



**Grünes Band
Deutschland**

*30 Jahre grenzenlose
Liebe zur Natur*

BUND
FRIENDS OF THE EARTH GERMANY

The *BUND* connects The **Green**Belt

**Long-term work
for a vision**

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in Bayern e.V.





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A reminder to think



»The Green Belt is not merely a symbol of the desire for community and collaboration, but an indicator.«

The Green Belt is a memorial of a special kind: it provides a haunting reminder of the **inhumane division of Germany** and Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War. But it does so in an unassuming way, without feigning concern or apportioning blame. Instead of pointing the usual accusatory finger, it lays no claim to eternity, but nestles in the landscape, staking out its extensive yet all-too vulnerable territory. It is an expression of deliberately exercising restraint in how land is used – and hence serves as a prototype for a »green infrastructure« aimed at preserving biodiversity. The Green Belt will survive just as long as there is a will to preserve it. Consequently, it is not merely a symbol of the desire for community and collaboration, but an indicator – one that shows an ever stronger leaning towards green thinking.



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greener

What conservationists from East and West called for at their first meeting in the wake of German reunification was **provocative and bold**: the border strip – an area taken over by nature – was to be given “priority protection as a Green Belt and the ecological backbone of Central Europe”.

It was Friends of the Earth Germany (Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland e.V. – BUND) that provided the impetus and scientific basis for this idea.

In day-to-day practice, this seemingly straightforward concept has proved extremely unwieldy for politicians and conservationists alike. Since that initial meeting, the association has been working tirelessly to perfect strategies, alliances and concepts for the Green Belt. Within a quarter of a century, this has become the most important national and international project for the BUND and its regional branches, one whose symbolism and reach transcends all administrative, departmental and **even national boundaries**. Amid the diverse natural landscapes and wildernesses along the former Iron Curtain, there is a network of habitats emerging that is unique the world over. At the same time, new economic opportunities in ecologically sustainable tourism are opening up for many border regions previously in decline. There can be no more convincing or sympathetic way of promoting international understanding and peace – even with the help of nature.●

November 1989 „The border strip is literally a “refuge” and at the same time a vast “connection of habitats” running through whole Germany. The BN urges for this green belt of the border strip to be protected as a contiguous nature conservation area.”
Hubert Weiger

January 1991 „This one time only chance for nature conservation is within our reach, but in danger to slip away: (...) Crucial threats are road construction and agriculture.”
Kai Frobels

November 2014 „The Green Belt could become a National Nature Monument today. The death strip has become a life line, future generations will thank us for this.”
Hubert Weiger

July 2014 „Two-thirds of the Green Belt’s area are protected. That is quite a success in a densely populated country like Germany, where every square metre is made use of by somebody.”
Kai Frobels

»Amid the diverse
natural landscapes
there is a network of
habitats emerging
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world over.«





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The Green Belt – a cross-section of habitats

The inner-German border caused huge disruption in human lives and nature. It tore apart the country **along a distance of almost 1,400 kilometres** – making no distinction between forests, lakes, marshes, heaths, pastures, arable fields, farmsteads or villages – and shaped the fate of the people as well as the face of the landscape.

Nature coped far better with this disruption than the human inhabitants. Under the dubious protection of barbed wire and border patrols, it was left to its own devices for decades. The already near-natural and valuable sections of the landscape developed into veritable treasure troves for nature conservationists: near-natural forests, tall-grass and tall-forb meadows, dry grasslands, wet meadows and marshes – a whole spectrum of habitats pressed for space in today's cultural landscape – form a swath of priceless natural heritage, the »Green Belt«.

It is held together by land once used for agricultural purposes and seemingly less valuable at first sight. Here too, the **East German border guards proved to be unwitting guardians of the landscape**. In the interests of improving visibility, they regularly cut back the vegetation. This resulted in areas of fallow land and open-land habitats at differing stages of development that helped animals and plants proliferate.

Volunteer experts from the »Coburg Working Group for Ecology« (»Arbeitskreis Ökologie Coburg« within the Bavarian branch of the BUND (BUND Naturschutz Bayern – BN) had recognised the value of this unofficial protected area very early on. Unlike their colleagues from the East, they were able to get very close to the border. And unlike the nature conservation authorities in the West, they did not have to worry about territorial powers or boundaries when carrying out their observations. Armed with field glasses and a spotting scope, they mapped Coburg's bird life as early as 1975 under the wary eye of the border guards.

»Nature coped far better with this disruption than the human inhabitants.«



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»Hundreds of
red-listed species
had sought refuge
in the Green Belt.«



The birds themselves were unperturbed by the formidable border: they used the fences as vantage points or singing perches and for showing off their plumage. **The observers in the West could hardly believe their eyes:** numerous endangered species such as the great grey shrike, the common redpoll, the European nightjar and the whinchat appeared to be thriving in the border strip. The ornithologists soon realised that most of the birds did not actually live in the observation territory, but on its outer edge.

Further investigations carried out by the BUND along all 140 kilometres of the border area curving around the region of Coburg confirmed these findings to be true of the fauna and flora in general: hundreds of red-listed species had sought refuge in what is now known as the Green Belt.

However, what makes this area so valuable is not only the fact that it serves as a retreat, but above all the diversity and close connectivity of the habitats. Tall-grass fallows border on sedge fens, for example, dry grasslands on mature woodlands, or softwood plains on marshes and mixed oak forests.

While elsewhere there is fierce competition for every inch of land around the edges of fields and every hedgerow or forest perimeter, this area is **the largest functioning ecological corridor in Germany.** Even today, two and a half decades since the border fortifications were torn down, the cleft in the landscape is clearly visible from the air as a green line.

Like a quarry or geological outcrop, the border strip cuts through the landscape and includes a cross-section of habitats, extending from the Bay of Lübeck to Lake Schaalsee, the Elbe lowlands, the Drömling, Harz and Eichsfeld regions, the Werra Valley and the Rhön, all the way down to the Thuringian and Franconian Forests. Over an area measuring a total of 177 square kilometres, it features typical natural landscapes and **almost 150 different types of habitat** that have long since ceded to a monotonous array of arable fields, spruce forests and nutrient-rich meadows in



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the surrounding agricultural landscape. The Green Belt harbours immense biodiversity: it is home to over 5,000 animal and plant species, including at least 1,200 that are endangered or threatened with extinction.

This in itself is reason enough to protect the Green Belt in the form of a nationwide conservation project. However, it also provides a fascinating opportunity to maintain a living memorial to Germany's history in the former death strip. After all, what could be more apt than a belt of unspoilt nature for illustrating Willy Brandt's famous words, »Now what belongs together will grow together«?

Since the turn of the millennium, this vision has become reality to a large extent. Just under two-thirds of the territory covered by the Green Belt is protected under the **European Natura 2000 scheme**. National nature conservation areas, which often overlap with European ones, account for approximately 30 per cent of the Green Belt. Around 87 per cent has been spared new utilisation. This is thanks to the concerted efforts of a large number of partnering organisations – including the BUND and other nature conservation associations, government agencies such as the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (Bundesamt für Naturschutz – BfN), as well as numerous supporters from administrative bodies, industry and tourism and an international network of experts – all of whom have worked tirelessly on developing a Green Belt for Europe. Since 1999, the first point of contact and coordinating body for all these activities has been the »BUND Project Office Green Belt«.

Yet, despite numerous successes, the Green Belt is by no means safe for all time. Roughly one-third of the Green Belt remains completely unprotected to this day. Given the lack of suitable nature conservation instruments for such a complex entity, the Green Belt is far more dependent on the good will of all the parties involved than national parks or »ordinary« conservation areas.

»Yet, despite numerous successes, the Green Belt is by no means safe for all time.«



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From wooden





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stake to Iron Curtain

November '89 on the border near Hof: an endless convoy of »Trabis« heads towards the West in the cold light of dusk. The tourists celebrating the fall of the Berlin Wall wave enthusiastically from their car windows. One of the border guards is overwhelmed by emotion. He takes a baby from the pram of a mother from Upper Franconia, holds it up in the air and shouts: »This is revolution, boy!«

Eleven months later, there was only one Germany. [The world's most inhumane border](#) had become obsolete; almost 1,400 kilometres of »anti-fascist protective wall« were suddenly a chapter of the past.

It had all started with simple wooden stakes. The Allied victors of the Second World War had merely staked out the line between the East and West sectors. It soon became clear, however, that ideological differences would make the planned joint administration of Germany impossible. Many people displaced by the war opted for the West: despite increasing controls on the Soviet side, approximately 1.6 million people fled to the West in the first few months.

It was not until the founding of the two German states in 1949 that the demarcation line became a true border. For a few years, it remained relatively penetrable, and increasing numbers of people sceptical of the "Workers' and Farmers' Republic" took advantage of the situation to defect to the West. This caused unease among East Germany's political leaders. In [1952, they closed the Iron Curtain](#): Virtually all transit routes were cut off. Before long, a wire fence was erected the full length of the border, along with a ten-metre-wide protective strip (Schutzstreifen) of ploughed land that was off-limits for civilians. Strict regulations were imposed on all those living within 500 metres of the border. Without approval, they were not even allowed to make changes to their own gardens, and it was forbidden to walk about the streets at night. All those living within five kilometres of the border were also threatened with reprisals: they had to register with the East German police and





have their ID cards endorsed. Outsiders were only allowed to enter the zone with a special pass.

Dark times also befell the borderlands in the West. Many communities lost part of their hinterland. One such »balcony community« was the little town of Heldra near Eschwege: three-quarters of the surrounding area was suddenly dominated by concrete and barbed wire. Another example was the village of Mödlareuth between Thuringia and Bavaria, which [was divided in two](#) by a wall. The Americans called it »Little Berlin«.

In the West, many people left the border region due to sheer economic hardship; in the East, the government achieved the same effect via a series of resettlement programmes. In the course of a purge referred to internally as »Operation Vermin«, around 11,000 »unreliable elements« were forcibly resettled from the restricted zone to the country's interior.

However, the tightening of the border regime did not prevent increasing numbers of people from fleeing, albeit predominantly via Berlin, where the border crossings were still open. In total, around 2.7 million people had left East Germany by 1961, i.e. almost one-seventh of the population. Demographic collapse could only be averted by even more drastic measures. The regime invested billions in strengthening the border fortifications. [West Berlin was literally walled in](#) – although the word »wall« glosses over the horrendous security systems. Even the rest of the inner-German border was mercilessly sealed off: expanded metal fencing, minefields, self-firing devices, alarm systems and guard dogs made it virtually impossible to escape from East Germany. Strict surveillance was nevertheless deemed imperative. [Around 38,000 border guards](#) took to their stations – statistically, one every 40 metres.

By 1966, when the anti-vehicle ditches were excavated, even the most loyal of East German citizens must have realised what the so-called »anti-fascist protective wall« actually meant. The civil rights activist Rainer Eppelmann called it »lifelong socialist imprisonment«. It was to last a further 23 long years and cost the lives of 900 »barrier crashers«, the last of whom was Chris Gueffroy. He died at the Berlin Wall – only 10 months prior to the Wall coming down in November 1989.

»In the course of a purge referred to internally as »Operation Vermin«, around 11,000 »unreliable elements« were forcibly resettled from the restricted zone to the country's interior.«



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Duty-bound by heritage

Without a will or an executor, disputes are inevitable. This also applies to natural legacies such as the Green Belt. For the most part, it consists of plots of land which initially became the property of the Federal Republic of Germany on the demise of the GDR. Helping the true heirs, i.e. the previously expropriated owners or their descendants, get justice was far from easy. The German Property Act (Vermögensgesetz), intended to provide compensation, did not apply to plots of land in the immediate vicinity of the Wall or border. In principle, the expropriations were legitimate. They had served a public purpose, and the GDR had granted pro forma compensation at least. But weren't border fortifications and minefields something different after all?

In 1996, following a lengthy dispute, **the Wall Land Act (Mauergrundstücksgesetz)** came into force, allowing all previous landowners to either buy back their former plots of land at a special price of 25 per cent of the market value or to claim 75 percent compensation if the government wanted to retain the land for its own purposes.

However, the main issues of contention were the top properties in the vicinity of the Berlin Wall. In dealing with this delicate historical issue, the legislators had



Nürnbergers Nachrichten
03.10.2007

Biotop todgeweiht?

Frühere DDR-Grenze umweltpolitisches Niemandsland

VON WOLF-DIETRICH NAHR

Bedrohte Tier- und Pflanzenarten wären das insgesamt etwa fünf Millionen überleben im Schutz des ehemaligen DDR-Todesstreifens an der früheren DDR-Grenze. Doch das regige und einzigartigste Biotop droht nun buchstäblich unter die Räder zu kommen, weil sich Bund und Länder über bürokratische Details streiten.

NÜRNBERG – Direkt an Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel richtet Hubert Weiger seinen „eindringlichen Appell“ – und das bewusst kurz vor dem heutigen Tag der Deutschen Einheit. Die Regierungskonferenz im Reichstag, die Finanzminister Peer Steinbrück ihren Finanzminister Peer Steinbrück einwirken. Und auf den Haushaltsausschuss des Bundestages: „Wir müssen politischen Druck erhöhen, sonst wird nichts“, sagte der Vorsitzende des Ausschusses für Naturschutz und Pflanzenschutz.

Der Bund der Naturschutz befürchtet, dass die Biotopflächen von unschätzbarem Naturschutzwert früher oder später „verschleudert“ werden. Aus dem grünen Band wird dann ein braunes Band. Schon jetzt ist ein Fünftel des ehemaligen Grenzstreifens wieder in Privatbesitz. Die Biotopflächen inmitten von intensiv bewirtschaftetem Agrarland seien oft die einzigen Rückzugsräume für etwa 600 bedrohte Tier- und Pflanzenarten.

„Nationale Blamage“ richtet sich etwa 100 Meter von



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»For years, the BUND demanded that the plots of land in the Green Belt be handed over to the regional states free of charge for nature conservation purposes.«

completely lost sight of the consequences for nature conservation along the former inner-German border. Nor did they realise that the protection of the Green Belt was a matter of public interest which, in some instances, might far outweigh any individual's claim to his granddad's long-forgotten piece of arable land.

Hence, the return of the plots of land along the border to their previous owners commenced in 1996: all **4,053 applications** were processed with the exception of a handful of very complicated cases. This resulted in the repurchase of around 1,800 plots measuring a total of just under 2,000 hectares.

In isolated cases, the BUND succeeded in coming to an agreement with applicants and tax authorities prior to the land being returned. It paid the normal purchase price, three-quarters of which went to the previous owners and one-quarter to the tax authorities – almost as intended by the Wall Land Act, but with the important difference that the land was earmarked solely for nature conservation. However, some agricultural cooperatives were even more proficient in this practice. Many areas of value for the Green Belt fell into the hands of large agricultural firms. In total, around one-tenth of the Green Belt was practically lost to nature conservation due to the enforcement of the Wall Land Act. And as if that were not enough, the Wall Land Act and the Federal Budget Code (Bundeshaushaltsordnung) resulted in a **general utilisation obligation**, which also applied to the remaining 55 per cent of the Green Belt still belonging to the German state.

For years, the BUND called for the plots of land in the Green Belt to be handed over to the regional states (Länder) free of charge for nature conservation purposes or sold to nature conservation associations at symbolic prices. However, the tax authorities pointed out that according to the Basic Law (Grundgesetz) nature conservation was the responsibility of the regional states and therefore did not class as a national government objective. In 1998, the BUND did at least manage to convince the Ministry of the Environment and Finance (Umwelt- und Finanzministerium) along with the agency responsible for the administration and privatisation of state-owned farm and forest land in Eastern Germany (Bodenverwertungs- und -verwaltungs GmbH) to put a **temporary stop to the sale of »nature conservation areas«**. The term was broadly defined to include anything from nature conservation areas protected





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by law to areas of land deemed valuable based on mapping operations carried out by the regional states. However, in practice this meant that the regional states and nature conservation associations were merely given the right of first refusal to purchase these plots of land – at full market value, needless to say. It was therefore inevitable that private buyers would ultimately prevail in most cases.

Given the magnitude of the legacy, the BUND's tenacious commitment to preserving the Green Belt, including its fundraising activities and land purchases, had little more than token value. It was the German federal government that was calling the shots. As early as 2003, Federal Finance Minister Hans Eichel indicated that the federal government was willing in principle »... to transfer ownership of land falling under the Wall Land Act to the regional states free of charge«. That is precisely what the winners of the 2005 parliamentary election laid down in the coalition agreement, declaring their intention to **protect the Green Belt as an area of national natural heritage**. However, the devil is in the detail, as seen from the fact that the budget committee of the German federal parliament (Bundestag) not only wanted to transfer ownership of the land, but also the costs of the forestry commission rangers working there. The regional states deemed this unacceptable and initially rejected the donations of land, no longer considering them quite so generous.

As a result, it took a full five years for the Green Belt to **»reach its heyday«** in October 2008: Thuringia decided to take ownership of around 3,900 hectares of the former death strip, assigning it to the nature conservation foundation owned by the regional state (Stiftung Naturschutz Thüringen). This meant that in one fell swoop a large part of the Green Belt had been withdrawn from the reach of private interests. One by one, the other neighbouring states of Brandenburg, Lower Saxony, Saxony, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Saxony-Anhalt followed suit. The land transfer was not fully completed until 2011. Since that time, just under half of the Green Belt has been directly dedicated to nature conservation; though long-overdue, this is a triumph for the BUND, which has been engaged in tireless lobbying in Berlin and with the regional state governments. Now the regional states **»merely«** need to prove themselves worthy of this legacy. One way in which they can do this is by terminating lease agreements for arable land as soon as possible or amending them in line with nature conservation principles – instead of using the income to finance maintenance measures a few kilometres further up the road. ●



»In one fell swoop a large part of the Green Belt had been withdrawn from the reach of private interests.«

On the lookout for shrikes



As a boy, Kai Frobel had hoped to win first prize in the competition entitled »Youth Discovers Nature« (Jugend entdeckt Natur). But he could never have anticipated that his competition entry would mark the start of what is probably Europe's most important international conservation project – and shape his entire professional life. As a pupil back in 1975, he studied the border strip, which ran not far from his parental home. Almost every day, he observed bird species there that were virtually non-existent elsewhere. In addition, he often took his youth group belonging to the Bavarian branch of the BUND (BN) on excursions to the so-called upstream territory of East Germany. In 1977, he summarised his findings for the competition in an »attempt at an ecological spatial analysis«. For the first time, this included a description of the special habitat structure of the border strip: »Above all, the strip leading up to the first metal mesh fence is the most untouched area of the entire territory under investigation. This strip of land measuring between 30 and 80 metres in width (...), which is mostly covered with tall grasses, bushes, hedgerows, small pine and birch trees, is home to small game as well as the great grey shrike, red-backed shrike, whinchat and – in marshy areas – the common snipe and the golden oriole.«

For the budding scientist, however, winning prizes was not as important as making new discoveries. Together with other young people and wildlife conservation experts from the Coburg district division of the BN, he founded the »Coburg Working Group for Ecology« (Arbeitskreis Ökologie Coburg). They set themselves the enormous task of **mapping the flora and fauna of the entire Coburg region**, i.e. an area covering over 1,000 square kilometres. Thanks to Frobel's school project 140 kilometres of the East German border strip were also included – comprising habitats which did not actually form part of the territory being investigated.

