restoration projects at Garla Mare and Vrata in Romania, which are expected to be completed in 2020. Other projects with limited area or volume are nevertheless important for biodiversity or as pilots – e.g. restoration of small but exceptional soda lakes at Neusiedler See, or the pioneering of fish passes on the Rusenski Lom river in Bulgaria.

# 5,996

hectares of wetlands are expected to be restored by 2021.

# 17.52

million cubic meters of water are expected to be replenished by 2021.

Table: Living Danube Partnership – River and wetland restoration achievements to date and planned

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Forecast total	Original Target
Additional hectares of wetlands restored	0.00	400.00	53.00	0.00	3,700.00	1,330.00	513.00		
Total (cumulative) hectares wetlands restored	0.00	400.00	453.00	453.00	4,153.00	5,483.00	5,996.00	5,996.00	5,327.00

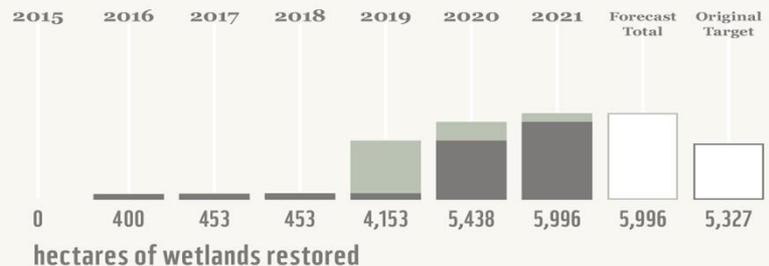
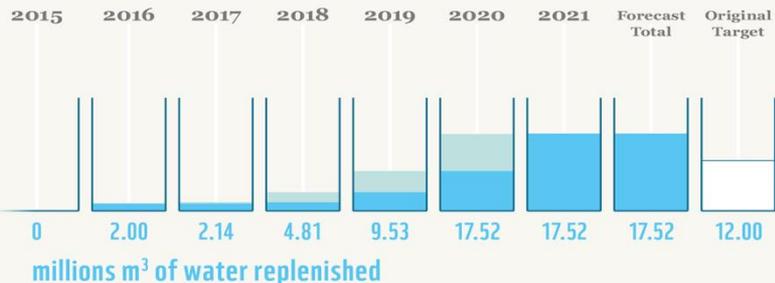


Table: Living Danube Partnership – River and wetland restoration achievements to date and planned (millions of m³)

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Forecast total	Original Target
Additional water replenished	0.00	2.00	0.14	2.67	4.72	8.00	0.00		
Additional water replenished – LDP cost-share	0.00	0.99	0.15	2.67	4.72	8.00	0.00		
Cumulative total of water replenished	0.00	2.00	2.14	4.81	9.53	17.52	17.52	17.52	12.00
Cumulative total, directly financed by LDP	0.00	0.99	1.14	3.81	8.53	16.53	16.53	16.53	12.00





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# Overview of restoration projects



## NEUSIEDLER SEE • AUSTRIA / Neusiedler See National Park

Soda lakes are a rare type of wetlands that support unusual wildlife, including seabirds many kilometers from the sea. In Europe, they only exist in the Pannonian Basin, stretching from eastern Austria across Hungary to Serbia. Hundreds of the lakes have lost their unique character due to man-made interventions, including drainage. By installing a system of sluices, the Danube Partnership has raised the level of groundwater, preventing some of the soda lakes from drying out.

The successful project – the first to be completed under the Living Danube Partnership in 2016 – has inspired local stakeholders to undertake additional interventions to save other soda lakes in the area, including preparation of a large EU LIFE project for soda lake restoration by the Neusiedler See National Park; and a restoration project for 6 small soda lakes, submitted to the EU LEADER programme in partnership with the local hunting association.



## ŠIROKI RIT • SERBIA / Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve

Since the second half of the 18th century, Široki Rit in northern Serbia was free of forest vegetation thanks to regular flooding. This changed in the second half of the 20th century, when efforts to regulate the Danube prevented regular flooding and led to gradual drying and siltation of the area. Widening and deepening the existing supply channel and slightly dredging the lake has given the area the possibility to fulfil its primary ecological function as a breeding and spawning area for waterfowl, fish and amphibians and a stopover for migrating birds. The area has attracted an additional nesting pair of rare White-tailed eagles since completion of restoration works in 2017.



