



## CASE STUDY

# Slovenia: Ecosystem restoration of Lake Cerknica



### Summary

The phenomenon of intermittent Lake Cerknica has become famous worldwide as an area where cattle can graze, farmers can plow fields, catch fish and drive boats in the same place. A project supported by EU funding aimed to restore the unique ecosystem of Lake Cerknica. This project was possible due to a favorable legal setting - Lake Cerknica was included in a European network of nature protection areas Natura 2000.

### Background

Cerknica lake is one of the most important Slovenian Karst sights known worldwide. When the water level is highest it covers over 29 km<sup>2</sup>. That area also represents the project area. Lake's most significant characteristic is its intermittent nature which gives this unique area a special charm. Due to this variability, special ecological conditions were created on the lake that enable rich diversity of animal and plant species and their habitats. Factors that threaten the biodiversity on Lake Cerknica are modified watercourses, abandoning of meadow mowing and deficient knowledge of nature and its conservation. In the past people wanted either to drain or to flood the lake for their benefit. Many interventions were carried out on lake's watercourses and sinkholes that changed the water regime on the lake. The result of the changed water regime is a lower ground water level and faster drying of the lake that has a negative influence on water organisms and habitats. With the act and establishment of a public institution Notranjska Regional Park in 2002 the lake has gained the legal protection. Additionally, Lake Cerknica was included in an European network of nature protection areas Natura 2000 because of the presence of certain bird species and in 2006 it was registered as Ramsar site beside two other Slovenian wetlands of international importance.

## **Actions taken**

A project (2007-2009) supported by EU funding (LIFE06NAT/SLO/000069) aimed to restore the unique ecosystem of Lake Cerknica. The main focus was to achieve the prolongation of the drainage time and to hold back the water in the driest summer months. This expected to raise the level of groundwater, particularly close to riverbeds or watercourses, crucial for conserving endangered habitat types and species.

Project partners mapped the lake area to precisely identify the great diversity of habitats present over the 29 km<sup>2</sup>. Another partner provided complementary watercourse mapping and geological probing, which generated topographical maps, watercourse profiles, and the depth and composition of soil along 12 km of filled watercourses. This vital information enabled the team to draft a Management Plan to guide the project and future watercourse restoration actions. About 260 ha of land were purchased for long term protection of wildlife and conservation of cultural and natural heritage. Unwanted flora (e.g. coppice) was removed. In addition, education of youth on the importance of nature conservation and popularization of the project was conducted presenting the project to school

children with educational activities and excursions. The project was highly active in engaging the public, including through information notices in a shopping centre, published materials and lakeside boards. It also conducted nature protection actions with a network of schools and held three summer research camps.

## **Outcomes**

Confirmation and funding of the project LIFE 06/NAT/SI/000069 "Intermittent Lake Cerknica" by the European Union is yet another evidence of exceptionality of this area, not only for Slovenia but for Europe as well. The project represents an important step towards a greater recognition of the area and the education of the local inhabitants on the meaning and importance of this unique place and about the importance of natural and cultural heritage preservation not only for diverse animal and plant life of Lake Cerknica and the lake itself but also for the people and our descendants.

A special importance in the underwent project activities goes to Cerknica municipality. Being the first local community that tried and carried out the buying of farm land for permanent protection it gave a good example in the scope of nature protection.

In Notranjska Regional Park an even development of agriculture, forestry, fishing, tourism, recreation and education in accordance with natural values is assured. Furthermore favourable conditions for the development of the area and its inhabitants are prioritized.

As a result, sustainable use of natural resources, life in harmony with nature and other inhabitants of this area are promoted.

Project LIFE 06/NAT/SI/000069 "Intermittent Lake Cerknica" has undoubtedly contributed to better reception and understanding of the Natura 2000 network not only on local but on global level as well.

## **Lessons Learned**

It is important to involve and inform the public about the importance of the project. In addition to books and booklets produced there were more than 250 educational activities with school and kindergarten children.

Managers in other protected areas can look at this project as a sample of good practice in wildlife protection through land acquisition.

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**Supporting Materials**

GWP Central and Eastern Europe

Summary of the project

Conservation Plan for After LIFE period

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**Related IWRM Tools**

Policies with Relation to Water Resources, Basin Management Plans, Local Authorities, Civil Society Organisations , Youth Engagement and Empowerment

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