

A BUND project for vital floodplains

BUND's floodplain centre in Burg Lenzen was able to save one of these special habitats: the Hohe Garbe in the north of Saxony-Anhalt. Stretching 420 hectares along the former border between East and West Germany, it is one of the largest floodplain forests in the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Elbe River Landscape. The dense tree population and ample deadwood form an ideal habitat for rare species such as the black stork, the white-tailed eagle, and the European otter.

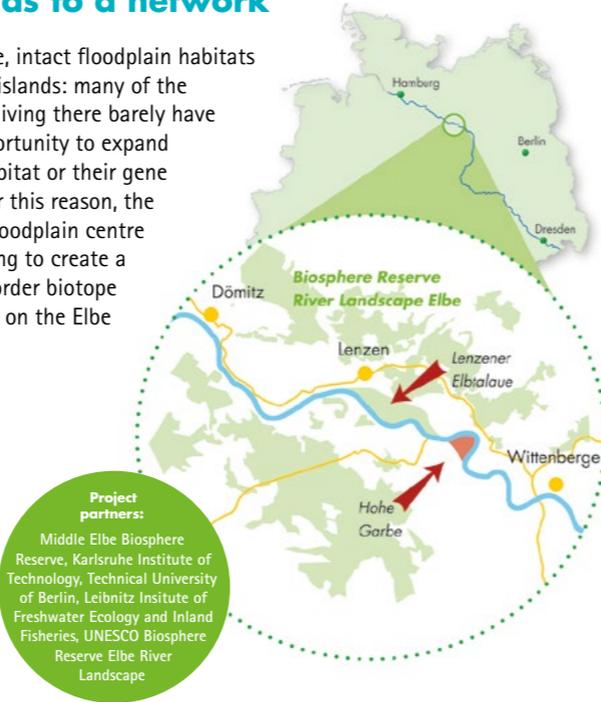
However, the dynamic of rising and falling water levels was long interrupted in Hohe Garbe. An old, obsolete dike cut the area off from the Elbe River. Water made it over the barrier only during major floods, and then it was hardly able to drain off: atypical conditions for a floodplain and a threat to biodiversity. The old trees were at risk of dying and common floodplain plants and animals threatened to disappear.

With the project "Vital Floodplains along the Elbe River", the BUND floodplain centre has reconnected the Hohe Garbe with the natural dynamics of the Elbe River. Now the water brings diverse life to the old forest and the surrounding meadows. We achieved this through numerous coordinated measures and the active help of many supporters.



From individual floodplain islands to a network

Separate, intact floodplain habitats are like islands: many of the species living there barely have the opportunity to expand their habitat or their gene pool. For this reason, the BUND floodplain centre is working to create a cross-border biotope network on the Elbe River.



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VITAL FLOODPLAINS ALONG THE ELBE RIVER

Creating diversity – inspiring people



Riverine floodplains – a unique habitat



Floodplains are natural stretches of land shaped by the dynamics of rivers. The rise and fall of water levels creates a rich mosaic of diverse habitats that allow numerous rare plants and animals to thrive in close proximity. Healthy floodplains are thus among the most species-rich ecosystems in Central Europe.

However, our natural floodplains have already largely disappeared as a result of river regulation, the fortification of banks and, in particular, the construction of dikes. Today only a third of Germany's original floodplains still exist; along the major rivers, this figure drops to between 10 and 20 percent. Of these, only 10 percent are considered ecologically intact.

Yet healthy floodplains are of great value to our society: they protect against flooding, efficiently store carbon dioxide, filter the water, and serve as nurseries for numerous species of fish. Like a sponge, they soak up and retain water in the landscape. They cool the environment in hot weather, and protect entire stretches of land from drying up. Pristine floodplains also provide people with popular recreational areas.



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Burg Lenzen (Elbe)

Mission accomplished!

At a glance: all the measures taken and successful outcomes at Hohe Garbe



Areas for floodplain development

In a land consolidation procedure, BUND acquired a patchwork of small scattered areas from various owners spanning more than 130 hectares in total. Joined together, they met the requirements for implementing the rewilding measures.

The old forest can grow again

From now on, this forest will be allowed to develop naturally, without human intervention, and even expand another 40 hectares to reach a total of 225 hectares. To support the process, with the help of schoolchildren and local residents, we planted around 14,000 common floodplain trees and shrubs.



Treasure island

Until the mid-nineteenth century, the Lower and Middle Elbe River was home to numerous islands and side channels. They mostly disappeared when the river was regulated to accommodate shipping traffic. By dredging a partly silted side channel stretching almost two kilometres, we returned the Kälberwerder Island to the Elbe River. The side channel is now an important habitat for young fish that thrive in the current, such as European pikeperch, ide and asp.



New dike

Old dike



New life along the waters

In and around the artificial body of water that was formed during the construction of the new dike we created new habitats: flattened zones along the bank now serve as nurseries for young fish and sand martins are already breeding in the elevated steep walls. Next door, fire-bellied toads, moor frogs and the like quickly moved into the excavated pools.



Experience the floodplains

The BUND visitor centre in Burg Lenzen has various programmes to teach both young and old about the value of healthy floodplains. The "research backpack" is an ideal companion for exploring the floodplain realm in the castle park – playfully and with all the senses. Children can enjoy *The Auenelf* (The Floodplain Elf), an enthralling puppet show.



Using excavators to re-join the river with the floodplain



Two silted-up flood channels were excavated and deepened, and the old dike was cut in seven places. Now even smaller floodwaters are once again flowing into and through the floodplain, creating diverse habitats for animals as various as black storks and fire-bellied toads.

A workshop for the floodplains

With our floodplains forum, we have continuously involved local residents and regional players in our decision-making. We have voted on measures and implemented them together, such as our planting campaign. Information evenings, walks through the project area, and a regional floodplains newspaper all proved suitable formats for carrying on an in-depth conversation about the project.



A perfect daytrip

With the floodplains tour app, visitors can cycle a loop trail and explore the former border region's multifaceted nature, culture, and history.