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# Overview of restoration projects



## **BARCS OLD DRAVA OXBOW • HUNGARY/CROATIA**

### **Mura-Drava-Danube Transboundary Biosphere Reserve**

Several oxbows have been created as a result of natural as well as man-made changes to the main channel of the Drava River. The Barcs Old Drava, the longest side-branch of the river in Hungary (15 km), has suffered from declining water levels that have hurt the ecology of the area as well as fishing. The Living Danube Partnership contributed co-financing for an EU-funded project to restore water levels and floodplain forest habitats through construction of a bottom-weir (with fish pass) and to improve infrastructure for angling. The intervention, which was completed in 2017, involved cross-border cooperation with Croatia.



## **DRAVA RIVER SIDE ARMS • CROATIA**

### **Mura-Drava-Danube Transboundary Biosphere Reserve**

In many places along the Danube and Drava rivers, natural side arms have been historically separated from the main channel. These man-made modification lead to negative results including the deterioration of the side-arm ecology, the loss of effective floodplain and the increased riverbed incision of the main river channel mainly due to changed river flows and reduced sediment transport. Co-financing from the Living Danube Partnership is leveraging EU support – the first EU LIFE Nature-funded project in Croatia -- to restore six side-arms of the Drava River in Croatia. The project, which is led by the Croatian Water Authority, is designed to give the Authority experience in ‘natural’ river management while helping Croatia comply with the EU Water Framework Directive and the requirements of the EU Habitats and Birds Directives. To date, detailed planning has been completed, but implementation has been delayed by permitting procedures and the Covid-19 pandemic and is not expected to be completed until 2023. Two riverine species have been reintroduced to the area and habitat monitoring is ongoing.



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# Overview of restoration projects



## LANKÓC FLOODPLAIN FOREST • HUNGARY

### Mura-Drava-Danube Transboundary Biosphere Reserve

The overall goal of the project is to reduce riverbed degradation of the Drava River through changes to the existing river regulation structures and management. This will improve the status of riverine and floodplain habitats and, among other benefits, improve the water supply of the Lankóc Floodplain Forest. Through staff costs to initiate and prepare the project as well as very limited co-financing (€5,938), the Living Danube Partnership has leveraged significant EU funding for project activities (€1.85 million). Construction of six water-regulation measures is expected to be completed in autumn 2020.



## RUSENSKI AND CHERNI LOM RIVER • BULGARIA

### Lower Danube Green Corridor

Many dams and other man-made barrages in Bulgaria do not have any or only inadequate fish passes. As a result, the natural free movement of fish has been severely restricted or stopped. The Living Danube Partnership provided co-financing for an EU-funded project that in 2017 restored over 120 km of river connectivity, including removal of 2 barriers and construction of a new fish pass. The pioneering project is being used to pilot and promote good practice in design and construction of fish passes in Bulgaria to permit the free movement of fish and restore endangered fish populations. Project activities have also included restocking of fish populations as well as education and awareness.



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# Overview of restoration projects

## PERSINA MARSH • BULGARIA / Lower Danube Green Corridor

Persina is the largest of the Belene islands, a complex of Danube islands in Bulgaria that are characterized by freshwater marshes, seasonally-flooded riverine forests and agricultural lands that are exceptionally rich in biological diversity. Protected as a Ramsar wetland site and part of the EU's Natura 2000 network of specially protected sites, the Belene complex hosts rare plants and globally threatened birds such as the Dalmatian pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*). Improvements to the system of sluices controlling water supply to the area that were completed in 2019 have improved regulation of water in the marshes of Persina Island (which is also home to a prison). Specially constructed platforms in the marsh have already been taken over by flocks of pelicans.



## KALIMOK MARSH • BULGARIA / Lower Danube Green Corridor

For centuries Kalimok marsh, located to the west of the town of Tutrakan in northern Bulgaria, was one of the most important sites for commercial fishing in the Lower Danube. This changed after the marsh was drained and separated from the Danube in the 1950s, leading to a steep decline in fish production. Attempts to farm the area proved unsuccessful, so fish ponds were established, but by the 1990s these also had been abandoned. In 2007, new sluices were installed to reconnect the marsh to the Danube. With support through the Living Danube Partnership, in 2019 the water management system was optimised in the Kalimok marsh complex, which is now protected under both national and EU legislation. Wetland restoration in Kalimok and the nearby Persina marshes together has delivered some 7 million m<sup>3</sup> in replenishment, i.e. well over half of our original target.