Under the coordination of the working group, **between 40 and 80 volunteer cartographers swarmed across the area over a period of five years**, collecting almost **50,000 individual items of data about 269 animal and plant species**.

Initially, the purpose of the study was to encourage nature conservation in town and country planning in general. Perhaps more important in the long term, it was the first study to provide reliable information about the potential of nature along the inner-German border, and hence formed the basis for all further conservation efforts. By way of

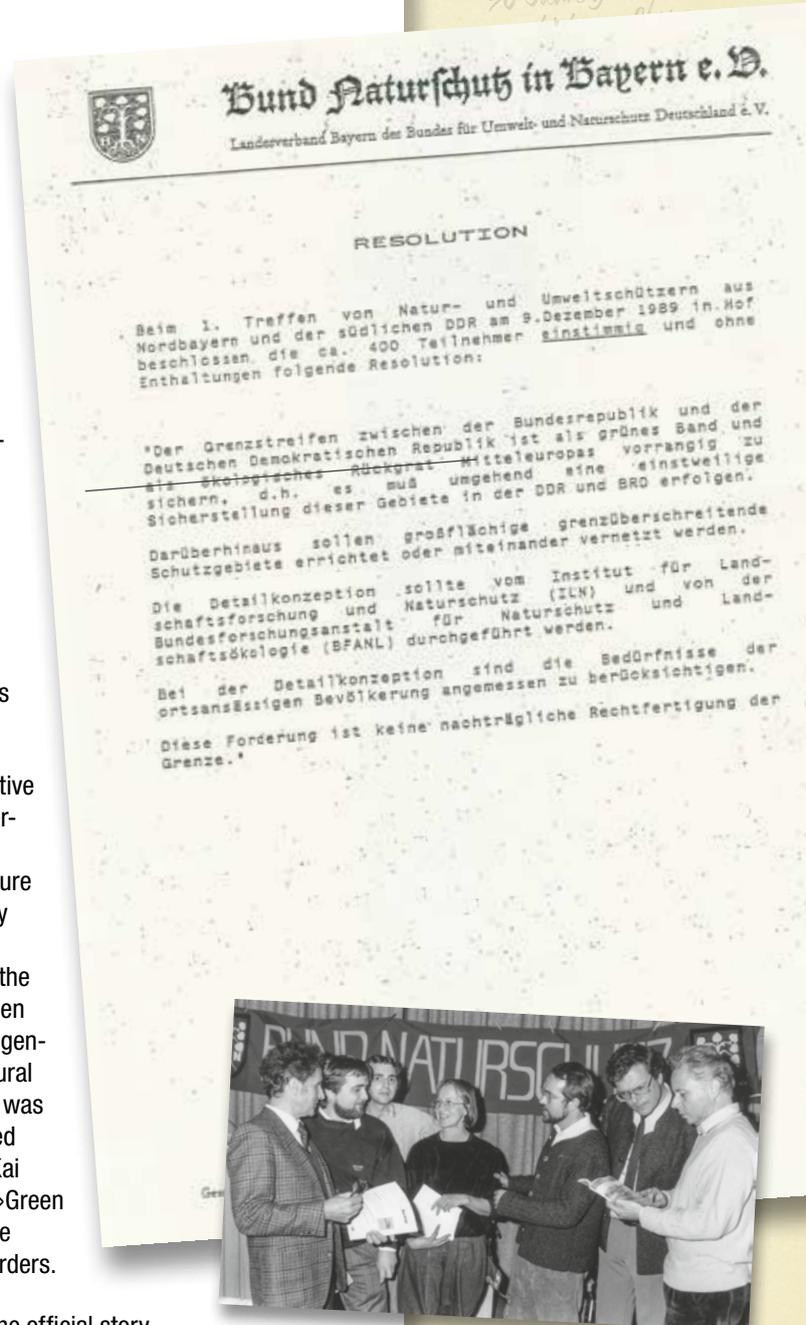
example, the Coburg district division of the BN succeeded in exerting influence, via the border commission, on East Germany's plans to expand the border fortifications, thus preventing the drainage of the Rottenbach marshes. In addition, the Kronach district division of the BN acquired several hectares of the most important marshland on the Bavarian side – **the first purchase of land at the Green Belt by the BUND.**

This demonstrates that it was not the nature conservation authorities, nor a ministry, nor a regional or national government agency that established the outstanding value of what was to become the Green Belt, but pupils, students, working people and pensioners belonging to the BN – without so much as a service contract, travel allowance, or government aid of any kind. And that undoubtedly had something to do with Kai Frobels ability to spread enthusiasm for nature. So still today he is seen as the »Father of the Green Belt«.

However, it was not until after the fall of the Wall that he gave his "baby" this name. Invited by Kai Frobels and the BN, nature conservationists and environmentalists from both German states first met officially in Hof on 9 December 1989.

Kai Frobels and Hubert Weiger, the association's then representative for North Bavaria, had previously established contact to East Germany: with independent environmental groups affiliated to the Church, as well as nature conservationists linked to the Culture Federation (Kulturbund) and specialist authorities. However, they had not anticipated anything like the volume of interest: **around 400 participants from the whole of East Germany** crowded into the »Eisteich« pub. The chaos and stifling atmosphere did not dampen the enthusiasm for the opportunities of the new era. There was general consensus that the border strip should be left in a near-natural state and become the ecological backbone of Central Europe. It was also blatantly obvious that the habitat structures that had evolved over a period of decades were now under considerable threat. Kai Frobels summed up the conservation concept by using the term »Green Belt«. **A unanimous resolution was passed** that even included the tentative idea of extending the Green Belt beyond Germany's borders.

Following these concealed beginnings in the hinterland of Hof, the official story of the Green Belt began. **It became and still is one of the BUND's most important projects.** And even if numerous fellow campaigners have since been rallying to the cause, the BUND has generally retained overall control.



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»The new story carrying the headline »From death strip to lifeline« was thought sure to resonate with the public.«



Career of an idea

Following the inspirational kickoff meeting in Hof, the aim was to raise awareness of the Green Belt. However, there was concern within the BUND that the organisation would be accused of making light of the murderous border and wanting to preserve it. It became clear at the very first press conference held in Coburg in 1981 that these misgivings were unfounded. The press representatives were visibly impressed by the depiction of the »death strip as a place of refuge«.

In the then prevailing climate of mutual pledges between the two German states, the new story carrying the headline »From death strip to lifeline« was thought sure to resonate with the public. In 1990, as soon as weather allowed, the BUND organised its first supraregional **press trip to the borderland habitats** in Steinachtal and Frankenwald. This is what first sparked broad, well-meaning interest in the Green Belt. From then on, the media reported in great detail about the »historic opportunity for nature conservation«. Public authorities, institutions and politicians from all camps expressed their support for the fascinating conservation idea. **Encouragement came from all sides**, even from the federal government. In November 1990, Environment Minister Klaus Töpfer publicly declared his backing for the Green Belt, stating that in the former border zone »special efforts should be undertaken to safeguard and protect as many of the numerous ecologically valuable areas as possible on a permanent basis«.

Unfortunately, words of encouragement were seldom followed by deeds. The Green Belt remained caught up in a precarious tug-of-war between conflicting interests.

Specialist articles, flyers, talks, conferences and press trips were not enough to guarantee success for the BUND. The organisation had to intervene at a local and political level, more than ever because the momentum of the early



Pflüge zerreißen „Grünes Band“

Agrarpolitischer Widersinn: Thüringen läßt Brachflächen aktivieren, Bayern legt still

Von Peter Engelbrecht

COBURG (RNT). Ein Brachungsgebiet seltener Tier- und Pflanzenarten hätte es werden sollen, doch inzwischen ist das „Grüne Band“ entlang der 1389 Kilometer langen früheren deutsch-deutschen Grenze teilweise zerstört.

Der Bund Naturschutz in Bayern legte nun erstmals Zahlen vor, die auf einer Luftbild-Auswertung der 670 Kilometer langen Landesgrenze von Thüringen zu Bayern und Hessen beruhen. Ergebnis: Rund fünf Prozent des „Grünen Bandes“ sind dem Pflug zum Opfer gefallen und total zerstört. Etwa 20 Prozent der wertvollen Flächen im mehr als 30 Meter breiten Grenzstreifen sind beschädigt, hauptsächlich durch Umpflügen oder intensive Grünlandnutzung. Lediglich an drei Stellen wurden Negativfolgen durch Gewerbegebiete oder Sandabbau festgestellt, berichtet der Artenschutzreferent des Bundes Naturschutz, Kai Frobel.

Besonders dramatisch stellt sich die Situation in Gebieten dar, in denen die „Grüne Band“-Landschaften genutzt werden. In der Gegend um Sonneberger Unterland oder im Bereich des Rodach/Melrichstadt hingegen blieb der Grenzstreifen überall dort, wo er sich durch geschlossene Forstflächen schlängelt, etwa im Frankenswald, voll erhalten, etwa im Geo-Ökologe im Totesstreifen 40 Jahre lang ungestört blieb, entwickelte sich ein Bienenweide aus Brachland, Feuchtwiesen und Wald - ein Refugium seltener Tierarten wie Braunkehlchen, Schwarzstorch



Nabe Sonneberg in Südthüringen - hier ist das „Grüne Band“ geblieben.

Landwirtschaftsministers Volker Sklenar (CDU), der seine Landwirtschaftsminister aufgedrängt hatte, die Möglichkeiten der bayerischen Landesregierung zu prüfen. Dies stieß seinerzeit beim bayerischen Umweltminister Thomas Goppel (CSU) auf energiegelichen Protest. Goppel bezeichnete den ehemaligen Grenzstreifen als europaweit einmalige Biotope, die es zu erhalten gelte.

Frankenpost

ZEITSPIEGEL

Hilferuf des Bundes Naturschutz für ehemaligen Grenzstreifen

„Grünes Band“ in Gefahr



Das war einmal: Grenzgebiete und Natur, die sich in unberührten Bäumen des ehemaligen Grenzstreifen entwickelt hatten. Die Grenzgebiete, denen wertvolle Tier- und Pflanzenarten, sind verschunden; doch auch die Tiere, die dort leben, sind in Gefahr.

BRUNNEN - Das „Grüne Band“ am ehemaligen Grenzstreifen zwischen den beiden deutschen Staaten droht zu zerfallen. Nach Ansicht des Bundes Naturschutz sind sich der Grenzstreifen entlang der 1389 Kilometer langen ehemaligen Grenze zwischen Bayern und Thüringen sowie zwischen Bayern und Hessen teilweise zerstört. Der Landesreferent des Bundes Naturschutz in Bayern, Hubert Kienast, fordert die Bundesregierung, den Grenzstreifen als europaweit einmalige Biotope zu erhalten. Er fordert die Bundesregierung, die Grenzstreifen als europaweit einmalige Biotope zu erhalten.

Ein kurzer Rückblick: Wo die Natur im Totesstreifen 40 Jahre lang ungestört blieb, entwickelte sich ein Bienenweide aus Brachland, Feuchtwiesen und Wald - ein Refugium seltener Tierarten wie Braunkehlchen, Schwarzstorch

years of reunification was having an extremely negative impact on the Green Belt. In many places, grey areas in the law were being shamelessly exploited for rash planning decisions and dubious construction projects.

The BUND campaigned vehemently for the national nature conservation authorities to take an interest in the topic and provide funding. In cooperation with the Bavarian branch of BirdLife International (Landesbund für Vogelschutz), BUND started drawing up detailed species and habitat maps for the border region between Bavaria, Thuringia and Saxony as early as 1990. The cartographers discovered an abundance of rare animal and plant species and were able to demonstrate that **more than 30 endangered bird species** were directly dependent upon the Green Belt. They also made some **unusual insect discoveries**, such as the extremely rare wart-biter cricket. The findings were incorporated in the model conservation concept of the environment agency in Plauen. Soon after, the whole of the Green Belt in Saxony was legally protected. This was a time when the numbers of designated protected areas peaked, with the BUND frequently assisting the conservationists from the government agencies. Today there are **over 150 designated conservation areas** along the Green Belt. They cover almost one third of its length.

Despite these successes, the race against time and commercial interests remained testing, especially in places such as Saxony-Anhalt or Thuringia, where there was considerable pressure to utilise the land. This was due in no small part to the federal government. For many years, the government had failed to promote the Green Belt as a project of national importance, instead treating it with a mixture of goodwill and resignation: while stressing the importance of safeguarding areas of land deemed worthy of protection, it claimed that the regional states were responsible for the practical implementation of the policy.

Ironically, in 1995, the Year of Nature Conservation in which the Green Belt was buoyed by receiving several high awards, the legislator thwarted the plans of many nature conservation associations and local, district and regional governments by passing the Wall Land Act (Mauergesetz) of 1996.



Grünes Band
Schland
grenzenlose
zur Natur



The return of plots of land in the border regions to their previous owners and the sale of land to private individuals made it even more complicated or impossible in many places to protect the Green Belt. This meant the BUND had to **step up its efforts in the »field of real estate«**. The aim was to safeguard valuable habitats by purchasing land. There was also a need for action at the highest possible level, where the formation of the coalition government made up of the Social Democrats and the Bündnis 90/Green Party alliance indicated a possible shift in policy.

In 1998, the BUND actually succeeded in persuading the financial authorities to defer the sellout: for the time being, those areas of land clearly worthy of protection could no longer be sold to private individuals. They could, however, be sold to nature conservation associations. Consequently, the BUND further stepped up its land-purchasing activities.

In order to raise the necessary funds, it has been issuing **»Green Belt share certificates«** since 2002. Every donor to this campaign receives symbolic shares with a **»nominal value«** of 65 euros each. In 2012, a further scheme was launched: **Green Belt sponsorship**. The donations have been used in nine project regions to date, mainly for purchasing plots of land which cannot be adequately protected any other way. In total, 700 hectares have been purchased so far. Donors are invited to the project regions by the BUND and kept informed of what is happening there by means of regular newsletters. The BUND also carries out numerous other activities for the Green Belt that it would never be able to finance without these successful fundraising campaigns.

For a long time, public funding for projects was very limited. Even the environment minister and member of the Green Party, Trittin, took a while to acknowledge the importance of the Green Belt. But in 2001, on the initiative of the BUND, he approved funding for the first nationwide survey of the Green Belt.

The red-green era also saw the amendment of the Federal Nature Conservation Act (Bundesnaturschutzgesetzes) in 2002. It called for a national habitat network covering at least ten per cent of Germany's land area. In many regions, the Green Belt acts as the central axis for this network. By now, the idea of the Green Belt had become so well established that no government could ever seriously consider abandoning it. Consequently, by 2007 the Green Belt had acquired **priority status in environmental policy**: in the federal government's national strategy for biological diversity, it was dubbed a **»flagship project«**. Further accolades followed in 2009, when the Green Belt was included in the federal government's coalition agreement and in the Federal Nature Conservation Act as part of the national habitat network.



Unter großer öffentlicher Beteiligung gestellt. Mit dabei: Sachsen (links) Umweltschirm in Plauen (zweites





Grünes Band
Deutschland

*30 Jahre grenzenlose
Liebe zur Natur*

The Green Belt crowd

Lots of people contribute to the protection of the Green Belt! The Green Belt project would be unthinkable without the tremendous, long-standing dedication of the regional branches of the BUND, the many local and district divisions of the BUND and the BN, the donors, nature conservation associations and foundations, regional and national government agencies, in particular the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN). These photos show just part of the "Green Belt crowd". They are representative of the many people who have genuinely come to care about the Green Belt :





Grünes Band
Deutschland

30 Jahre grenzenlose
Liebe zur Natur

United we stand

»Numerous supporters of the BUND continue to work tirelessly for the Green Belt cause.«



Since 1998, BUND has been coordinating its activities from its headquarters in Nuremberg under the direction of the biologist Liana Geidezis. The four-man team at the BUND Project Office Green Belt performs a wide variety of tasks: submitting applications for and managing major projects funded by third parties, including research and development projects initiated by the BfN or transnational EU projects; organising the purchase of land in close cooperation with local BUND representatives; lobbying at all levels; hosting national and international conventions; and carrying out all the nationwide and international press and PR work. Last but not least, the Project Office serves as an interface for the exchange of information among all parties involved in the Green Belt. More recently, the Project Office has also taken on the role of regional coordinator in the »European Green Belt«. Since 2004, Melanie Kreutz and Liana Geidezis have been chiefly responsible for the exchange of information and data in the Central European Green Belt; this involves initiating and implementing of cross-border projects, as well as organising regular international workshops and conferences.



The tremendous success of the project is owed in no small part to the Project Office's close and long-standing cooperation with the **many colleagues and volunteers** at the regional branches of the BUND, the district and local divisions and the national association of the BUND in Berlin, all of whom handle fundraising activities (share certificates and sponsorships for the Green Belt) as well as PR work. Since 1999, the BUND's regional branches in Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia along with the Ecology Education Institute (Ökologische Bildungstätte) in Upper Franconia (BN-Umweltstation) have made a particularly important contribution to preserving the Green Belt by **purchasing land, predominantly with the help of donations received by the BUND**, and implementing a wide range of nature conservation measures. In charge locally are Dieter Leupold, Karin Kowol and Stefan Beyer, who are assisted by employees and volunteers. Numerous other supporters of the BUND continue to work tirelessly for the Green Belt cause. The "belt of names" on page 24 shows the many active supporters of the BUND who are dedicated to protecting the Green Belt in one way or another.



The success of the Green Belt in Germany and Europe would be unthinkable without the **BUND's various cooperating partners**. These include hundreds of staff employed with the nature conservation authorities of the regional states and the federal government as well as other nature conservation associations such as BirdLife International, WWF or the Heinz Sielmann Foundation. Among the partners are also environment ministries of the federal states, the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation and the Federal Environment Ministry, the district and municipal nature conservation authorities, 19 landscape management associations and 7 tourism organisations as well as the management bodies of 3 biosphere reserves, 17 nature parks and the Harz National Park.

