

2.47 Conservation of the last wild rivers of Europe

RECOGNIZING that natural rivers and their valleys constitute:

- (a) terrestrial ecosystems having amongst the highest on-land biological production, biodiversity and abundance of living organisms;
- (b) the natural corridors of life uniting the European flora and fauna into coherent ecological and genetic units;
- (c) dynamic natural migration routes for the chemical and physical matter, as well as for the biological species;
- (d) discrete catchment units with their fauna and flora evolving separately in isolation from other river systems; and
- (e) precious natural resources, the use of which during the coming centuries is hardly predictable and therefore they should not be irreversibly transformed now;

BEING AWARE of the vulnerability of rivers owing to:

- (a) a lack of ecological management over the past thousand years which has resulted in vast amounts of transformation of rivers in Europe;
- (b) their becoming the most degraded and heavily polluted terrestrial ecosystems;
- (c) the reduction of wild (or semi-natural) sections of river valleys in Europe to about 5% of their original number or area;
- (d) being under threat of almost total disappearance due to construction of waterways or channelization; and
- (e) the additional threat to several central European rivers from diminishing precipitation, as predicted in computer simulations analyzing climate change;

BELIEVING that wisely managed and carefully protected natural rivers may become an important environmental asset and economic driver for local communities and entire national economies;

The World Conservation Congress at its 2nd Session in Amman, Jordan, 4–11 October 2000:

1. REQUESTS IUCN's Council, Director General and members to launch a Pan- European campaign to save this most threatened of our ecosystems;
2. CALLS ON European countries to incorporate into their water policies elements to:
 - (a) preserve all remaining wild and semi-wild rivers in a state close to natural;

- (b) cease some programmes for river channelization and damming, especially those initiated before the adoption of the EU Water Framework Directive;
 - (c) prepare independent strategic environmental impact assessments of the economic and ecological consequences of river regulation projects before they are undertaken; and
 - (d) initiate programmes to 're-naturalize' some river sections, aiming to prevent the loss of the biological elements native to particular catchment areas;
3. URGES relevant European States to conserve the last of the European wild rivers, such as Belaya, Danube delta, Desna, Dnepr, Loire, Northern Dwina & Youg, Oka, Pechora, Pripjet, Sava, Tisza, Udaj, Ural, Viatka, Vistula, Volga delta, Vychegda, West Dwina – Daugava, and a number of smaller rivers;
4. URGES IUCN to:
- (a) review and if necessary promote further development of an international classification of river and river-valley categories from the point of view of the degree of their naturalness; and
 - (b) prepare of a list of the most valuable rivers and river-valleys or their sections in Europe.

This Resolution was adopted by consensus. State and Agency members United States refrained from engaging in deliberations on this Motion and took no national government position on the Resolution as adopted, for reasons given in the US General Statement on the IUCN Resolutions Process (see p. 76).