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# Overview of restoration projects



## GÂRLA MARE • ROMANIA / Lower Danube Green Corridor

The Garla Mare and Vrata restoration projects in Romania are together expected to generate as much or even more replenishment benefits as Persina and Kalimok in Bulgaria. Garla Mare is an area of marsh covering about 700 ha in a former side branch of the Danube River. Historically, the area was modified for fish farming, isolating the natural marsh from the river and dividing it with dykes. The water inundation of the area will be improved through modification of a water supply channel. Some dykes will be reinforced to protect active fish ponds against flooding, and reed-beds will be managed to improve the dynamics of the wetland habitat. Significant delays were caused by unexpected inconsistencies in the land cadastre. These have now been overcome and permitting is nearly complete, opening the way to implementation of measures in autumn 2020. The Garla Mare project is funded exclusively through the Living Danube Partnership and is expected to increase capacity for water retention by 5.2 million m<sup>3</sup>.



## VRATA • ROMANIA / Lower Danube Green Corridor

Adjacent to and separated by a dyke from the Garla Mare wetlands, the Vrata site is similar in size and volume to its neighbour. A scoping study including modeling of a potential technical solution indicates a replenishment potential of between 2.8 and 6.7 million m<sup>3</sup> of water depending on elevation of the terrain. The site also has added value due to the openness of the land concessionaire to develop his business based on the restoration work. Two sluices to the adjacent Garla Mare site will be installed. The site has only recently entered the pipeline of wetland restoration projects after analysing the restoration potential along the Lower Danube in Romania. It was chosen in preference to the Cetate restoration site, which had promising potential for wetland restoration but unclear and complicated land ownership that would have risked delays of completion.



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# Promoting a movement for wetlands

Beyond wetland restoration, the Living Danube Partnership seeks to promote a movement for wetlands in the Danube basin.

The focus is at three levels:

- Promotion and local stakeholder involvement around individual restoration sites and activities.
- Outreach to a wider audience, particularly young families, through organisation of a mobile exhibit, special events as well as through ongoing media, social media and internet.
- Advocacy and promotion of wetland conservation and restoration and water stewardship among experts and decision makers.





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# Progress to date

# 56

million people have been reached with a message of rivers, wetlands and restoration

# 86

thousand people have been directly involved in events.

We are on track or have already exceeded our targets related to outreach and awareness raising.

Last year we further exceeded our original target for outreach (people reached indirectly via internet as well as traditional and social media), with over 46 million people reached through various channels compared with a 5 million target over the 7-year partnership. This was helped by a number of freshwater-related issues that we could use for communications and awareness, including a month-long joint communications campaign with Coca-Cola in September 2019 and the Europe-wide campaign to defend the EU Water Framework Directive.

In contrast, our engagement of people, particularly young families, through events was modest (8,094 vs 30,000 target for the year). This was largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which since March 2020 has forced the cancellation of festivals and other events that we had planned to attend. The resulting substantial cost savings will permit us to step up our engagement in 2020-21.

Our outreach to decision-makers continued, particularly through the official meetings of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River, some of which had to take place online.

Results to date and planned	Actual by FY2020 (cumulative)	FY2021 (plan)	By FY2021 (plan, cumulative)	FY2021 targets
# of people involved in restorations	1,995	300	2,295	2,100
# of people involved in events	86,094	50,000	136,094	120,000
# of people reached indirectly	56,120,936	12,000,000	68,120,936	5,000,000
# of expert publications	2	2	4	4
# of videos	22	5	27	5



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# A year of activity – cut by COVID-19

Many of our plans to participate in music and film festivals were frustrated by the COVID-19 pandemic. One event that did take place was the Big Jump in July in Hungary.



Coca-Cola added its voice to WWF and over 100 other organisations in defence of the EU's landmark water legislation.

In September 2019 we joined forces with Coca-Cola Europe to promote wetlands and the work of the Living Danube Partnership in traditional and social media.



Our mobile exhibit on freshwater and wetlands targeted young families, including interactive learning activities.



In October 2020 together with Coca-Cola Romania we organised a seminar on water and wetlands for the company's partners and employees. – a pilot for further business-targeted events planned for 2020-21.



Official meetings of the ICPDR continued to provide the best opportunities for advocacy and experience sharing with relevant decision-makers and experts across the Danube basin.



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# The power of partnership



## €20 million

The Living Danube Partnership has leveraged €20 million for river and wetland restoration.

The Living Danube Partnership presents a unique model of cross-sectoral cooperation.