Special mention should be given to the role played by the Ministry of the Environment for Saxony and the State Environmental Protection Agency (Staatliches Umweltfachamt) in Plauen, which have campaigned for the Green Belt right from day one. As early as 1996, the entire 42-kilometre-long stretch of the Green Belt in Saxony was protected by conservation orders. Thuringia's Ministry of the Environment has been all the more forceful in pioneering and setting the pace for the transfer of land to the federal states by coordinating activities and negotiations on a nationwide basis.

The Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) is one of the Project Office's most important partners when it comes to planning and funding research, development and trial projects, or working on major nature conservation projects and the European Green Belt.

At an international level, the EuroNatur Foundation plays a similarly important role as regional coordinator for the Balkan Green Belt.

Today, it is therefore fair to say that the **»death strip to lifeline« idea has caught on** not just in Germany, but throughout the whole of Europe and even worldwide. It is just a shame that nowadays hardly anyone is aware of its early beginnings in the **»Eisteich«** pub or the pioneering work carried out by the BUND Naturschutz.



»The success of the Green Belt would be unthinkable without the BUND's various cooperating partners.«

„Belt of Names“

Heike Albrecht ·
Olaf Bandt · Ralf-
Uwe Beck · Dagmar
Becker · Udo Benker-
Wienands · Gunter Berwing ·
Stefan Beyer · Carl-Wilhelm
Bodenstein-Dresler · Christiane
Bohn · Klaus
Buchin · Reiner
Cornelius · Corinna
Cwielag · Wolfgang
Degelmann · Bastian Erdorf · Matthias Fanck ·
Heide Filoda · Thomas Findeis · Melissa Fischer ·
Dietrich Förster · Monika Frank · Dieter Franz ·
Uwe Friedel · Kai Frobel · Liana Geidezis · Susanne
Gerstner · Lorenz Graf · Franziska Gruler · Heidrun
Heidecke · Frank Henkel · Ron Hoffmann · Mark
Hörstermann · Bernhard Hub · Rolf Jünemann ·
Matthias Kirsten · Rosemarie Kleindl · Svenja Klemm ·
Heinz Klöser · Friedhart Knolle · Ursula Kolowski ·
Elke Körner · Karin Kowol · Melanie Kreutz · Eckart
Krüger · Axel Kruschat · Christian Kunz · Undine
Kurth · Walter Kuttelwascher · Klaus Leidorf ·
Daniela Leitzbach · Dieter Leupold · Jörg Lüth ·
Helmut Maack · Ute Machel · Klaus Mandery ·
Stefanie Markwardt · Hermann Martens · Richard
Mergner · Hellmut Naderer · Christine Neubauer ·
Stephanie Neumann · Jörg Nitsch · Thomas
Norgall · Gundula Oertel · Kerstin Oerter · Olaf
Olejnik · Ine Pentz · Thomas Pitsch · Bettina
Praetorius · Alexander Purps · Thomas Rebhan ·
Frank Reißerweber · Michael Rothkegel ·
Uwe Scheibler · Tino Schlagintweit · Helmut
Schlumprecht · Jörg Schmiedel · Norbert
Sondermann · Karsten Sroka · Traudi, Jürgen
und Christian Starck · Burkhard Vogel · Silvia und
Burkhard Voß · Klaus Vowinkel · Karl-Friedrich
Weber · Sabine Wegendt · Hubert Weiger · Oliver
Wendenkampf · Almuth Wenta · Magnus Wessel ·
Thomas Wey · Nanne Wienands · Hubert Wirsching ·
Horst Worliczek · Angelika Zahrnt...



Grünes Band
Deutschland

Without any claim to be complete: Former and present contributors from the BUND-setting – along with hundreds of deeply committed people in nature conservation authorities, ministries, associations, politics and media!



Grünes Band Deutschland

30 Jahre grenzenlose Liebe zur Natur

-  BUND land purchase regions
-  Green Belt

To sustainably secure valuable habitats along the Green Belt and make them tangible for future generations, BUND purchases land in the Green Belt. So far in nine pilot regions (see map ). Here we carry out various measures with our local groups to protect the precious nature.



Grünes Band Deutschland

*30 Jahre grenzenlose
Liebe zur Natur*

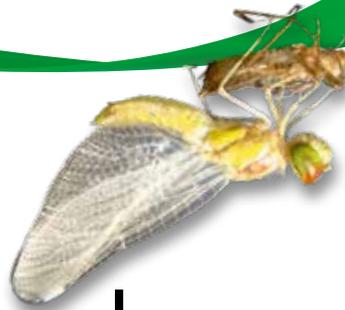
*»It was the first time
that the various types
of habitat along the
Green Belt had been
fully mapped.«*





Grünes Band
Deutschland

30 Jahre grenzenlose
Liebe zur Natur



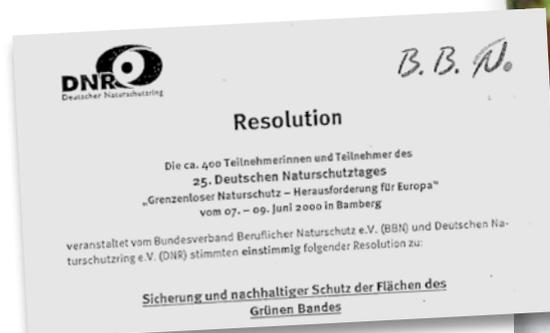
Taking stock of the table silver

The much acclaimed »table silver of German unity« includes not only the large-scale conservation areas such as the Schorfheide-Chorin Biosphere Reserve or the Müritznational Park, but the Green Belt as well. However, for a long time its true value was very difficult to assess. Although numerous maps and concepts had been drawn up for protecting and maintaining individual sections, no survey had ever been done of the wildlife and vegetation along the entire length of the Green Belt. Consequently, there was no scientific basis for implementing the Green Belt conservation concept at a national level.

In June 2000, the Green Belt was made the main theme of the 25th German Nature Conservation Day in Bamberg by the BUND Project Office. The 400 delegates passed an unanimous resolution designating the Green Belt as a »unique opportunity for a historically based nationwide ecological corridor«. At the same time, they urged the regional states to designate protected areas.

The »Trial and Development Project – an Inventory of the Green Belt«, which was funded by the Federal Ministry of the Environment, represented a major step forward. It was the first time that the various types of habitat along the Green Belt had been fully mapped. The project was coordinated by the BUND Project Office Green Belt, with the Office for Ecological Studies in Bayreuth assuming responsibility for the scientific direction.

Six teams of cartographers were on the move from April to September 2001. It was by no means an easy assignment, as the territory was often difficult to access, particularly in places where the patrol track that formerly ran adjacent to the border no longer existed. A good two per cent of the land had to be recorded as non-mappable. The cartographers nevertheless succeeded in covering just under 1,400 kilometres within a single vegetation period. At the same





Grünes Band Deutschland

30 Jahre grenzenlose
Liebe zur Natur

»The closer they
looked, the more
natural treasures they
discovered.«



time, they carried out a detailed survey among nature conservation authorities, bodies responsible for managing protected areas, and landscape management associations about their experiences of conservation projects in the Green Belt.

Their most important finding provided compelling evidence that the Green Belt was **worthy of protection**: around half of it consists of red-listed habitats classed from »threatened by complete extinction« to »endangered«. However, the pressure to use the land proved to be a little less intense than had been feared: around 85 per cent of the land area was still in a relatively near-natural state. Extensively used grassland and forests each accounted for one-fifth of the land area, with watercourses and fallow land covered with ruderal vegetation or grass accounting for a further one-tenth each. Around five per cent of the land area consisted of structurally diverse wetlands with large standing water bodies.

Based on this data, the ecologists were able to identify fifteen sections – distributed along the length of the border and measuring approximately 500 kilometres in total – that were suitable focal areas for nature conservation projects of **national importance**. In particular, the Federal Department for Nature Conservation uses these findings as a basis for devising and planning its large-scale conservation projects.

In the spring of 2012, the cartographers took to the Green Belt for a second time. On this occasion, they worked with improved GPS technology, digital field maps, higher spatial resolution and a more sophisticated catalogue of habitats. For the first time, even small and linear structures such as hedgerows and ditches were recorded. This exercise revealed the tremendous diversity of the Green Belt, which features **146 types of habitat** – ranging from Nardus grasslands and dwarf-shrub heathland to species-rich moist and wet grasslands, inland dunes and sand grasslands.

What never ceased to amaze the field biologists in the Green Belt was the fact that the closer they looked, the more natural treasures they discovered. In the course of their fieldwork, they came across dozens of red-listed plants – even though a detailed inventory of the flora was not the main purpose of the exercise.

They even discovered rare botanical species, such as Swiss ragwort or northern hawksbeard, which Germany has a special international responsibility to protect.



The actual purpose of the inventory, however, was to compare the data with the findings from 2001: How had the Green Belt changed? Any slight gains in areas subject to little or no disturbance were cause for hope – but not for giving the all-clear.

Shifts in the proportion of the land occupied by the various types of vegetation were seen primarily in open-land habitats. Extensively used grassland – generally a reflection of conservation-orientated landscape management – had increased its share of the land from 10 to 15 per cent. At the same time, however, there had been an increase in scrub encroachment, which is an indication of inadequate maintenance. Thickets and shrubs had tripled their share of the land. Even young forests had increased their share by a third, now accounting for almost a tenth of the Green Belt.

However, also areas subject to increasing or intensive use had made gains. Intensively used grassland had also increased by a third, now accounting for almost seven per cent of the Green Belt.

One of the major setbacks was the obvious decline in species-rich moist grasslands and unused grasslands, whose share of the Green Belt had almost halved and is now around the 8 per cent mark.

It was particularly encouraging to see only a minimal increase in built-up areas and roads, and even a slight decline in arable land.

It had apparently been possible to withstand pressure to utilise the land despite numerous competing interests. There is still a need for further action, mainly with respect to grassland. In particular, the intensification of land use through fertilisation and frequent mowing, which causes loss of biodiversity, is incompatible with the concept of extensively used, species-rich open-land habitats. Shrub encroachment and spontaneous forestation of fallow areas, on the other hand, appear to be tolerable. They allow nature time to recover and can be kept in check intermittently if necessary.

In any event, the Green Belt is no exception to the rule: all table silver takes a bit of looking after.





Grünes Band
Deutschland

30 Jahre grenzenlos
Liebe zur Natur

»This partial
fragmentation
process began with
the rebuilding and
extension of transport
routes.«



Incisions in the Green Belt

The farmer blinks and hesitates briefly before sinking his ploughshares into the tall grass regardless. After all, it doesn't belong to anybody. One hour later, another hectare of the Green Belt has been razed to the ground. **Illegal encroachment** of this kind was commonplace in the early years following German reunification. The authorities were often unaware of it or had insufficient staff to intervene. Most affected were the fallow sections of the Green Belt that ran through intensively used areas and belonged to the state. **This is how one of the largest interrupted stretches – measuring 14 kilometres in length – came about in the northern foothills of the Harz Mountains.**

The situation is – even today – not much better where there is a legitimate owner. In this case, the land may be used as the owner pleases assuming there are no nature conservation restrictions. Around 15 per cent of the Green Belt has been ploughed up or destroyed at one time or another. Over the last few years, the proportion of gaps has fallen again slightly and is now around the 13 per cent mark.

This fragmentation process began with inevitable: the rebuilding and **extension of transport routes**. In the early 1990s, the BUND recorded as many as 280 new paths and roads in the section of the border running through Bavaria, Thuringia and Saxony alone. At the same time, it also registered numerous other encroachments on the Green Belt – some of them illegal – such as construction waste dumps, sand harvesting and slurry areas. Moreover, it was not long before the first **industrial estates sprung up in the former border strip**

One encroachment deemed particularly severe, owing to the fact that it occurred in a lengthwise direction: the mine clearance operation completed in 1995. Over a distance of almost 350 kilometres, mainly in the rough terrain of the Thuringian



Grünes Band
Deutschland

30 Jahre grenzenlose
Liebe zur Natur

Highlands, the vegetation was completely cleared and the soil ploughed up with heavy machinery to a depth of half a metre. The BUND campaigned in vain for gentler methods to be used, but even designated conservation areas fell victim to the earth diggers. To make matters worse, the mine clearance operation lowered inhibitions about using the land for legal and illegal purposes – despite the fact that of the 1.3 million explosive devices once buried in the ground, around 15,000 were still unaccounted for.

A far more recent »historical legacy« is hindering attempts to close gaps: the long-standing practice of selling off land, with the result that around one-third of the Green Belt is now privately owned, has taken its toll. Time and again, landowners have successfully opposed land consolidation based on nature conservation principles. The Federal Administrative Court has ruled in their favour, arguing that public interest in an uninterrupted Green Belt is insufficient reason for land consolidation.

In cases such as these, the BUND has to use its negotiating skills and financial strength to stop the onslaught of ploughs or excavators by buying up land.

The Green Belt continues to suffer large-scale irreversible damage due to transport infrastructure projects such as the A38 Göttingen-Halle, A44 Kassel-Eisenach and A73 Suhl-Lichtenfels motorways. The A71 Erfurt-Schweinfurt motorway was also planned without any regard for incidental damage to the environment. Over 700 metres of Green Belt were not just razed, but wrenched from the ground. Gaps of this kind in the habitat network can never be closed again.

Further havoc was wreaked by the Baltic Sea motorway. It runs south of Lübeck, cutting straight through the Wakenitz lowlands in the Green Belt. Two collective legal complains involving the BUND were dismissed.

The latter was more successful in its opposition to the 87n main road: The new, predominantly three-lane road through the Rhön Biosphere Reserve would have cut through the Green Belt near Unterweid. It was axed from the Federal Transport Infrastructure Plan due to serious objections relating to nature conservation.

The railways also cause huge disruption to the Green Belt. The vigorously contested express railway (ICE) line between Ebensfeld and Erfurt has currently been constructed. In the mountainous area of the Thuringian Forest, 22 tunnels and 29 viaducts were built. At Lake Froschgrundsee, the line also cuts through the Green Belt across a width of 100 metres. It goes without saying that large-scale projects of this kind always require elaborate compensatory measures. But regardless of their level of sophistication, such measures cannot safeguard the core function of the Green Belt as an ecological corridor.

Compared with the early years, the number of transport infrastructure projects has fallen significantly. Not surprisingly, the 450 transport links have led to a certain degree of saturation. On average, the Green Belt is intersected by a transport route every three kilometres. In stark contrast to its distinctive sweeping logo, the Green Belt is merely a delicate broken line in the landscape. Some of the gaps could be closed by means of green bridges. This would give civil engineers and construction companies the opportunity to do something useful for the Green Belt for a change.

»The long-standing practice of selling off land, with the result that around one-third of the Green Belt is now privately owned, has taken its toll.«





Grünes Band
Deutschland

30 Jahre grenzenlose
Liebe zur Natur

»Large sedge swamps
looks graceful from a
distance, swaying
in the wind like
soft fur.«



Ecological border crossers

More than two-tenths of the territory covered by the Green Belt is quite wet. In Brandenburg and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, in particular, it meanders through shore areas, marshes, bogs and lowlands – habitat complexes that are especially attractive to ecological border crossers. The availability of water, light and nutrition often changes dramatically over a short distance in these parts. As a result, plant and wildlife communities are closely interconnected.

Take large sedge swamps, for example: this type of habitat is discriminating. It confines itself to a narrow zone on the banks of flowing waterways – where conditions are too dry for reeds, but too wet for small sedge or moor grass.

Large sedge swamps look graceful from a distance, swaying in the wind like soft fur. Species typically found in this plant community are the delicate Marsh Bedstraw and the Yellow Flag Iris. As undisturbed standing water bodies are virtually non-existent nowadays, there is hardly anywhere for large sedge swamps to thrive. However, in the proximity of Lake Schaalsee, which is intersected by the Green Belt, this species has been able to establish itself in numerous places.

Litter meadows are another good example: in places susceptible to high levels of moisture, it is impossible to grow decent fodder grass. In the olden days, the farmers only mowed there in the autumn, refrained from spreading fertilisers and used the grass solely as bedding material. This practice resulted in extremely low-nutrient, species-rich litter meadows. In more recent times, they have become extremely rare owing to drainage, fertilisation and frequent mowing.



GrünesBand
Deutschland

30 Jahre grenzenlose
Liebe zur Natur

Litter meadows have found sanctuary in the Drömling region, an area of lowland marshes cultivated for centuries in the glacial valley of the River Aller. Here, litter meadows have been able to regenerate in many places where the border guards and their mowers unwittingly maintained the landscape. In certain parts, even **moor grass meadows – a particularly rare sight** – have been able to thrive. They retain a strawy yellow colour long into the spring and flower late. However, the play of colour in the summer is all the more impressive when Devil's Bit and Marsh Gentian come into bloom. In the autumn, the head-high tussocks of moor grass turn gold and copper-coloured. It is at this time of year that the contrast with the familiar green of the nutrient-rich meadows is particular striking.

Together with small areas of low moor bogs interspersed with Tall Forb Communities and trees, the wet open landscapes of the Green Belt form a vibrant habitat mosaic. Numerous rare and endangered animal species such as the Marsh Fritillary or the Whinchat – the bird that has come to symbolise the Green Belt – have taken refuge here.

Large sedge swamps and litter meadows require extensive cultivation methods in order to retain their value from a nature conservation perspective. The most precious jewels in the Green Belt, on the other hand – fens and raised bogs, small water bodies, brooks and swamps – need to be left untouched. These unusable and impassable areas in the shadow of the border **were left completely undisturbed for 40 years**, allowing them to develop into veritable treasure troves of nature, as was the case on the banks of the River Wakenitz, in parts of the Lake Schaalsee region and on the plains of the River Muschwitz.

Here White-faced Darters can be seen fluttering about while the white heads of the Cotton Grass sway in the wind and Purple Marshlocks light up the landscape. The air is full of sounds such as the chirping of the Reed Warbler or the croaking of frogs and toads.

One thing these ecological border crossers have in common is that they are dependent on genuine wilderness. In the wetlands and riparian forests of the Green Belt, wildernesses still exist.

The types of habitat at the other end of the moisture scale represent a rather small, but valuable part of the Green Belt. Although nutrient-poor grassland, semi-dry and dry grassland only account for two per cent of the land area, they are of **disproportionate significance** for nature conservation. Grasses, herbs and shrubs that get by with very little water grow in areas of this kind. Being well adapted to dry conditions, they only take root in our latitudes in places where rain water rapidly trickles away through crevices, cracks and pores and there is little chance of humus forming. This is





GrünesBand
Deutschland

30 Jahre grenzenlose
Liebe zur Natur



primarily the case in the southern and central parts of the Green Belt, for example, on the shell limestone, keuper or gypsum subsoils found in the Thuringian Grabfeld region or in the Rhön Mountains. These arid-hardy survival experts migrated from the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe centuries ago, when ecological corridors were commonplace phenomena for which no specialist term was needed.

