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PROJECT UPDATE - APRIL 2006

DANUBE REGIONAL PROJECT UPDATE: APRIL 2006

Welcome to the first "Update"

This is the first of a series of regular "Updates" about recent Danube Regional Project (DRP) achievements, events and plans. Its goal is to keep you aware of what's happening with the DRP. We encourage you to find out more about the information briefs listed below by contacting us. Many of the briefs below are also linked to the "News" and other sections of our website (www.undp-drp.org). The "Update" is a key tool for enhancing stakeholder awareness and use of DRP products, activities, tools and lessons learned.

Over \$636,000 for NGOs

In early 2006, a total of 62 NGOs were awarded over \$636,000 to reduce nutrient and toxic pollution to Danube waters. This second round of grants was financed by the DRP via the REC. The NGO projects were launched in 11 Danube River Basin countries -- Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Moldova, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine. Examples of project goals include promoting best agricultural practices, environmentally-friendly detergents and wastewater cleaning systems for households. Press releases were distributed through the DRP, REC, UNIS (UN-Vienna) and UNDP.

Wetlands Day news

On World Wetlands Day, February 2, the DRP announced a new project to encourage national water managers in using wetland vegetation to help reduce pollution, and to include such actions in their national plans for meeting the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD). Project outputs will include guidelines and case studies where wetland plants have improved water quality.

Also announced was a DRP-supported local campaign in Vojvodina, Serbia and Montenegro. Its goal is to protect the Zasavica Special Nature Reserve and its wetlands from illegal garbage dumping, tree cutting and hunting. The campaign was launched as part of the larger "International Wetlands Campaign" by the Danube Environmental Forum (DEF) -- the largest network of Danube environmental NGOs in the Danube River Basin (DRB). The DEF campaign will encourage national water managers to incorporate wetland protection into their national plans.

News releases for the above were widely disseminated, including on the web pages for the Ramsar Convention, the implementing agency of World Wetlands Day (www.ramsar.org/wwd/6/wwd2006_reports.htm).

Help for Sava Plan

A new project was launched to help Sava River Basin country governments -- Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro and Slovenia - develop their Sava River Basin Management Plan (RBMP), under the coordination of the new Sava River Basin Commission. Tasks include an assessment of the quality of information available from Sava countries for the ICPDR 'Danube River Basin Analysis'. Countries will be assisted in their reporting obligations to the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD). And international agreement on key trans-boundary issues, measures and the structure of the future Sava RBMP will be supported.

A related DRP-funded NGO project was launched to boost public involvement in developing the Sava RBMP. One DEF NGO from each Sava country will form an 'International Sava River NGO Committee' to involve NGOs during Sava Plan development. Public awareness of EU water protection law will also be increased. Related news releases were distributed in each of the four countries.

What water pollution?

The DRP component for public access to information on water pollution is now running the last round of national workshops in five participating countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Serbia and Montenegro. At each workshop, national and local level stakeholders discuss project outputs including manuals for government officials on how to respond to information requests, brochures for NGOs and the public on how to access water-related information, and the progress of local demonstration projects in water pollution hot spots. Workshop participants also discuss ways to ensure project results are used in practice beyond the project's end, as well as possibilities to disseminate project lessons on a wider scale - including a Danube Basin-wide Dissemination Workshop planned for early October 2006. (For more info: www.rec.org/REC/Programs/PublicParticipation/DanubeRiverBasin/default)

Help for municipal wastewater financing

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A new version of the 'ASTEC' model was launched in March. ASTEC is a powerful tool for managers of municipal water and wastewater utilities (MWWUs), municipal decision-makers and national policy-makers. The tool examines the interaction between an MWWU's tariffs and effluent charges with investment strategies, cost structures, customer behaviour and physical conditions. It can calculate the exact costs of service provision to customer groups and compare them with revenues from those groups. For example, ASTEC can help estimate the cost and price consequences of a new investment (e.g. adding nutrient removal facilities) or a newly introduced effluent charge regulation. (For more info: kis.andras@makk.zpok.hu)

Getting farmers to reduce water pollution

DRP's Phase II project geared to reducing water pollution from agriculture, contracted to Danish-based company Carl Bro, has selected eight farms as demonstration sites. The farms, with pig and cattle production ranging in size from small and medium to large, are located in Vojvodina, Serbia and Montenegro. The farms will test the application of newly introduced 'best agricultural practices' (BAP). Carl Bro also held a training workshop in February in Belgrade for its national partners from seven countries - to develop national action plans on how the partners will get trainers in their countries to train farmers in using BAP. Project details can be found at: <http://www.carlbrodrp.org.yu/page1.htm>.

Mixing water with wine

From April 25-26, the DRP is financing a workshop between DRB national water and agriculture managers in Malinska, Croatia. Its goal is for the two groups of managers to better understand and appreciate each other's goals and challenges. Emphasis will be placed on how to meet the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and Water Framework Directive (WFD) in a way where synergies between the two groups can be forged. The meeting follows two similar workshops at the EU-wide held recently in London and Vienna.

Banning phosphates in detergents

Also in Malinska, Croatia in late April, the final report on recommendations for how DRB national governments can enact voluntary bans on the use of phosphates in detergents will be presented to the ICPDR's Pressures and Measures Expert Group. To date, Austria, the Czech Republic and Germany have already enacted such bans.

What's behind the Iron Gates?

An inception report is expected soon for a DRP project looking into the sediment behind the Iron Gates dams in Romania. The objective of the project, targeted at Romania and Serbia and Montenegro, is to first pool available information on the contamination of sediments behind the Iron Gates dams. The next steps are to identify information gaps, fill some gaps through a sampling mission, and hold a workshop to identify remediation recommendations.

I learn, we learn

A workshop was hosted in Vienna by the DRP for other Global Environment Facility (GEF) International Waters (IW) projects and interested partners such as the UNDP, ICPDR and REC. The goal was to share and pool international project experiences in using communications as a key project tool. Representatives from GEF IW projects came from the Black Sea, Caspian Sea, Red Sea, South Pacific, and Danube region. Experiences and lessons learned will be presented in an upcoming Communications Guide for GEF IW project managers.

Communications news

The DRP initiated its new "DRP Info Sheet Series" for a number of key DRP thematic components from agriculture to wetlands to municipal wastewater treatment. Each series will begin with a "Background Story" that explains the big picture related to that theme in the DRB, and the related need for DRP international support. The next sheet will show all of the current and planned products, tools and activities that can be used by DRP project beneficiaries. Separate sheets will then describe in brief each of the products, tools and activities. The theme of "agriculture and water pollution in the DRB" was the first to be implemented.

Four stories were submitted to the ICPDR magazine 'Danube Watch': the new DRP wetlands project (see above); Sava River Basin management help (see above); a biomass energy project in Hungary using wetland plants; and controversy around hydropower development in the DRB.

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