The long-term commitment and relationship of trust between the partners and focus on achieving overarching objectives and targets has provided the flexibility needed to realise technically complex and by their nature uncertain wetland restorations involving different landowners and users, authorities and other interests.

A steering group composed of representatives of the partners meets twice per year to review progress toward the targets and approve plans and budget allocations for the next year. They review the pipeline of restoration projects and other initiatives, deciding on adaptive management or additional activities where relevant.

Thanks to this flexible approach, the partnership has been able to adapt to inevitable challenges, including delays or dead ends where barriers to achieving wetland restoration have proven insurmountable. It has also been able to respond to opportunities, including leveraging significant additional support and activities for wetlands well beyond that originally envisaged. To date, the Living Danube Partnership has leveraged some €20 million in support for wetland and river restoration and related activities, including €7.65 million in direct support (e.g. by co-financing EU-funded projects) and €11.33 million indirectly (e.g. through provision of staff time for development of proposals).



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# Looking forward

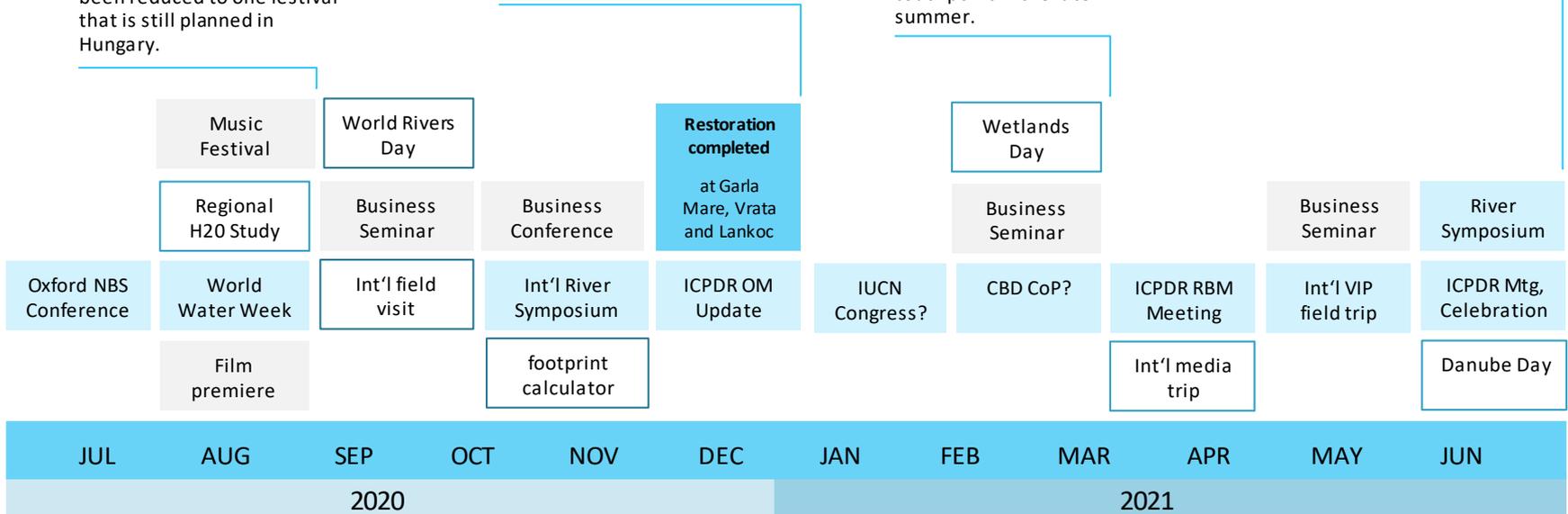
The final year of the Living Danube Partnership will be packed. Our focus will be both on pulling through and promoting the river and wetland restoration already planned as well as on leveraging these results for greater impact in the Danube basin and beyond. The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has led to complications and some delays, but we remain confident that we will achieve activities and results by the end of June 2021 as planned.

Special events will be used to directly engage the public as well as targeted stakeholders such as the private sector on the importance of water and wetlands. Some of the events, including a business conference and seminars, are already planned to take place partly or wholly online. Original plans to focus on summer music festivals have been reduced to one festival that is still planned in Hungary.

Completion of the Garla Mare and Vrata projects in autumn 2020 will deliver major contributions toward our targets for water replenishment and wetland restoration. Restoration of the Lankoc forest floodplain is expected around the same time, while completion of restoration of the Drava side arms will take until 2022-23.

Thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic, there will be a relatively stronger focus on outreach via traditional and social media, focused around project milestones including completion of wetland restoration, the launch of a water footprint calculator or World Rivers Day and other anniversaries. A study on water will provide another touchpoint in the late summer.

A major focus will be sharing our results and experience with decision makers, experts and other stakeholders, mostly through conferences like the World Water Week. Official meetings of the ICPDR will provide opportunities to reach relevant decision makers and experts in the Danube basin.





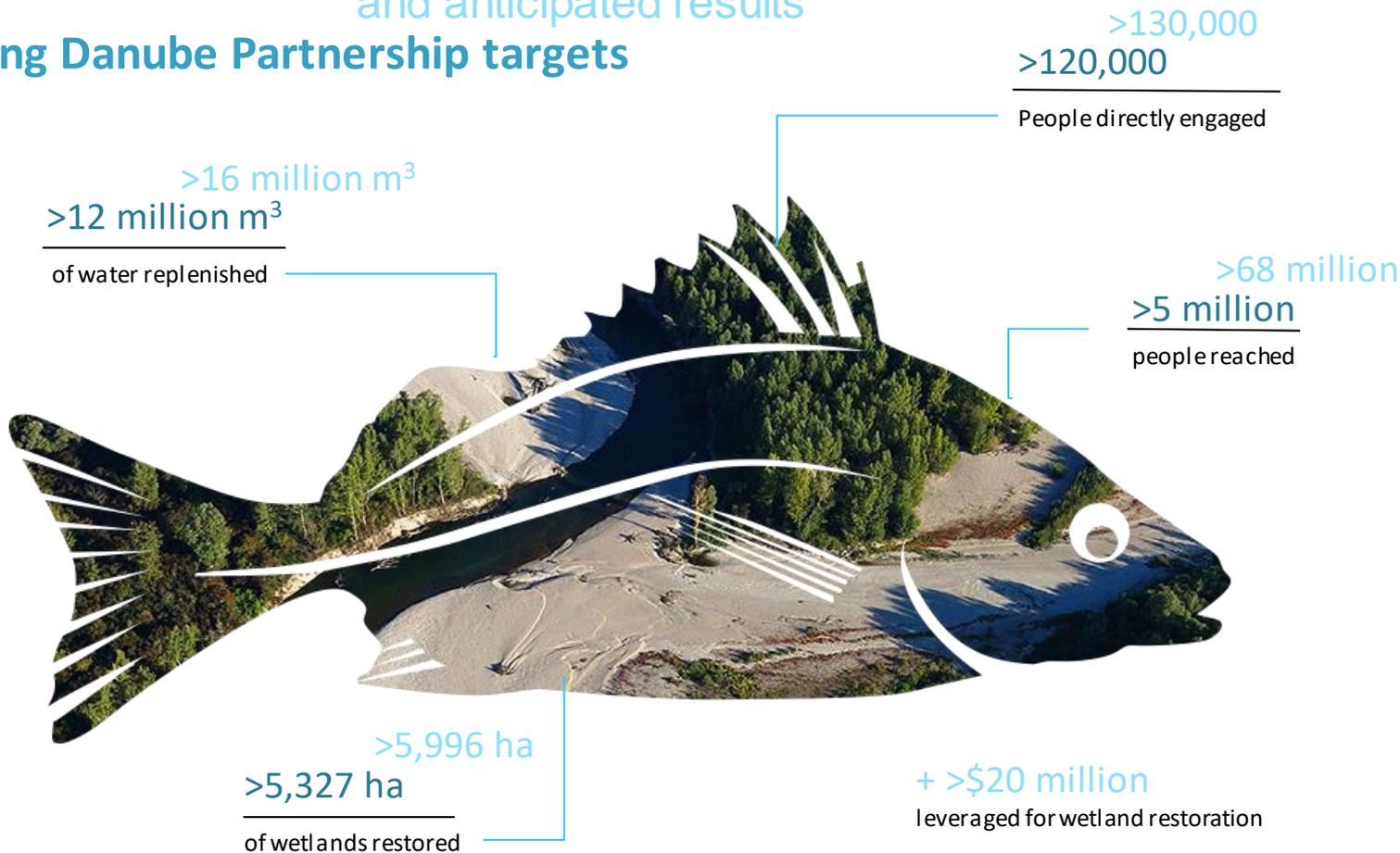
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The Living Danube Partnership contributes to Sustainable Development Goals 6, 13 and 15



# Living Danube Partnership targets and anticipated results



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