There is also some interesting wildlife linked with these habitats. One fascinating example is the **Large Blue**. On hatching, this butterfly's larvae feed on thyme blossoms and seeds. After a while, they drop to the floor in order to be picked up and adopted by a particular species of myrmicine ant. Once inside the anthill, they feast brazenly on the ant brood until reaching pupation – fobbing off their alarmed hosts with a few drops of honeydew.

The Heath Fritillary and the Dark Green Fritillary lead a similarly adventurous life; the BUND aims to increase their numbers in South Thuringia via species conservation projects. In 2012, the organisation purchased around seven hectares of the Green Belt in the region of Klettnitzgrund for this purpose. This has also benefited other inhabitants of warm, dry habitats, such as the Sand Lizard, Blue-winged Grasshopper, Ladybird Spider, Wood Lark or Stonechat.



There are now sections of the Green Belt featuring uninterrupted stretches of dry and semi-dry grassland alongside dwarf shrub heathland **over distances of up to 40 kilometres**. This migratory freedom in the borderlands not only suits arid-hardy survival experts, but nomadic shepherds as well. It is hard to find any comparable supraregional cattle track networks anywhere else in Europe. However, for this to work on a permanent basis there have to be sufficient numbers of sheep and goats moving around, which is by no means always the case. Between 2001 and 2012, for example, the **dry areas** of the Green Belt in their typical form declined by a third. Owing to natural succession, they become overgrown with shrubs and turned into young forests. **Mechanical habitat maintenance** is needed here on a regular basis to help mitigate the problem.●





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Searching for traces in wilderness and history

There are one million tonnes of concrete running through the Green Belt; a monumental component of the border fortifications has survived the demolition works virtually unscathed. This is fortunate, because without the **perforated concrete slab track** once patrolled by Trabant jeeps, it would be difficult to experience the Green Belt today. Some municipalities have even renovated their section of the patrol track. It is used every weekend by day-trippers keen to experience nature and the history of the border strip at first hand.

However, before venturing into the wilderness, fallow land and history, it is worth reading up on the subject matter. Otherwise, rare species of flora and fauna or traces of German history can easily be overseen.

The latter are best found in one of the **borderland museums**, where in places the border fortifications, including border fences, walls, anti-vehicle ditches, minefields and automatic firing devices, have been preserved in all their horror on a scale of 1:1. In total, there are 50 memorial sites and other establishments dedicated to the historic legacy of the division of Germany.

The absurdity of the division is perhaps most obvious at Philippsthal Borderland Museum, where the border ran right through the middle of a printing works. The memorial at Billmuthausen, on the other hand, commemorates the resettlement of around 10,000 East German citizens and the brutal razing of entire villages that stood in the way of the border regime. The significance of the border for world affairs

is epitomised by the Point Alpha memorial in the so-called Fulda Gap. NATO considered the expansive Fulda plains to be a likely route for a Russian invasion, which is why US and East German observation towers can be seen directly opposite each other in this area.

Some of the museums are now partially dedicated to the more recent history of the borderlands. It is a history that is less moving, but equally fascinating: the metamorphosis from death strip to Green Belt. Eichsfeld Borderland Museum in Teistungen, for example, has erected a pavilion dedicated specifically to the German and European Green Belt; further information on the subject is available from





the *Haus des Volkes* in Probstzella, a lavishly illustrated exhibition that emanated from the “Experience Green Belt” project conducted by the BUND.

It goes without saying that for nature-lovers the true treasure troves of nature are more appealing than display cases and information boards. However, visitors are advised not to explore the most valuable sections of the Green Belt on their own account, the main reason being that they could cause damage. The Black Stork, for example, which is extremely sensitive to disturbance, breeds in the secluded forests. Moreover, undetected mines still pose a residual risk. **It is therefore important to keep to the patrol track at all times** and take the warning notices seriously.

However, the patrol track does not always make for an easy walk. It takes little account of the topography, cutting across the landscape in a straight line instead. This makes it a strenuous route, as the biologist Reiner Cornelius from the Hesse branch of the BUND is all too well aware. Initially, he was only involved in land-purchasing transactions. Impressed by the landscape and biological diversity of the Green Belt, he explored it over the course of **seven summers** and summarised his experiences and recommendations in **seven travel journals** – resulting in the BUND’s “standard reference work” **for experiencing the Green Belt**; see page 62. There is no better way of preparing for a hiking trip along the Green Belt than reading this work.

The cycle paths along the Green Belt follow a more meandering route, as the coarsely perforated concrete slabs are seldom good for riding on. Consequently, the tours suggested in the bikeline cycling guide for the Green Belt do not always follow the original

demarcation line, but the natural and historical points of interest along nearby paths.

All the public relations work, exhibitions, borderland museums, cycling guides and signposts that emerged more or less spontaneously at regional level following German reunification were a good start, but by no means sufficient for effectively developing the former border regions or **restricted zones**.

This is why in 2005 the Green Belt Project Office set about work on a preliminary study as part of the large-scale testing and development project **»Experience Green Belt«** funded by the **German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation**. In three model regions (the Elbe-Altmark-Wendland, the Harz, and the Thuringian Forest including the Slate Mountains and the Franconian Forest), nature conservationists and tourism experts jointly drew up proposals for improving the integration of landscape development and tourism.

There was fierce debate about whether the Green Belt should be systematically developed as a tourist destination at all. Nature conservationists feared that guided Trabi convoys would soon be rattling over the patrol track. Critics from the tourism camp were more concerned that the slightest mention of East Germany could ruin business opportunities. Ultimately, however, it became clear that controlled **soft nature tourism** and the potential associated income would significantly improve acceptance.

One cornerstone of the project involved detailed analyses of the landscape’s natural features: Where is a trip through the Green





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Belt worthwhile and possible without disturbing nature? And where does this necessitate certain changes in land use or infrastructure?

The district of Altmark, for example, offered ideal prerequisites for nature tourism. The sparsely populated region in the borderlands between Lower Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt covers just under a tenth of the Green Belt. Approximately 40 kilometres of this region lies in the Landgraben-Dumme lowlands, which include a whole series of **wetlands of pan-European importance**. The “string of pearls” function of the Green Belt is particularly obvious here.

This explains why, for decades, the Altmark district has also been the focus of the BUND’s land-purchasing activities and cross-border nature conservation projects.

As early as the 1990s, the Saxony-Anhalt branch of the BUND collaborated with the local nature conservation authorities, landscape management association, previous landowners and the Federal Property Agency (Bundesvermögensamt) in an exemplary manner in order to facilitate extensive land purchasing and the re-wetting of the marshes in the vicinity of the Harper Mühlenbach. The »Experience Green Belt« project followed on from this initiative.

In the Kusebruchwiesen north of Salzwedel, for example, small new bodies of water were created and dikes built across ditches. This resulted in a near-natural mosaic of wetland habitats for amphibians and, above all, for water birds, which can be observed from a tower specially built for this purpose. The area has been developed in such a way that it is fully accessible on foot, by canoe or by bicycle.

The second cornerstone of the project involved developing »borderland experience points«.

This meant searching for historical relics and showcasing them in a suitable manner, for example by renovating them or installing information boards. One such relic is the watchtower at the ferry jetty in Lenzen, where visitors can try to imagine what everyday life was like for the East German guards. Together with the experiences of nature, the borderland experience points form the backbone of dozens of tour offers along the 190-kilometre-long cycle path known as the Vier-Länder-Grenzradweg as well as several regional hiking and cycling tracks.

The other two model regions in the Harz and the Thuringian Forest/Franconian Forest already had a better tourism infrastructure. Here, therefore, the project partners from the fields of tourism and nature conservation focused more on ensuring that the Green Belt featured regularly in marketing campaigns and supplementary offers.

In the Harz region, cross-border nature discovery and cycling tours were developed, including signposting, resting places and a birdwatching tower. The backbone of the tour network is the **91-kilometre-long Harz border path** connecting various landscapes, habitats and sightseeing attractions. In the popular national park visitor centre „Torfhaus“, there is now an exhibition dedicated specifically to the Green Belt. The model region of the Thuringian Forest and the Slate Mountains/Franconian Forest was already well accustomed to tourism, but was not linked in any way to the Green Belt. This link only came about with the launching of the testing & development project, which led to the creation of new discovery routes. At select points along these routes, hikers come across devices they may be more familiar with from art galleries – **audio guides**, which can be downloaded on mobile phones and provide information about nature, culture and history, including authentic eye-witness accounts. Further modules of the testing & development project included the signposting of distinctive points, further training for nature and countryside guides, three exhibitions and nature conservation work camps for young adults from all over the world.

In all the model regions, the key element of the testing & development project »Experience Green Belt« was intensive PR work. The first aim was to make the local population realise that the Green Belt on their doorstep was a rare asset: what was long seen as a historical burden is actually a unique selling proposition capable of generating money. The second aim was to explain to tour operators and visitors the reasons behind developing a catchy brand and a coherent corporate design under the motto »Nature – Culture – History«.

There is now general consensus that the nature conservation projects not only make economic sense thanks to tourism, but also contribute to the sustainable development of the various regions. Moreover, the impact on nature is nowhere near as severe as initially feared. Even one-time critics of the project have since come to realise that the recently launched initiative to develop nature tourism is »**the best thing that could ever have happened**«.





Investing in visions

»Within a few generations, agricultural grasslands emerged, for which the term »devoid of life« barely goes far enough.«

Initially, the future of the Green Belt appeared fascinatingly simple: a mega-sized national park from the Baltic Sea to the Vogtland! At first glance, this was by no means an unattainable goal, given that the ecological corridor in existence belonged to the German state. However, even if a coup of this kind had been possible from a technical and legal perspective, it would not have solved the complex issue of how to preserve the unique value of the Green Belt as a ecological corridor.

The secret lies in the »ecotone«. This is only indirectly related to bird song and gurgling streams; the term literally means "a place where ecologies are in tension". There is certainly no lack of tension in the forest perimeters, river banks, embankments and hedgerows: at all the transitions and interfaces in the landscape – fringe habitats – animal and plant populations migrate and compete for living space and resources. This explains why ecotones feature far greater biodiversity than the surrounding areas.

From around the 16th century up until well into the 19th century, the landscape was dotted with arable fields, meadows, fallow areas, streams, ponds, cattle tracks and heaths. Almost every parcel of land was enclosed by hedges, resulting in a veritable fragmented maze of man-made ecotones. Just like pulmonary alveoli or treetops, which have a huge surface area for the exchange of gases, they provided an abundance of **boundary areas for the exchange of species** from one place to another.

River regulation, land consolidation, land development and hundreds of thousands of kilometres of asphalt roads put an end to that once and for all. Within a few generations, agricultural grasslands emerged, for which the term »devoid of life« barely goes far enough. They are quasi living dead landscapes, in which hedges, riparian strips or fallows have scarcity value. Conservationists have bemoaned this trend for decades.

For a long time, however, the idea of a **ecological corridors was no more than a utopia** – as in the 1920s, when ornithologists first broached the subject of »bird migration corridors«, or in the 1980s, when the term became rooted in nature



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conservation, in theory at least. Many endeavours were limited to local areas, the perimeters of crop fields and stepping-stone habitats.

But then the Green Belt came into play: a **coherent habitat strip** in an otherwise fragmented and desolate landscape. Over a period of several decades, the »landscape management« carried out by the East German border guards had allowed this area to revert to a kind of pre-industrial mosaic of fallows capable of linking up the numerous nature conservation areas and large-scale protected areas that existed in the latter days of the East German regime. Here was concrete evidence of how a habitat corridor works from an ecological perspective.

The idea of a national park covering a distance of 1,400 kilometres may have been illusory from the start due to being virtually impossible to implement for legal reasons. However, the positive results achieved in many regions of the Green Belt are fuelling a new, far more realistic vision: that of a nationwide »**green infrastructure**«. The Green Belt provides the blueprint for this concept. It proves that ecological corridors can be established anywhere with sufficient administrative capacity, adequate funds for purchasing and maintaining land and a will to cooperate. The stumbling block is the lack of tools.

It is for this reason that the BUND is calling for a »national habitat network plan« that transcends regional borders and receives generous funding from tax revenue. The aim is to create a network of »national green corridors« that are interwoven to varying degrees. Districts and municipalities could then dock onto the network with their own **green axes and protected areas**. An initial step in this direction was taken in 2009 when the Green Belt was incorporated in the German Federal Nature Conservation Act, which had been calling since 2002 for an ecological network covering at least 10 per cent of the country's area. Further measures could include "Technical Instructions for an Ecological Network" or the designation of the Green Belt as a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**. It would fit particularly well in the **National Nature Monument** category because, in its own unique way, the Green Belt traces Germany's history, culture and nature.

For nature conservation in the Green Belt, this all represents a huge challenge, while also acting as a stimulus. The clearance of vegetation on heathland or sheep pastures in barren mountainous regions suddenly takes on greater urgency when no longer seen as a means of tending the landscape on a romantic whim, but of investing in transport arteries that are **literally vital for survival**.

»The aim is to create a network of »national green corridors« that are interwoven to varying degrees.«



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»But this is precisely what the creators of the monument intended – that it blends in with the countryside it serves to protect.«

A gate to celebrate



More often than not, the Green Belt is barely visible in the landscape. In order to ensure that this line, which divided Germany and Europe for four decades, is never forgotten, the BUND devised the idea of »The West-Eastern Gate (Das WestÖstliche Tor). A Project for Germany«. This land art installation consists simply of two solid, 12-metre-high, untreated oak logs surrounded by young trees and bushes. The two logs are linked by a stainless steel threshold running along the former demarcation line.

The gate invites visitors to cross the demarcation line as a subtle reminder of the days when doing precisely that could have had fatal consequences.

Situated in an elevated position in a particularly well-preserved section of the Green Belt, it »guards« around 20 hectares of land purchased by the BUND that provide a habitat for Red-backed Shrikes and Rattle Grasshoppers.

The gate's greatest day was its inauguration in June 2002: Hubert Weiger requested an unusual favour of the [guest of honour, Mikhail Gorbachev](#). The former Soviet president, who is associated more than any other statesman with the overcoming of the Iron Curtain, did not hesitate for a moment before [agreeing to become patron](#) of the European Green Belt.

Passers-by may be surprised at the state of the monument. The two oak logs are cracked, grey and fungus-infested, and the bark is peeling off extensively. They are more reminiscent of dead forest wood than the celebrations of 2002. Since then, some of the young trees have also died, and the steel thresholds are barely visible in places, having become overgrown with grass. But this is precisely what the creators of the monument intended – that it blends in with the countryside it serves to protect.





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Cooperation on a grand scale

As long as the East German border guards did their job, the Green Belt was a kind of collateral ecological benefit. But after their withdrawal, it took a while to determine how best to maintain extensive land-use patterns consistent with nature conservation. The most important realisation was that an ecological corridor requires acceptance. No farmer would immediately comprehend why a 100-metre-wide stretch of fallow land had to run right through the middle of his fields. Nor is he likely to accept

his fields becoming waterlogged due to rising ground water as a result of a neighbouring farmer extensifying and filling in ditches to create wet meadows. For people to cooperate, they must recognise the overriding importance of their plots of land for the habitat corridor, have no reason to fear any major disadvantages, be aware of the subsidies available and be given a fair say.«

It is therefore particularly important that cooperation be based on voluntary participation and comprehensive information about the objectives of habitat management. Since, by definition, this kind of »best practice« can only be developed through practice, the BUND has been pursuing cooperative models on a grand scale since the 1990s. Major nature conservation projects such as those funded by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation appear highly promising.

Six projects of this kind have been launched since 1992. Together they cover around a quarter of the Green Belt, and in the case of two projects, the Green Belt is the main focus. However, a few difficulties have been encountered on the way. In order to obtain funding for major projects of this kind, the application must include far more than a mere strip of land running through the landscape. Consequently, such projects sometimes extend deep into the hinterland to encompass adjoining natural spaces in the ecological network, such as the Elbe Valley floodplains or Hainich National Park. There is hence a risk of causing too much unrest across entire regions, as many people fear that the increasing emphasis on »nature conservation« is likely to restrict land use of any kind. This can diminish acceptance of the need to protect the Green Belt itself, as illustrated by the large-scale nature conservation project Eichsfeld/Werra Valley.

The most recent major project of this kind on the border between Thuringia and Bavaria has encountered somewhat less resistance. It was the Ecological Educational Centre Upper Franconia (Ökologische Bildungsstätte Oberfranken) that initiated the project. Since 1998, this organisation has been responsible for implementing the Species and Habitat Protection Programme in the Steinach Valley/Linder Plain – a project which is not geared to administrative boundaries, but solely to natural spaces in the interesting transitional landscape between the Thuringian Forest and the hilly countryside surrounding the upper River Main.

»For people to cooperate, they must recognise that their plots of land are of overriding importance for the ecological corridor.«





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»Ultimately, however,
it proved possible to
win the support of the
farmers' represent-
atives by means of a
compromise.«



In the expansive Linder Plain on the southern flank of the Thuringian Forest, the River Föritz frequently bursts its banks. Large expanses of wet meadows, remnants of riparian forests, bogs and marshes along with numerous ponds make this part of the Sonneberg lowlands a **natural space of supraregional significance**. In a southerly direction, the landscape rejuvenates in the Steinach Valley, which is still unspoilt in parts.

The Green Belt, comprising expansive tall-grass meadows, wetlands and fallows overgrown with shrubs, meanders through the project territory over a distance of around 20 kilometres. However, the designation of some nature conservation areas and the launching of habitat improvement projects proved incompatible with planned road-building and gravel-quarrying projects. Interests were finally reconciled via an **agricultural development plan** and five **land consolidation operations**. Contributors to the project included the Regional Nature Conservation Authority, the Regional Water Authority, the State Environment Agency of Suhl, the specialist departments of Sonneberg District Administration, the Hof Water Authority, the directors of the Landowners' Association for Land Consolidation, Hildburghausen Agricultural Office and the Thuringian Farmers' Association.

The Thuringian branch of the BUND intervened wherever it was deemed necessary. It used the proceeds from the sale of Green Belt share certificates for purchasing around 60 hectares of land made up of individual plots distributed across the entire section of the border. The success is plain to see: wet meadows have been restored, arable land has been transformed into a complex of wet hollows and small water bodies, the River Steinach is now able to evolve undisturbed, and the bends in the renaturalised River Föritz make it easy to forget that this was once a paved ditch.

Since 2010, this project, together with two further species and habitat protection programmes, has formed the backbone of the large-scale nature conservation project entitled »Green Belt Rodach Valley – Lange Berge – Steinach Valley« that covers a distance of **110 kilometres** and a total area of 6,000 hectares along the former border.

Given the magnitude of the project, even high-level stakeholders had their reservations. The farmers' association, for example, objected to the prospect of a new »green border« emerging. It argued that the purchase of land for nature conservation purposes was having an impact on land rent prices and could pose a threat to businesses. Ultimately, however, it proved possible to win the farmers' representatives by means of a compromise: the project management team reduced the scale of the core territory and the planned land purchasing operation. In addition, it set up a special committee to take better account of agricultural interests. According to the Thuringian Association for Rural Development (Thüringer Landgesellschaft), there is now widespread support for the project: for **over 80 per cent of the core territory in Thuringia**, the landowners and farmers have approved the planned measures subject to provisos in certain cases. The chances of achieving a **supraregional ecological corridor** are therefore quite good.



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Guiding principle: keep land open



Nature conservationists have always looked back at the pre-industrial era with a certain wistfulness. In those days, the fine-pored cultural landscape absorbed animal and plant species from distant biogeographic regions like a sponge. The farmers were probably unaware of this diversity. Pragmatism and the weather dictated where, when and how they worked the land. In many instances, habitats were destroyed due to over-utilisation and human error, but there were always others to replace them elsewhere.

The fact that animal and plant communities were able to **proliferate virtually unhindered** was due to the way in which the land was cultivated. So does that mean we have to go back to day-labour and horse-drawn ploughs?

Hardly, but historical forms of land use tell us something about the **basic rules of green infrastructure**. An ecological corridor functions no differently today than it did back then. However, it has to make do with a much smaller total area, along extremely narrow corridors. A closely woven, uninterrupted network, high habitat diversity, and landscape management methods optimally geared to the prevailing conditions are therefore all the more important.

»The guiding principle
inspired by history is
“structurally diverse
open land”.«





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»There can be no standard formulae for looking after the many different types of habitat in the Green Belt.«



The guiding principle inspired by history has been bandied about among Green Belt theorists and practitioners for some time: »structurally diverse open land«. It was underlined in 2011 by expert researchers and practitioners when making their recommendations about habitat maintenance in the Green Belt. According to these recommendations, bushes and trees should be kept in check by means of grazing, mowing or occasional clearance to allow the development of a small-scale mosaic of extensively cultivated meadows and fallows, interspersed with shrubs and single trees. Forests should only be allowed to develop spontaneously if they enable existing near-natural forests to be linked together. **Any intensive use** in the form of arable land, cultivated forests or rich pastures is taboo.

Though this may sound simple, there are no standard formulae for looking after the many different types of habitat in the Green Belt. The various open-land habitats alone call for a vast range of concepts adapted to the prevailing conditions. Dry and semi-dry grasslands, for example, are most suitable for sheep grazing; areas with more woody plants can be grazed with goats or Heidschnucke (moorland sheep); in contrast, wet meadows that are sensitive to trampling should be mowed. Marshes, riparian forests, wetlands and many other special areas, such as wooded ravines or sand dunes, each call for a different maintenance regime.

When and how often maintenance is needed, how long which animals should be allowed to graze, how much and what kind of woody plants should be preserved, how the land should be mowed and what should be done with the mowed material – all these questions depend upon a large number of factors: the climatic and soil conditions, the previous use and state of the land, the objectives pursued at any particular location, as well as local traditions and the means available.

For this reason, the Green Belt Project Office has compiled **guidelines**, based on the updated inventory of the Green Belt, that provide detailed advice on how to care for the many different types of habitat. These guidelines draw on years of practical experience at local level.

One example relates to the section of the Green Belt in the Vogtland in Saxony, which is a designated conservation area in its entirety. Major conflicts over land use have never posed an obstacle to progress here. In this conservation area complex covering an area of 633 hectares, a maintenance regime based on the guiding principle of keeping land open was initiated back in 1993. It involved the renaturalisation of water bodies, mowing damp and wet meadows





at regular intervals, converting arable land into extensively used grassland, felling spruce trees and clearing shrubs from heathland or nutrient-poor grassland.

Keeping sheep on impassable land that has lain fallow for many years and risks becoming overgrown with bushes has proved particularly advantageous. The very first grazing season in 1996 made it possible to stem the growth of woody plants and extract substantial amounts of biomass. Around 650 sheep are now deployed on the 160-hectare site, assisted by 35 goats that have an appetite for even the toughest species of shrubs. In winter, they live in animal sheds and feed on hay from mowed land. The rest of the time, they are guided through the countryside by a shepherd in accordance with **a cleverly devised plan**. This ensures that the animals graze on each area of land at precisely the right time and only twice a year.

Nutrient-poor, silicate-rich grasslands and damp areas are ready for grazing from as early as mid May, whereas grazing on dry dwarf-shrub heathland does not start until early summer. Most types of habitat – including *Nardus* grasslands, which are classed as being particularly valuable in the EU Habitats Directive – can be **properly maintained** on a permanent basis by means of controlled grazing.

Problems are nevertheless encountered from time to time. Intruding species such as the lupin also take advantage of the ecological corridor. Like clover on arable land, this plant takes nitrogen from the air with the help of root bacteria. Plants characteristic of nutrient-poor grassland that are not capable of doing this are at a disadvantage and disappear. In the long term, the unintended natural fertilisation of the habitat with green manure even leads to a change in soil conditions. In places featuring particularly rare plant communities, the lupins have to be kept in check by means of extra mowing.

Catering for the diverse demands of the Green Belt calls for an equally diverse range of »departments«. It takes **large-scale cooperation** – above all in sections of the Green Belt where nature conservation is not yet deemed a priority – for a shepherd to actually set off on his travels or for a farmer to become a guardian of the landscape.

Farmers need good incentives if they are to exercise restraint on lucrative plots of land in the interests of nature conservation, or cultivate unprofitable fallow land. Consequently, financial aid and expert advice from the nature conservation and agricultural authorities, support from professional farming associations, and not least regional marketing initiatives for products such as straw, herbs, sheep products or meat from grazing cattle are absolutely essential. **Landscape management extends all the way to the meat counter.**

»In places where nature conservation is not yet deemed a priority, large-scale cooperation is needed.«



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»Intensively used types of habitat such as cultivated grasslands and forests are barely penetrable for many animals and plants.«



Closing gaps

In the early days, change was fast and furious: as early as the mid 1990s, large gaps measuring up to seven kilometres in length appeared in the Green Belt. Gaps of this kind inevitably call into question the value of the belt as a whole. Since that time, preventing and closing the gaps has been a key task in protecting the Green Belt. But **what exactly is meant by a gap?** An ecological corridor is a highly complex phenomenon: a habitat of a certain quality and size may be quite adequate for a particular animal or plant species to develop a stable population; for some species, the same habitat may be sufficient as a corridor within the habitat network, while being too narrow to serve even this purpose for others.

Only in the case of **roads, built-up areas and arable land** is the issue clear-cut. For most organisms, this is where the journey ends. However, even other »green«, but intensively used types of habitat, such as cultivated grasslands and forests, are barely penetrable for many animals and plants. This explains the importance of the research and development project finished in 2014 under the heading »Updating of the Green Belt Inventory«. It provided a detailed, precise basis for assessing where it makes sense to restore or develop natural habitats and how this can best be achieved. The findings show that there is still plenty of work to be done: around one-seventh of the Green Belt consists of intensively used meadowland, arable land, spruce afforestations and built-up or degraded areas that interrupt the ecological corridor to varying degrees.

On this basis, BUND, assisted by the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, launched the **project entitled »Closing the Gaps in the Green Belt«** as part of the



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Federal Programme for Biological Diversity. In summer 2012, staff employed by the BUND's regional branches in Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia began making a closer analysis of certain sections of the Green Belt where gaps and pseudo-greenery formed particularly long barriers. This analysis consisted primarily in clarifying the following questions: **Who does the land belong to?** Could there have been illegal changes in land use? Are the landowners or tenants willing to cooperate? What land-use changes and objectives can be negotiated with them? And, above all, would it be possible to exchange pieces of land or purchase individual plots? Ownership of certain plots had previously been transferred to the Thuringian Foundation for Nature Conservation (Stiftung Naturschutz Thüringen) or the Foundation for the Environment, Nature and Climate Protection (Stiftung Umwelt, Natur- und Klimaschutz) of the regional state of Saxony-Anhalt, as part of a federal government programme. In these instances, of course, they needed little convincing. However, it proved all the more difficult to win the support of farmers or forest owners.

The »gap-closing« project therefore fills a gap in its own right – namely in the existing planning, funding and implementation set-up behind the Green Belt. It operates where there is no leverage in the form of red-listed species or habitats, no incentive based on tourism potential, no funding from cultural landscape programmes – in short, it operates where crop revenue is the sole priority.

Hence, this project is perhaps even more ambitious than the large-scale conservation projects in Eichsfeld, South Thuringia or the Franconian Forest. Although land users take some convincing there too, the need to **link up protected areas** is easier to communicate than a seemingly arbitrary extensification of land use in a widespread agricultural landscape.

Consequently, the managers of the »gap-closing« project are placing particular emphasis on PR work, discussions at local level and information events. Generally speaking, the aim is to convince landowners of the benefits of exchanging or selling their plots of land. The concept also involves deviating from the historical path of the border in the interests of the ecological corridor in places where particularly serious problems are encountered, and creating an emergency bypass for the Green Belt.

In recent years, complications have arisen due to the financial crisis and the **ill-conceived turnaround in energy policy**. People are increasingly investing in land, while at the same time the cultivation of energy maize is becoming more and more lucrative. Both these phenomena are pushing up the price of arable and forest land. As a result, the nature conservation associations and foundations are receiving ever smaller areas of land for their money.

The ultimate success of the six-year project is to be monitored by means of a performance review. Regular fauna and flora mapping operations will be undertaken to document the changes and anticipated successes following land-use conversion or discontinuation.

»The need to link up protected areas is easier to communicate than a seemingly arbitrary extensification of land use in an agricultural steppe landscape.«





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european
greenbelt

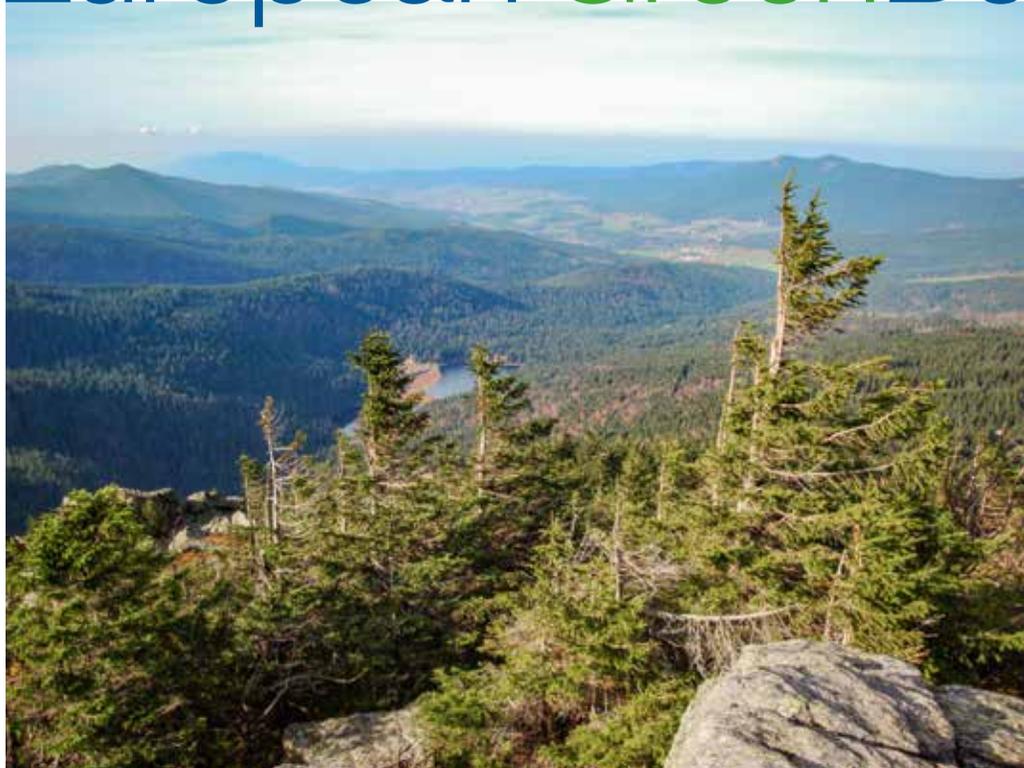




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European Green Belt



» Given the positive experiences of German conservationists on their home soil, extending the Green Belt to a total of 12,500 kilometres through the whole of Europe seemed a natural step.«

Germany is not the only country to overcome borders in the interests of protecting nature. Between Finland and Russia, Austria and Hungary, in the Baltic and the Balkans, the Iron Curtain left vast expanses of land in total isolation. Here too, nature was largely protected from bulldozers, ploughs or chainsaws for almost 40 years. And here too, **the cross-border ecological corridor is a powerful symbol** of Europe growing closer together.

Given the positive experiences of German conservationists on their home soil, extending the Green Belt from its original 1,400 kilometres to a total of more than 12,500 kilometres through the whole of Europe seemed a natural step. However, for economically deprived border regions, predominately in Southern Europe, there are more pressing concerns than nature conservation. Making natural heritage the focus of a pan-European initiative was therefore quite a bold move.





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The impetus for the initiative came in June 2002 from the chairman of the Bavarian branch of the BUND, Hubert Weiger, at the inauguration of the land art installation »West-Eastern Gate« (Westöstliches Tor), when he first publicly mooted the idea of a »European Green Belt«. Since then, 24 nations have joined the cause.

In all these countries, it had long been common knowledge that the former bloc border harboured hidden natural treasures. The stringent border protection measures were not the only reason for their existence. Distinctive, linear landscape features such as mountain ridges or rivers have always been used to delineate borders, as have areas which are difficult to cultivate and only sparsely populated. What these »marginal« areas have in common is that they are generally of interest for nature conservation per se.

It is therefore no coincidence that in direct proximity of the former Iron Curtain there are **over 40 national parks and 3,200 protected areas** dating back longer than the European Green Belt initiative in most cases. One example is the cross-border Pasvik-Inari National Park, located far north of the Arctic Circle. The ideas for the park in the border triangle between Norway, Finland and Russia reached fruition in the political thaw of 1989.

Further south, in Karelia, Russia designated a further two national parks. With their vast lake landscapes and incredibly slow-growing forests, they make magnificent home ranges for large mammals such as moose and brown bears. However, even in these sparsely populated regions, conflicts over land use are on the increase: in the immediate vicinity of the Kalevalsky National Park, equally valuable primeval forests are being destroyed to make plywood.

The numerous FFH conservation areas and bird sanctuaries close to the former bloc border did not come about purely voluntarily. Many countries only designated conservation areas at the insistence of the EU and only in places where there was little conflict over land use, i.e. in peripheral regions. Unfortunately, this has not happened in the case of the Baltic coastline, the Romanian mountains that lend themselves to skiing, or river basins close to settlements. Here, the Green Belt is in danger of becoming fragmented due to urban development, winter sports resorts or power plants. A similar threat is apparent on the coasts of Bulgaria and Montenegro, where heavy investment is being made in mass tourism, the leisure industry and second homes. Hundreds of hydroelectric power stations have been built on the floodplains of the Mur and the Drava, and there is no end in sight. As early as the 1990s, organisations like EuroNatur and the Austrian Nature Conservation Association (Natur-schutzbund Österreich) along with local environmental initiatives in Slovenia, Hungary, Croatia and Serbia took action for the protection of these habitats and for the development of an **international biosphere reserve**.

When Mikhail Gorbachev became patron of the European Green Belt in 2002, there were already a number of conservation initiatives with similar names – the »Fennoscandian Green Belt« and the



»With their vast lake landscapes and incredibly slow-growing forests, they make magnificent home ranges for large mammals such as moose and brown bears«



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european
green belt



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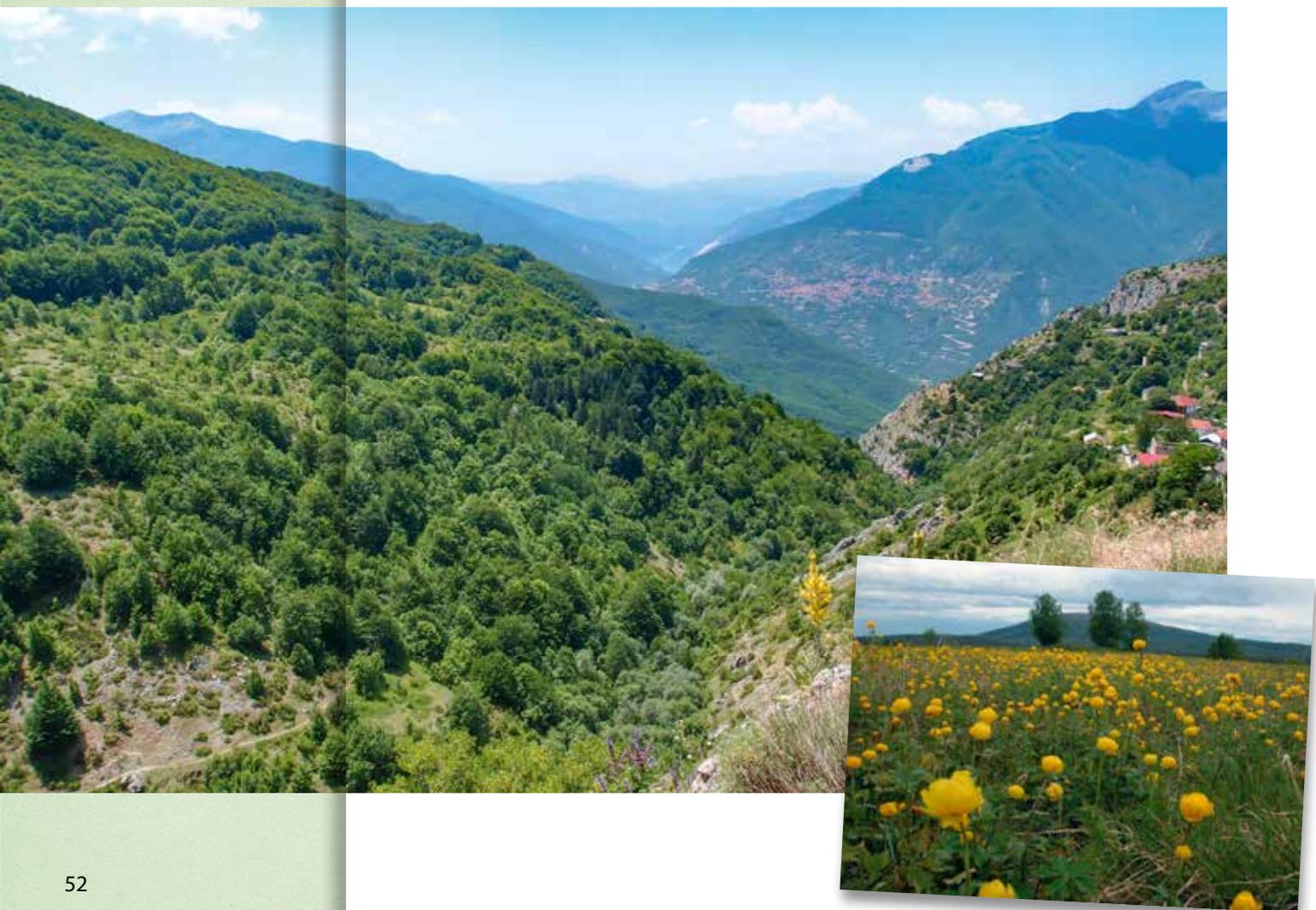
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»Balkan Green Belt« – in addition to the German Green Belt. The »European Green Belt« made it possible to bring them together under one roof.

This initiative was driven by a sense of fascination and enthusiasm that was already noticeable at the first international congress held in Bonn in 2003. The delegates recognised that this was an opportunity to make their long-standing, sometimes desperate efforts for the ecological corridor and sustainable regional development part of a bigger picture. All of a sudden, their calls for cooperation beyond administrative and disciplinary boundaries gained an international dimension – and hence an entirely new impetus. The realisation of this new quality was overwhelming, not just for the staff of the BUND Project Office Green Belt. Unlike the Green Belt in Germany, which appears somewhat lost amid the arable fields, the **European Green Belt is teeming with life**: almost all the continent's climatic and vegetation zones, landscapes and ecosystems are featured. And it measures not just metres in width, but kilometres.

Even high-ranking nature conservation officers became caught up in a wave of enthusiasm. Hartmut Vogtmann, then president of the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN),





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picked up on the idea, stating that the Bonn congress was an “important starting point for a joint long-term campaign to protect the Green Belt as a central national and European connectivity axis“. High hopes were also reflected in the founders’ objectives. The European Green Belt was to become not only the »backbone of a European ecological network and make an important contribution to the protection of Europe’s natural heritage«, but also help to »put an end to the loss of biodiversity by the year 2010«.

That may have been a little over-optimistic in the light of the challenges encountered at every turn, including language barriers. It was not until the tenth anniversary that the first flyer about the European Green Belt was printed in more than 20 languages. Other obstacles resulted from legal, cultural and perceptual differences. While some saw the Green Belt primarily as a lever for establishing new protected areas, others hoped to create a pan-European cycling route.

Given these differences, the BUND sees itself as having an important mediation role to play. For over a decade, BUND has been initiating and organising conferences, press trips and presentations, not only throughout Europe, but in Canada, the USA, Indonesia and South Korea as well.

An important step towards reconciling the various different visions for the Green Belt was taken at the first congress of the international working group, which took place in 2004 in the Hungarian section of the national park on Lake Neusiedl.

Seventy delegates from 17 nations along with representatives from the EU, the European Council and UNESCO drafted a joint agenda, programme of work and large-scale work-sharing plan, which was added to in 2012. Since then, the Fennoscandian section has been managed by the Russian nature conservation organisation Baltic Fund for Nature, while the Mecklenburg-Western Pomeranian branch of the BUND has been responsible for the Baltic coast, and the European Natural Heritage Foundation (EuroNatur) for the Balkan section. All activities in the Central European Green Belt, from Germany to Croatia, are coordinated by the BUND Department Green Belt in Nuremberg. The main responsibility of these regional coordinators is to assist with all local activities – in cooperation with non-governmental organisations, specialist authorities and the so-called »national focal points«, i.e. the national points of contact. In Germany, for example, this task is performed by the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation. The regional coordinators also have to handle the PR work.

»The BUND sees itself as having an important mediation role to play.«





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»Within one and
the same habitat,
protected areas
often border on
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In short: building an efficient organisation from scratch that encompassed so many different regions, political fields and cultures, and achieving consensus among hundreds of stakeholders with respect to time, place and content, proved to be a monumental task.

The moose in the Inari region and the Balkan Lynx in the mountain forests of Albania are generally blissfully unaware of all the hard work – involving conferences, objectives, action plans and conflict resolutions – that is carried out by the nature conservationists and other stakeholders. Yet every success on the part of the international network improves the chances of these animals continuing to thrive in the future. Thanks to growing public awareness of the European Green Belt and its **international reputation**, the local initiatives are gaining more influence in matters such as the designation of new protected areas, **opposition to projects that are detrimental to nature**, or sustainable regional development via ecotourism.

The Interreg projects funded by the European Union since 2006 represent important milestones on the road to green cooperation across the continent. This funding instrument is normally directed at grey infrastructure – the cross-border development of transport and utility systems. However, since the subject of green infrastructure found its way into European politics, more funding possibilities have been made available to the parties involved in protecting the Green Belt. This enabled the BUND to launch a comprehensive project on gap-analysis in the Green Belt.

The main purpose of the first Interreg project entitled »Green Belt – Protection and Assessment of Natural Heritage along the Former Iron Curtain«, which was conduct-



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»Almost all the continent's climatic and vegetation zones, landscapes and ecosystems are featured.«

ed in the Central European section of the Green Belt, was to gain a general overview. A key component of the project was **the analysis of land use and protection categories** in the Central European countries over a distance of 2,080 kilometres. According to the findings, only around one-third of the regions directly adjoining the former border are protected to any extent by conservation orders. Within one and the same habitat, protected areas often border on unprotected areas, nature parks on biosphere reserves, or national parks on landscape conservation areas. When viewed from a cross-border perspective, some small protected areas scattered across the landscape prove to be part of a very much larger one. Different criteria, jargon and legal remedies apply in each region.

In addition, the project generated input for PR work and educational projects and facilitated clearer communication among administrations of protected areas, nature conservation associations and agencies.

Most importantly, it provided a basis for addressing the following questions in a systematic way: Where are protected areas still required, and where does the protection status or management need improving? **There is certainly no time to waste**, as some regions of Central Europe, such as the border between Hungary and Slovenia, are witnessing similar developments to those seen in the German Green Belt following reunification, when roads, industrial estates and arable fields encroached on nature.





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From belt to network

»Here, the delegates from neighbouring regions were able to exchange information about conflicts and possible ways of resolving them – for the first time ever in some cases.«



The second Interreg project, also initiated by the BUND under the heading »GreenNet – Promotion of an Ecological Network in the Central European Green Belt«, lay further important groundwork for developing the European Green Belt. It was based on a similar idea to the BUND's gap-analysis project, but on a larger scale. The focus was on six pilot regions in Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Italy that were unprotected or **threatened by »grey« planning**, but could help to link up more valuable or better-protected areas. The most important instru-



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ment used was a web-based geographic information system, which explained to the stakeholders and parties concerned locally where and why the Green Belt could give rise to conflict. However, establishing direct contact was also important: thanks to the presence of simultaneous interpreters at the round tables of the »GreenNet«, the delegates from neighbouring regions were able to exchange information about conflicts and possible ways of resolving them – for the first time ever in some cases. All the necessary information was pooled and published on a specially developed website, together with the results of meetings and ballots.

This approach brought about immediate success in the pilot region of the Julian Alps between Italy and Slovenia. Here, the Green Belt was threatened by a plan to merge two ski resorts. Thanks to proper information and transparent mediation at every level, it was possible to resolve the conflicts. Now development of the region will not involve building ski lifts, but **promoting ecotourism in line with nature conservation principles**.

Despite the many successes of the pan-European »grass roots initiative«, it still suffers from one fundamental weakness: money is only available on request. Whatever the nature of the undertaking – be it an individual initiative, research work or an international congress – funding has to be applied for on a case-by-case basis. The European Green Belt requires an institutional basis, an official mandate and a dedicated budget. Establishing a more efficient organisation structure of this kind was the objective of the project entitled **»Further Development of the European Green Belt Initiative«**, which was funded by the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation. Jointly organised by EuroNatur and the BUND Project Office Green Belt, a newly formed international steering group convened bi-annually for this purpose. Regular pan-European conferences also took place, in addition to comprehensive PR work via a website, newsletters and flyers in all relevant languages.

There is reason to hope that all these efforts will fall on fertile soil, given the fact that a relatively far-reaching declaration of intent was drafted at the 10th anniversary congress of the European Green Belt initiative held at the Federal Ministry of the Environment in Berlin in 2013 and has since been signed by 18 nations to date. Two further countries have at least pledged their support. However, many more congresses may yet have to take place before the countries concerned put their money where their mouth is. Designating the **European Green Belt a UNESCO World Heritage Site** could help to accelerate this process.



»The European Green Belt requires an institutional basis, an official mandate and a dedicated budget.«



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zwischen Ost und West



»The Green Belt in Germany, as in the other participating countries, is a somewhat atypical, almost prototypical nature conservation entity.«

One milestone for the European Green Belt was the **founding of the “European Green Belt Association e.V.”** during the pan-European Green Belt conference held in the Czech town of Slavonice in September 2014. The founding members include EuroNatur, the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation and the BUND along with 20 other government and non-government organisations from 14 countries – a major success.

The Green Belt in Germany, as in the other participating countries, is a somewhat atypical, almost prototypical nature conservation entity. It does not wield a regulatory hammer, which would reduce its appeal, nor is it a half-hearted convention that fails to make any impact. Instead, it is an informal, but very serious cooperation model, a networking system not only for animal and plant species, but also for nations, regions, public authorities, universities, government and non-government institutions, associations and private individuals – with regional roots and international links.

Over the past 25 years, the Green Belt has amassed a wealth of experience and knowledge about what political and nature conservation instruments need to interact at every level of environmental planning in order to make the ecological corridor a reality despite **the competing interests of other potential users**; such instruments include anything from roof greening and green spaces in local communities, to green bridges, migration corridors, and an international network of protected areas that is worthy of the name. Perhaps this will also help the countries of Europe grow closer together and put political boundaries into perspective.

The story of the European Green Belt sounds rather like a fairytale, in which a kiss results in an ugly monster turning into a handsome prince. However, in the case of the Green Belt, a kiss – i.e. recognition as an important nature conservation initiative – is not the only thing that is needed. In order for an ecological corridor to function properly on a long-term basis, an entirely new consensus has to be reached: hedgerows, fallow land, wet meadows and heathland must be recognised as being **vital for survival** – just as vital as roads, power lines or drains.

»Politically accepted, administratively supported, institutionally enshrined and with broad ecological impact.«



A 30 year trackrecord of filling gaps

Even though Helmut Kohl received nothing but scorn shortly after the reunification for his vision of blooming landscapes, at the former border they were becoming a reality.

The Green Belt is certainly celebrating its thirtieth anniversary in good shape: it is politically accepted, administratively supported, institutionally enshrined and has a broad ecological impact.



It linestraces and permeates the farmed land and **connects protected areas** like a kind of oversized buffer strip.

Contrary to the prevalent post-reunification reflex to erase all trace of the border, the BUND in particular brought a better idea to the table. Out of this geopolitical legacy, **a lifeline of remembrance** would be formed, a model for nationwide Green Infrastructure as well as a monument to European unity, which would moreover create new perspectives for the tourism sector.

Today the idea is widely established and the Green Belt is considered to be **one of the most important and complex nature conservation projects in Germany**.

In light of this, in 2017 the German Federal Environmental Foundation honoured Kai Frobel and Hubert Weiger as the initiator and visionary of the Green Belt respectively with the German Environmental Award, representing the work of hundreds of fellow campaigners.





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»The gaps will be closed, I'm absolutely certain of that.«

The accolade is almost a kind of medal for bravery for their tireless commitment on many fronts and at many levels: from the Barents Sea to the Black Sea, and from international conferences to local councils.

This bravery also allowed one of the most difficult and complex projects run by the BUND, called "Closing the Gaps in the Green Belt", to take shape. **Roughly one eighth of Germany's Green Belt is still used for intensive agriculture purposes**, which presents one of the biggest challenges to nature conservation. One eighth may not seem like a lot, but it puts huge limitations on the primary function of the Green Belt, namely the habitat network. Who enjoys crossing a suspension bridge that is missing some of its boards, or even two or three one after the other?

Of all places, the voids in the Green Belt are most pronounced precisely where habitat networks are most dearly needed. In all, there are 26 pronounced gaps totalling roughly 170 km in length. They principally arose during the 1990s when many border sites were put into intensive agricultural use, some of them illegally.

In the Closing the Gaps project, which is supported by the federal government's Biodiversity Programme, **since 2012 the BUND has been endeavouring to repair the gaps professionally using a lot of money, patience and skill**. It is a Sisyphean task: it mostly involves encouraging owners to use their land for other, less harmful purposes or convincing them to sell or exchange it.

Sometimes this requires a good dose of luck, as was the case in the Tettau Valley in Thuringia. At an auction for seven hectares of wetland meadow, the BUND was involved in a bidding war with a sports official and hunter from Munich. After a dramatic showdown, the hammer finally came down in favour of the Green Belt with a bid that was just 500 euros higher than the Bavarian's.

The fine line between good and bad luck is demonstrated by the example of Salzwedel. On the one hand, the BUND managed to buy 91 hectares from the town and take it out of intensive use. The whinchats were grateful and now are raising four times as many chicks as before.



On the other hand, the town radically changed its course and privatised its urban woodland, one of the largest nature pearls of nature conservation in the entire Green Belt.

Year after year, the town authorities, the BUND and environment agencies had attentively looked after some 1,500 hectares of alder, ash and fen woodland, which are nestled in a mosaic of peat bogs and wet meadows and were able to develop into a natural forest over the course of several decades thanks to the protection provided by the border.

However, in early 2017 the town council saw no other way of solving its financial straits than selling the forest. The council did not contest the price which, at around 50 cents per square metre, was half as much as was hoped for. They likewise paid no heed to a petition with 50,000 signatures opposing the privatisation. The willingness of the BUND to perform a feat of strength in conjunction with the Landgesellschaft Sachsen-Anhalt in order to acquire a significant portion of the land was also to no avail. The winning bid was made by investors from North-Rhine Westphalia. If attempts to persuade them of the benefits of the Green Belt are not successful, there is the risk that one of the largest gaps in the Green Belt may form.

In spite of such difficulties, the BUND's gap-closing efforts have still produced good results: **it has been able to acquire some 230 hectares and thereby improve the connectivity of the habitat network.** In addition, it has managed to bring about improvements across large areas of land by way of contractual agreements.

The project has received recognition and accolades on a variety of levels, including in 2015 as a project in the "United Nations Decade on Biodiversity". In the same year, the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation also extended its financial support, whereby every euro given by sponsors and donors will be quadrupled, so to speak. The funding requirements are of course much higher, therefore BUND demands a 30 million euros state fund that it used to acquire and safeguard the missing areas of land.

Barbara Hendricks may well be proved right in the end. In response to the question of where she sees the Green Belt in 10 years time, the then Environment Minister seemed confident in 2017: "The gaps will be closed, I'm absolutely certain of that" •



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Together we can achieve great things!



The Green Belt is in danger of being torn apart: intensive agriculture, in particular, poses a threat to the former border strip and the survival of this remarkable green lifeline. Above all, the heavily subsidised cultivation of energy crops (e.g. maize) regularly engulfs land in the Green Belt. Together we can prevent this destruction! With your financial support, we can do everything possible to protect the Green Belt. [We lobby politicians and convince farmers and the general public](#) of our concept. The main focus of our work is on purchasing land in the Green Belt, because only as landowners are we able to protect these areas on a permanent basis. In order to achieve this goal, we need your help!

- Acquire a symbolic share of the Green Belt by making a donation of 65 euros or more.
- Make a gift of a share certificate.
- Support the Green Belt on a regular basis by becoming a patron.
- Collect donations at special events and spread the word about the Green Belt.

[Every donation helps!](#)

Contact:

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10179 Berlin
Email: dasgruenesband@bund.net
Tel. 030-2 75 86-4 29 or online
at www.bund.net/gruenesband

[Many thanks for your support.](#)

BUND account for donations to the Green Belt:

GLS Gemeinschaftsbank eG
BIC: GENODEM1GLS
IBAN: DE43 4306 0967 8016 0847 00
Reason for payment "Green Belt"



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»Of the many suggested names, “Bandi” came out on top. The likeable little mascot is now used not only for adorning leaflets and brochures.«



Reaching out to the public

Key indicator of the functioning of the Green Belt is its public profile. Residents must understand what it means when their property is suddenly classified as Green Infrastructure, and what benefits that brings with it. Both potential guests and tour operators must also be aware of the Green Belt so that green tourism and the culture of remembrance can come into play.

The BUND has been providing the relevant information for the last several decades, from the classic press release about exhibitions, excursions and conferences to demanding, action-oriented testing and development initiatives such as the “Green Belt Experience” project.

Rock-solid marketing also requires popular figures, however. The animal world of the Green Belt may well be rich and varied, but it is precisely that which makes advertising difficult. None of the species with the required charm is suitable as a stand-alone character. That’s why the BUND commissioned an illustrator with a soft spot for mythical creatures. He put pen to paper and created a four-legged animal that walks upright, and has a long green tail and spots. The naming ceremony was celebrated online: *of the many suggested names, “Bandi” came out on top.* The likeable little mascot is now used for more than only adorning leaflets and brochures. It is produced in limited numbers as a stuffed toy by a factory in Georgenthal near the Thuringian Green Belt. Anybody who shows exceptional commitment to the Green Belt has a good chance of receiving a Bandi as a pet.



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Knowing, what matters



»The nature conservation aspect received the best ratings from the respondents.«

In order to assess the efficacy of the BUND's large-scale media work, every couple of years it sends out market researchers, most recently in 2016. What do the latest responses from more than 1,000 respondents tell us? **Awareness of the Green Belt is growing:** across Germany, the number of respondents who had "heard of" the term increased from 20% in 2007 to 30%. This is a peak value with which the Green Belt can measure itself against familiar branded products from the consumer sector. Every more gratifying is that, over the same period, the number of people who had visited the Green Belt since the reunification rose even more dramatically – from 13 to 41 per cent.

The nature conservation aspect received the best ratings from the respondents: **94 per cent replied in the affirmative about the importance of protecting the Green Belt** for animals and plants. What's more, this was irrespective of whether the respondents lived in a district near the Green Belt or elsewhere in Germany. More than three quarters of the respondents were accordingly in favour of declaring the entire length of the Green Belt a nature conservation area. The remembrance aspect of the Green Belt was also viewed as important by almost three quarters of the respondents.

Will these numbers increase even further in the next survey? If designated as a natural monument in Germany, they just might.

»The popularity of the Green Belt is undisputed among experts – in Germany, in Europe and all over the world.«

Grüne Parallelen in Südkorea



The popularity of the Green Belt is undisputed among experts – in Germany, in Europe and all over the world. **Developments are being followed very attentively, especially from Korea.** The demilitarised zone (DMZ) between North and South Korea has many similarities with the Green Belt in Germany. An unusual network of habitats has developed here too, which represent most of the landscapes and types of habitat in the country and are home to an above average number of animal and plant species. The same descriptions apply both here and over there: a unique symbol of peace and nature, a legacy of the Cold War, a living monument.

There are differences too, however. The most obvious is that the border in Korea is still a long way from a peaceful situation and still serves as a barrier between two hostile countries in a state of ceasefire. It has considerably more military buildings and facilities which could one day be preserved as discernible places of remembrance.

There are differences in the geographical dimensions of the two areas as well. The DMZ is only **roughly 260 kilometres long, but at four kilometres across, is much wider.** Added to that is the six to ten kilometre-wide civil control zone in the South,



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which is sparsely populated and scarcely used. This predestines large parts of the Korean border to later use as a national park.

Another difference to the Green Belt in Germany is that, in South Korea at least, political will and a scientific and institutional basis has been present long before any hypothetical peace agreement coming into force. For example, the South Korea province of Gyeonggido, which butts up against roughly half of the border, has been cooperating since 2012 with the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation and the BUND in Germany. Together they have organised numerous international conferences, research projects and exhibitions and published illustrated books and informational material. With its intensive exchange, the BUND is also pursuing its aim of strengthening South Korean nature conservation organisations, especially the “Korean Federation for Environmental Movement” (KFEM), the partner organisation of “Friends of the Earth”.

Should reunification take place, Korea would be much better prepared to create a Green Belt than was the case in Germany.



»For example, the South Korea province of Gyeonggido, which butts up against roughly half of the border, has been cooperating since 2012 with the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation and the BUND in Germany.«





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»The “European
Green Belt
Association e.V.” is
a contact point for
150 organisations
from 24 nations.«



European Green Belt: The border regime and nature



Then the Green Belt Europe initiative began in 2003, there was much enthusiasm and expectations were high among the 23 organisations hailing from 14 countries. Keeping the whole thing on track turned out to be just as large a task for the somewhat spontaneously formed steering group.

It was to this end that the European Green Belt Association (EGBA) was founded in 2014 – with the BUND on its board. It has since proved its worth as a contact point for 150 organisations from 24 different nations. Its responsibilities include documenting all the relevant activities along the Green Belt, collecting information from each party involved about



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new developments, strengthening the brand, lobbying and media work and dividing up smaller amounts of funding. It moreover organises a regular international meeting, the Pan-European Green Belt Conference.

The conference has now taken place ten times, most recently in October 2018. More than 120 representatives of governmental and non-governmental organisations, authorities and scientific institutions from all neighbouring countries of the Green Belt met at the Wartburg near Eisenach. Where Luther once pondered the bible, they now worked on turning their vision of a European Green Belt into a green reality.

As always, the conference focussed on meeting people, exchanging information about ongoing or new projects, and on the specific requirements in the individual regions. At the end of the conference, the participants ratified the Eisenach Resolution. It evokes once again the ecological and unifying dimension of the transnational network of habitats and appeals to governments to make their contribution to the Green Belt.

Several current research projects also featured prominently at the conference, including the R&D project supported by the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation called “The European Green Belt as part of green infrastructure”.

Under the BUND’s leadership, the foundations for a more comprehensive approach to the challenges of the Green Belt were established. This was against the background of the fact that many nature conservation projects and conservation areas

»The Eisenach Resolution invokes the ecological and unifying dimension of the transnational habitat network.«





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»In 2018, the interregional “DaRe to Connect” project was launched, which is led by the BUND Department Green Belt.«



along the former Iron Curtain existed before the European Green Belt initiative was launched. However, these were all designated and managed at a regional, or at most a national level.

The project therefore essentially consisted of bringing together the often very different data pools on the natural environment from official sources in each respective country, balancing them out and making them accessible in a standardised geographic information system.

Now, special cross-border map layers for wetlands, forests, open landscape or existing conservation areas can be generated for the first time, which contain both the existing and potential ecological corridors. Overlapping these map layers produces a filter, which highlights the gaps in the Green Belt – and indicates whether they are suitable for being filled.

The interregional “DaRe to Connect” project, which was launched in 2018 and is led by the BUND Department Green Belt, is taking the next step. Indeed, those fighting for the Green Belt certainly cannot be said to lack bravery, but the acronym in fact principally stands for the Danube Region. The eleven partner organisations from eight European countries have taken on an enormous area. It extends more than 3,300 kilometres from the Bavarian Forest to the Black Sea. The Danube laps around and intersects the Green Belt at several points.

The project participants will need to be eagle-eyed to keep track of the overall picture and smaller details. To help with this, DaRe to Connect uses high-resolution image data from the Sentinel 2 satellites, which were launched in 2015 and 2017 to facilitate earth observation and environmental research.

One important question is how the satellite data can be used to map the entire Green Belt comprehensively and consistently, perhaps by recording vegetation



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and types of land usage automatically. There is definitely still a need for traditional mappers, however, for refining and verifying the satellite data on the ground. They operate in six pilot regions, the northernmost of which is the so-called “Three Country Corner” between the Bavarian Forest, Šumava and Mühlviertel. The southernmost pilot region covers the only section where the Green Belt runs parallel to the Danube: [the spectacular Iron Gates between Romania and Serbia](#), where two national parks meet.

Once the R&D projects had broadly outlined the gaps in the Green Belt, DaRe to Connect would provide precise statements about their suitability and development for transnational corridors between existing Natura 2000 conservation areas.

In the end, [most of the contributions at the Wartburg focused on how ecological adjustments could be made most efficiently](#), whether by designating new conservation areas, buying up land or just through greater consideration about how land is used. Stakeholders on the ground will be among those to benefit the most. Those who can prove that an unspectacular wetland meadow at the edge of a town is of international importance have better chances of saving it from use as agricultural land or a business park.

It is equally the case, however, that [without owners and land users, nothing can happen](#). They most sympathise with the goals of the Green Belt when they see opportunities for themselves too. An interesting example of this is provided by a feasibility study completed in 2019 called “Green Belt Oberpfalz - Czech Republic”. Possibilities were explored for an 850 square kilometre area on both sides of a 130 kilometre-long stretch of the border [with regard to how nature conservation, preservation of monuments and tourism could be combined in keeping with the goals of the Green Belt](#), mostly by combining existing ideas and ongoing projects – in other words, primarily through communication and networking between the stakeholders and parties involved. An additional gratifying aspect of the study was that money



»DaRe to Connect is intended to provide precise statements about suitability and development for transnational corridors between existing Natura 2000 conservation areas.«

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»Raising public awareness of the European Green Belt is also the aim of awarding model communities.«

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and an assignment came directly from the state and district governments without any marathon application process. It also marked the first time that a federal state, specifically Bavaria, played an active role in developing plans for a zoned off section of Green Belt on the western side, given that this area is also home to valuable habitats and cultural-historical sites.

The BUND's decades of research, struggle and campaigning for the Green Belt are evidently bearing fruit.

However, the idea of the European Green Belt can and must become better known still. It was for this reason that the EGBA launched the "European Green Belt Days" in 2016, and is why it supports organisations, associations and even communities who want to be involved in them. Campaigns aimed at the general public in many sections of the European Green Belt range from cross-border habitat management assignments to stargazing walks across impressive areas of the Green Belt to art workshops. **These campaign days take place between 18th and 24th September every year to mark the founding of the EGBA.**

Raising public awareness of the European Green Belt is also the aim of awarding model communities. **Each year, one town or municipality can be recognised per region**, which would earn this accolade with ideas and projects focussing on maintaining and developing the Green Belt. The role of the EGBA in this case is both that of jury and information source. After all, it is not only about judging, but more about disseminating the ideas across the network. The municipality of Haidmühle in the Bavarian Forest was the first to receive the award in 2015, which was followed in 2017 by the municipality of Leopoldschlag in Austria and in 2018 by the city of Peć in Kosovo, the latter becoming the first recipient in the Balkans.



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Monumental protection for the Green Belt

With its sheer expanse and ecological and historical dimensions, the Green Belt not only has something special, it has something almost sublime. Something worth cherishing and protecting. Unfortunately, there was no suitable framework for doing this in German law: too large for a conservation area, too narrow for a national park, too greatly shaped by humankind for both. The Green Belt served as Model when the federal government created a new protection category in 2010: the National Nature Monument. Unlike a national park, these monuments could also be principally of cultural-historical or regional heritage interest.

Despite the tailor-made paragraphs, it would still be a long time before Thuringia became the first state to designate its entire proportion of Green Belt as a natural monument in November 2018.

»The 763 kilometre-long corridor covers more than half of the entire German Green Belt.«



»They recognise that peaceful change is no utopia, that overcoming what divides us and the search for common ground are not just vital to the future of Europe, but are also achievable.«



The desire to do this was certainly present, but it could not be achieved simply by decree. **A new federal state law had to be passed.** This path broke new ground and led straight through the tangled undergrowth of the interests of farmers, forest owners and municipal planners.

It was about more than just achieving clarity, though – people on the ground had to be won over too. To this end, the BUND initiated a campaign supported by the Thuringian Ministry of the Environment, the most distinctive face in which belonged to an adventurer and traveller. **Mario Goldstein hiked with his dog and his rucksack across the former border as an ambassador for the Green Belt** in order to gather and then pass on images, faces and stories. **His message?** “There is no need to go to another continent to find monumental landscapes, species-rich natural environments and exciting stories. It is worth protecting our own treasures.”

Even though the targeted level of protection in the Thuringian Natural Monument does not entirely match that of a normal nature conservation area, its designation was an environmental and political feat given that the 763 kilometre-long corridor covers more than half of the entire German Green Belt. Its symbolic value should not be understated either. In fact, Thuringia’s Environment Minister Anja Siegesmund expressed her strong support for the Green Belt as a whole, for the network of habitats and for green infrastructure.

The neighbouring state of Saxony-Anhalt is also following suit. **A further 343 kilometres are due to be designated as a natural monument there**, which will likewise require its own legislation. Doing so will not be easy since roughly one third of the Green Belt in Saxony-Anhalt is in intensive use.

There are also ever louder voices claiming that the Green Belt is a kind of revenant of the GDR border, a consolidation of the separation in green.

As the main protagonist of the Green Belt, the BUND was always conscious of its responsibility to take a sensitive approach to history. As early as 1989, it emphasised that this project was not “a retrospective justification of the border”. The many joint projects and collaborations with museums in the border area are testament to how seriously this was meant. **Without the Green Belt, some of the relics would have long since been lost**, and some museums would never have opened. Without the tours, information and border hikes that the BUND has been offering for years, and without the physical immediacy of the Green Belt, countless young people would never have been made so acutely aware of the historical dimension of the division of Germany and the tragedy of the victims of the border. They recognise that peaceful change is no utopia, that overcoming what divides us and the search for common ground are not just vital to the future of Europe, but are also achievable.

What the recent pessimism and divisive rhetoric also likes to block out is simply the ecological function of the habitat network, which creates important lengthways links. However, the Green Belt also connects crossways – between numerous cross-border initiatives and partnerships, without which it could not exist. **The Green Belt is therefore far from an allegory for division, but is instead a symbol of the symbiosis of nature conservation and the culture of remembrance.**



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Nevertheless, the questionable criticism of the Green Belt was also a reason why the state government in Saxony-Anhalt appointed its own advisory board with a view to reconciling interests in matters concerning the natural monument. In any event, the government wants to announce the designation at the right moment to mark thirty years since the opening of the Wall. Once the section in Saxony is fully protected, 82 per cent of by far the largest part of the entire German Green Belt will be officially protected. Will the remaining 173 kilometres in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania be classified as a natural monument too? The keyword Green Belt does not appear even once on the homepage of the regional Ministry of the Environment. While Brandenburg will soon designate its small section of 30 kilometres as a National Nature Monument, Lower Saxony apparently has so far no ambitions for its 43 kilometres. There has been a somewhat surprising development western Germany, though: **the Hessian state government has already added a National Nature Monument – the Hesse Green Belt – to its coalition agreement.**

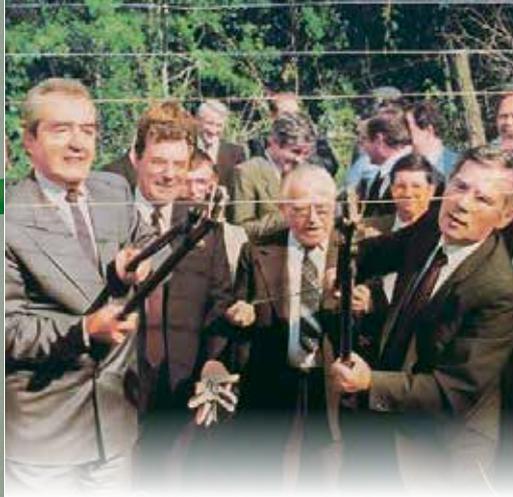
The fact that the new National Nature Monument protection category is being taken seriously in Germany sends a powerful signal for the European Green Belt. After all, the motives and reasons are just as valid on a larger, European scale, and they can be transferred to the title of “World Heritage Site”.

However, having a site designated protected by UNESCO is not easy – especially when it is **12,500 kilometres long, stretches across 24 countries** and includes hundreds of natural and cultural-historical characteristics.

One such attempt was made in the Fennoscandian section back in 2008. This one did not make it onto the national list of suggested sites, however.

A feasibility study supported by the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation was launched to examine whether a renewed attempt would be worthwhile. In 2014, after two years of intensive work, the 160-page answer was presented: yes, it would be feasible, but only if all of the countries involved cooperated effectively. The signs are relatively good. At any rate, the study was met with open ears at the European Cultural Heritage Summit 2018 in Berlin. The summit participants were in agreement that the European Green Belt meets the requirements. **Its nomination as a World Heritage Site should certainly be pursued in both the Nature and Culture categories.**

»The fact that the new National Nature Monument protection category is being taken seriously in Germany sends a powerful signal for the European Green Belt.«



Timeline

1975 – 2019

1975 – 1979

The first comprehensive bird life mapping operations undertaken from the western side of the inner-German border strip by the Bavarian branch of the BUND (BN) in the region around Coburg lead to the discovery of numerous endangered species.

April 1981

Initial land purchases by the BN in Upper Franconia along the East German border.

9 November 1989

Opening of the border between East and West Germany.

14 November 1989

Hubert Weinzierl, Chairman of the BUND and the BN, moots the idea of the former death strip becoming a “green belt for peace”.

9 December 1989

The Green Belt is born. The BN invites 400 nature conservationists and environmentalists from East and West Germany to their first joint meeting. The “Green Belt” conservation concept is launched and approved via the first resolution: “The border strip between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Repub-

lic is to be given “priority protection as a green belt and the ecological backbone of Central Europe”.

Early 1990s

Nature conservationists under the leadership of the BN fight tirelessly for the preservation of the Green Belt by means of mapping operations, exhibitions, flyers, applications for the designation of protected areas, lobbying and local projects. At the same time, gaps appear due to intensive cultivation, road building and afforestation.

1990 – 1991

In collaboration with the Regional Society for the Protection of Birds (Landesbund für Vogelschutz – LBV), the BN conducts a major fauna-mapping operation in the Green Belt between Bavaria, Thuringia and Saxony that proves the enormous importance of the former border strip for rare species.

1993 – 1994

Following the mine-clearing operation, the Green Belt is declared “free of mines as far as humanly possible to tell”.



1995

The first travelling exhibition about the Green Belt is launched against the backdrop of the European Year of Nature Conservation, with funding from the German Federal Foundation for the Environment (Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt – DBU), and runs for over 10 years in more than 200 locations.

1996

The Wall Land Act (Mauergrundstücksgesetz) allows ownership of parcels of land in the vicinity of the former border to be returned to private individuals.

April 1996

The section of the Green Belt running through Saxony is placed under a conservation order by the State Environmental Protection Agency (staatliches Umweltfachamt) in Plauen.

1998

The BN launches the first supraregional project (Species and Habitat Protection Programme Steinach Valley/Linder Plain).

This is followed by numerous other regional projects undertaken by the regional branches of the BUND in the Green Belt.

1998

The BUND Project Office for the Green Belt, which operates on a nationwide and international basis, is founded in Nuremberg.

2000

The BUND makes its first land purchases (11 hectares) in the Green Belt in the Altmark district of Salzwedel.

24 November 2000

The BUND starts issuing “Green Belt share certificates”. It uses the donations to safeguard valuable areas within the Green Belt.

2001 – 2002

Under the leadership of the BUND Project Office for the Green Belt and with funding from the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN), the first ever “Green Belt Inventory” is carried out – as a basis for a supraregional conservation concept.

19 June 2002

Inauguration of the West-Eastern Gate (WestÖstliches Tor) – a land art installation. The project is initiated by the BUND with the help of major funding from the German Federal Foun-



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ation for the Environment. It is at this event that BN Chairman Hubert Weiger announces the idea of a “European Green Belt”. Guest of honour Mikhail Gorbachev becomes patron of the organisation.

15 October 2002

Protection of the Green Belt is incorporated in the coalition agreement between the SPD and Bündnis 90/Grüne.

15 – 16 July 2003

The “European Green Belt initiative” is launched at a convention organised by the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation in Bonn. At this event, the Federal Minister for the Environment, Jürgen Trittin, announces that “the Federal Finance Minister (Hans Eichel) is now willing in principle ...to transfer ownership of areas falling under the Wall Land Act to the regional states free of charge«.

April 2004

The BUND organises the first press trip along the European Green Belt, starting in Hof and ending in the border triangle between Austria, Slovenia and Italy.

9 – 12 August 2004

At the first conference of the European initiative in Hungary, a working group is founded, consisting of national contacts and active non-government organisations. The BUND Project Office for the Green Belt becomes the regional coordinator of the Central European Green Belt.

11 – 13 October 2005

In cooperation with the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, the BUND Project Office for the Green Belt hosts the first international congress for the Central European Green Belt in Mitwitz.

11 November 2005

In the coalition agreement between the CDU, CSU and SPD, the Green Belt is classed for the first time as being part of the nation’s natural heritage. This lends new impetus to the faltering land-transfer process.

2006 – 2008

As regional coordinator, the BUND Project Office and its partners launch the first EU-funded Inter-reg project for the (Central) European Green Belt. Eighteen partners from 8 countries (Germany, the Czech Republic, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia and Bulgaria) collaborate on the project.

2005 – 2011

The “Experience Green Belt” project, which receives extensive funding from the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation along with scientific assistance from the BUND, makes it possible to experience the German Green Belt by taking advantage of nature tourism offers.

7 November 2007

In the “National Strategy for Biological Diversity”, the Green Belt is designated a flagship project for the preservation of biological diversity in Germany.



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29 July 2009

Amendment of the Federal Nature Conservation Act (Bundesnaturschutzgesetz): In section 21 para. 3, item 4, under the heading “Habitat network, habitat networking”, reference is made to the Green Belt forming part of the national habitat network.

26 October 2009

In the coalition agreement between the CDU, CSU and FDP, it is agreed to support the conservation and development of the German Green Belt and to initiate development of a European Green Belt.

2009 – 2012

The BUND launches the Interreg IV B project entitled “Baltic Green Belt”. Fifteen partners from Baltic coast countries (Estonia, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Russia) work on the development of a network for the Green Belt in the Baltic region.

28 January 2011

The transfer of Green Belt national heritage land to the regional state of Saxony-Anhalt for conservation purposes is finalised, thus fulfilling a long-standing demand of the BUND.

November 2011

At the convention entitled “Management of the Green Belt”, which is jointly organised by the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation and the BUND, agreement is reached on the guiding principle for preserving habitats.

2011 – 2014

The transnational Interreg IV B project entitled “GreenNet”, which is aimed at further developing the Central European Green Belt, is launched with the help of the regional coordinator, the BUND. Twenty-two partners from 6 countries are involved. The “Further Development of the European Green Belt Initiative” is carried out jointly by the BUND and EuroNatur with the help of the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation.

2012 – 2014

The “Updating of the Green Belt Inventory” is carried out by the BUND on behalf of the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation. 87% of the total area is still in a near-natural state.

2012 – 2017

Under the sponsorship of the BUND Project Office, the project entitled “Closing Gaps in the Green Belt” is conducted as part of the Federal Programme for Biological Diversity funded by the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation. The aim is to close gaps in the habitat network in a number of model regions.

6 May 2013

The “European Green Belt” is cited in an EU Commission report as the only example of existing transnational “green infrastructure”.

15 May 2013

The European Green Belt initiative celebrates its tenth anniversary at the Federal Ministry for the Environment in Berlin; 18 nations sign the declaration of intent to cooperate, and two further nations send letters of support.



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2014

The Green Belt Germany celebrates its 25th anniversary.

24 September 2014

Founding of the “European Green Belt Association e.V.” The founding members include a further 22 organisations from 14 countries in addition to the BUND. The organisation is chaired by Gabriel Schwaderer (EuroNatur), with Liana Geidezis (BUND) acting as deputy chair.

20 November 2014

The ruling parties of the Thuringian state parliament enshrine the designation of the Green Belt as a National Nature Monument in their coalition agreement.

6 May 2015

Kai Frobels is awarded the Bavarian Europe Medal for his efforts in supporting the European idea.

2 June 2015

The “Closing the Gaps in the Green Belt” project is awarded as an official project in the UN Decade on Biodiversity.

2015 - 2018

Start of the R&D project “The European Green Belt as part of Green Infrastructure”. The BfN-funded project is clear evidence of the European Green Belt’s contribution to Green Infrastructure.

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13 January 2016

Bandi, the Green Belt's little mascot, sees the light of day and begins its life promoting one of the biggest nature conservation projects in Germany.

24 April 2016

The designation of the Green Belt as a National Nature Monument is enshrined in the coalition agreement of the new government in Saxony-Anhalt.

2017

One of the most successful years for the BUND in terms of land acquired for the Green Belt: more than 900 ha are permanently safeguarded for nature conservation.

29 October 2017

Hubert Weiger and Kai Frobelt are honoured with the German Environmental Award by the German Federal Environmental Foundation as pioneers of the first and largest nationwide nature conservation project. The award is presented by German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

15 -19 October 2018

As part of the 10th Pan-European Green Belt Conference, 120 participants from 24 neighbouring countries plus Liechtenstein and Korea meet at the Wartburg in Eisenach and ratify the Eisenach Resolution concerning the European Green Belt.

1 November 2018

The BUND Department Green Belt celebrates its 20th anniversary.

09 November 2018

The state parliament of Thuringia designates the Thuringian Green Belt, which makes up half of the length of the Green Belt within Germany, a National Nature Monument.

2018

The BUND Department Green Belt initiates and launches the EU-supported "Life for Mires" and "D2C – DaRe to Connect" projects with a total of 14 partner organisations from 8 countries in the European Green Belt.

23 December 2018

The federal government in Hesse sets out in its coalition agreement its aim to declare its section of Green Belt a National Nature Monument, becoming the first former West-German state bordering the Green Belt to do so.

2019

The BUND passes the 1,000 hectare mark of land acquired for the Green Belt

2019

The Green Belt Germany celebrates its 30th anniversary!

Photocredits and description:

Cover The Green Belt between Mitwitz (Bavaria) and Sonneberg (Thuringia) (Otmar Fugmann)

Page 4 3 October 2014, 25 years Green Belt Germany jubilee event at Castle Lenzen (Jens Wegner)

Page 6 The Green Belt between Loddenreuth (Saxony) and Oberhartmannsreuth (Bavaria) with expansions east of the patrol track (Klaus Leidorf)

Page 7 GDR border fortifications, border police and *Saxicola rubetra* on a boundary post (Thomas Stephan)

Page 8 *Emberiza citronella* on a former border fence at the border museum Eichsfeld (Uwe Friedel)

Page 9 The Green Belt Thuringia-Hesse near Obersuhl (Klaus Leidorf), right: *Trifolium arvense* in front of a former observation tower (Helmut Schlumprecht)

Page 10 GDR border installations 1977 (BGS), bottom left: June 1989, border installations southeast of Duderstadt, Thomasberg (Klaus Schmidt), bottom right: border guards expanding the GDR border installations (Klaus Matwijow)

Page 11 Top right: GDR border installations, middle right: GDR border guards at the fence, bottom right: boundary post at a fallow (all Kai Frobel)

Page 12 Around 1960, GDR border in Kreis Heiligenstadt near Kirchgandern (Klaus Schmidt)

Page 13 9 November 2008, signing of the land transfer to Thuringia by Dirk Kühnau (former chairman of the Institute for Federal Real Estate), Dieter Althaus (former Minister-President of the Free State of Thuringia) and Sigmar Gabriel (former Federal Minister for the Environment)(Kai Frobel), right (top to bottom): article GONG (2005), article Die Zeit (2003), article Nürnberger Nachrichten (2007)

Page 14 Thüringische Muschwitz in the Green Belt Thuringia-Bavaria (Klaus Leidorf), top left: article Hannoversche Allgemeine (2001), bottom left: article Freies Wort (2005)

Page 15 Green Belt donor meeting 2002 in the Green Belt Saxony-Anhalt, Altmarkkreis Salzwedel (BUND), top right: article Hofer Anzeiger (2008), bottom right: Südthüringer Zeitung (2006)

Page 16 Left (top to bottom): Kai Frobel in the border strip 1979, *Saxicola rubetra*, *Lanius collurio* (all BN archive)

Page 17 Top right: 9 December 1989, first resolution of the Green Belt by the BUND Bavaria, bottom right: Hof, 9 December 1989, the Green Belt project is launched at the first German-wide nature conservation meeting, left to right: Walter Hiekel (Institut für Landschaftsplanung und Naturschutz/ ILN, Jena), Kai Frobel (BUND Bavaria), Werner Westhus (ILN, Jena), Nanne Wienands, Udo Benker-Wienands (both BUND Hof), Hubert Weiger (BUND), Rainer Haupt (ILN, Jena) (Ernst Sammer)

Page 18 27 March 1990: first press trip of the BUND to the Green Belt near Mitwitz (Peter Streck), right (top to bottom): article Neue Presse Coburg (1980), article Neue Presse Kronach (1990)

Page 19 Top: article Nordbayerischer Kurier (1997), middle: article Frankenpost (1993), right: Kai Frobel in front of a border post (Peter Streck)

Page 20 Green Belt Saxony (Liana Geidezis), left (top to bottom): article Freie Presse (1996), Green Belt share certificate, article Frankenpost (1993)

Page 21 The "Green Bonds", volunteers and full-time participants of the Green Belt (BfN (2), BUND (3), BUND project office Green Belt (20), Gudrun Classen-Cornelius (1), Kai Frobel (8), Dieter Krug (1), Josef Limberger (1), private (1), Thomas Rebhan (2), Jürgen Schmidl (1), Christian Starck (1))

Page 22 Top: excursion at the Green Belt Saxony-Anhalt, Altmarkkreis Salzwedel (Ute Machel)

Page 23 Top: participants of the "conference about the situation of the Green Belt Germany" from 17



to 18 October 2013 in Lützensömmern (Thuringia) (Daniela Leitzbach)

Page 25 Map of the Green Belt Germany with the nine BUND pilot regions with land purchases (BUND project office Green Belt/German Federal Agency for Cartography and Geodesy)

Page 26 Big picture: the Green Belt in the Rhön Biosphere Reserve between Unterweid (Thuringia) and Dippach (Hesse) (Klaus Leidorf), top left: meadow with *Arnica montana* in the Green Belt Thuringia-Bavaria (Stefan Beyer), middle left: orange-red *Hieracium aurantiacum* in front of a former observation tower in the Green Belt Harz, bottom left: *Gentianella ciliata* in the Green Belt Harz (both Helmut Schlumprecht)

Page 27 Top left: *Sympetrum pedemontanum* (Helmut Schlumprecht), top right: hatching dragonfly in the Kusebruch meadows at the Green Belt in the Altmarkkreis Salzwedel (Helmut Schlumprecht), top right: 2001, mappers of the first survey of the Green Belt (Helmut Schlumprecht), middle right: species-rich meadow in the Green Belt with *Anthemis tinctoria*, *Achillea millefolium*, *Centaurea scabiosa* (Helmut Schlumprecht), bottom right: Lutra lutra (Wolfgang Willner), middle: blossom of *Silene latifolia* (Helmut Schlumprecht), bottom middle: 7 June 2000, Cover of the resolution of the 25th German Nature Conservation Day on the Green Belt in Bamberg (archive BUND project office Green Belt)

Page 28 Top (left to right). *Pieris napi* on *Lythrum salicaria* in the Green Belt Thuringian Highland/ Franconian Forest, *Echium vulgare* on oligotrophic grassland at the Green Belt at the nature reserve Kleiner Fallstein in the Großes Bruch, male *Eresus cinnaberinus* on the inland dune north of Ziemendorf at the Green Belt in the Altmarkkreis Salzwedel (all photos Helmut Schlumprecht), *Ciconia nigra* (Dieter Damschen), top left: former GDR border post, sandy oligotrophic grasslands and heathland sites at the Wirler Spitze in the Altmarkkreis Salzwedel (Jürgen Starck), bottom left: the Green Belt between Zarrentin (Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania) and Marienstedt (Schleswig-Holstein) west of the lake Schaalsee (Klaus Leidorf), bottom: *Hyla arborea* (Christian Fischer)

Page 29 Top (left to right): *Lathyrus latifolius* (Helmut Schlumprecht), *Alcedo atthis* (Dieter Damschen), *Lycæna virgaureae*, *Zygaena purpurea*, right: *Verbascum nigrum*, bottom: *Cincindela hybrid* (all photos Helmut Schlumprecht)

Page 30 Photomontage, photo section in the back: main road Bundesstraße 6 cuts through the Green Belt in the Harz near Stapelburg (Daniela Albrecht), photo section in the front: press trip opposing the development of the main road Bundesstraße 87n through the Rhön Biosphere Reserve (BUND Thuringia)

Page 31 Top right: highway A37 access road "Eisfeld-Süd" directly at the Green Belt Thuringia-Bavaria, bottom right: converted Green Belt, patrol track with a line of trees as the remaining structure (both Klaus Leidorf)

Page 32 The Green Belt in the Wakenitz lowland near Herrnburg (Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania) (Oliver Granke)

Page 33 Background: *Carex arenaria* on sandy oligotrophic grassland on the inland dune near Bömenzien (Saxony-Anhalt) (Helmut Schlumprecht), top right: water violet-alder marsh forest (Hottonio-Alnetum) in the Green Belt near Salzwedel (Saxony-Anhalt) (Dieter Leupold), bottom right: rock vegetation in the Green Belt at the Saale river (Stefan Beyer)

Pages 33 and 34 Top middle: water violet-alder marsh forest (Hottonio-Alnetum) in the Green Belt near Salzwedel (Saxony-Anhalt) (Dieter Leupold), bottom middle: rock vegetation in the Green Belt at the Saale river (Stefan Beyer), right (top to bottom): *Corynephorus canescens* on sandy oligotrophic grassland in the Green Belt near Ziemendorf (Saxony-Anhalt) (Helmut Schlumprecht), *Vaccinium myrtillum* in a scrub heath with *Calluna vulgaris* in the Green Belt in the Thuringian Highland/ Franconian Forest (Helmut Schlumprecht), fen near Titschendorf in the Green Belt Thuringian Highland/ Franconian Forest (Stefan Beyer), lichen rich sandy oligotrophic grassland on the inland dune near Bömenzien (Saxony-Anhalt) (Helmut Schlumprecht)

Page 35 Top: former border fence in the border museum Eichsfeld (Uwe Friedel), right: the European Green Belt pavilion in the border museum Eichsfeld (Georg Baumert), bottom right: exhibition of the Green Belt in the national park visitor centre TorfHaus in the Harz (BUND project office Green Belt)

Page 36 Top left: hikers on the patrol track at the Green Belt Thuringia (Daniela Leitzbach), top right: memorial stone and information point about the razed village Jahrsau (Saxony-Anhalt) (Christian Starck)

Pages 36 and 37 Middle: memorial site Point Alpha at the Green Belt Thuringia-Hesse (Klaus Leidorf),

bottom: peace sculpture at the memorial site Point Alpha (Melanie Kreutz)

Page 38 The alluvial plain Werraue near Treffurt, Green Belt Thuringia-Hesse (Klaus Leidorf)

Page 39 Top: shepherd in the Green Belt Saxony (Kai Frobél), bottom: sheep from a sheep and goat herd at the Green Belt Saxony (Kai Frobél)

Page 40 Top: 19 June 2002, dedication ceremony of the Land Art object Westöstliches Tor in Eichsfeld, left to right: Hubert Weiger (chairman of the BUND), Wolfgang Nolte (mayor of Duderstadt), Angelika Zahrt (former chairwoman of the BUND), Gorbatschow's translator, Michail Gorbatschow (former president of the Soviet Union) with a Green Belt share certificate, Fritz Brickwedde (former secretary general of the German Federal Environmental Foundation), Jürgen Trittin (former Federal Minister for the Environment) (Jürgen Schmidl), bottom left: Westöstliches Tor (Thomas Stephan)

Page 41 Bottom: Green Belt between Mupperg (Thuringia) and Horb (Bavaria) (Klaus Leidorf)

Page 42 Left top to bottom: donator meeting at the Green Belt Thuringia-Bavaria (BUND), the Förirtz river in the Green Belt (Kai Frobél), water lily (Kai Frobél), introduction of the species and biotope protection project "Steinachtal and Lindener Ebene" with regional products (Stefan Beyer)

Page 43 Top: reduction of succession in the Green Belt Saxony-Anhalt (Sina Schröder), bottom: meadow with *Arnica montana* in the Green Belt Saxony (Kai Frobél)

Page 44 Top: excursion group at the Green Belt Thuringia (Daniela Leitzbach), middle left: youth doing heath conservation work in the Green Belt north of Arendsee (Saxony-Anhalt) during a project week (Dieter Leupold), bottom left: maintenance of wetlands in the Green Belt Saxony-Anhalt with a special mower (Dieter Leupold), bottom right: Grazing Konik ponies in the alluvial plain Rodachau near Stressenhausen at the Green Belt Thuringia (Daniela Leitzbach)

Page 45 Top: grazing sheep and goats in the Green Belt Thuringia in the administrative district Sonneberg (Gunter Berwing), right: sheep herd in the Green Belt Saxony (Kai Frobél), bottom: grazing Heck cattle in the alluvial plain Rodachau near Stressenhausen at the Green Belt Thuringia (Karin Kowol)

Page 46 Top: 17 September 2013, opening event for the project "Closing Gaps in the Green Belt Germany" supported by the Federal Programme for biological diversity (Bundesprogramm Biologische Vielfalt) at the Green Belt Saxony-Anhalt (Daniela Leitzbach), left: gap in the Green Belt near Breitensee (Thuringia-Bavaria) (Klaus Leidorf)

Page 47 The alluvial plain Ohreaue near Nettgau, Green Belt Saxony-Anhalt (Klaus Leidorf)

Page 48 Participants of the 8th Pan-European Green Belt Conference in Slavonice (Czech Republic) (Daniela Leitzbach)

Page 49 Top: view from the Arber mountain, Green Belt Bavaria-Czech Republic (Melanie Kreutz), bottom right: young *Otus scops* at the Green Belt Slovenia (Kristijan Malačič)

Page 50 *Ursus arctos* at the Fennoscandian Green Belt (Jari Peltomäki)

Page 51 Map of the European Green Belt with the four main regions (European Green Belt Initiative)

Page 52 Top left: *Merops apiaster* at the Green Belt Austria-Slovakia (Alexander Schneider), middle: Mavrovo National Park in Macedonia (FYRoM) (Melanie Kreutz), bottom right: meadow with *Trollius europaeus* at the Fennoscandian Green Belt (Kari Lahti)

Page 53 Top: the alluvial plain Marchaue at the Green Belt Austria-Slovakia (Robert Hofrichter), bottom right: *Lynx lynx* (Thomas Stephan)

Pages 54 and 55 Top: *Grus grus* at the Baltic Green Belt (Jörg Schmiedel)

Page 54 Left: the island Maligrad in Lake Prespa (Albania) at the Balkan Green Belt (Gabriel Schwaderer)

Page 55 Bottom right: *Halichoerus grypus* at the Baltic Green Belt (Elke Körner)

Page 56 "Torflohe und Pfrentschwiese" Nature Reserve at the Green Belt Bavaria-Czech Republic (Berndt Fischer)

Page 57 Hikers in the Prealpi Giulie Nature Park in the section of Green Belt along the Italian-Slovenian border (Melanie Kreutz)

Page 58 15 May 2013, Berlin: The "Declaration of Intent on the European Green Belt" is signed by representatives of the Environment Ministries of countries bordering the European Green Belt (Sascha Hilgers)



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Page 59 and 60 Top: A hike along the Green Belt (Salzwedel) with Federal Environment Minister Dr. Barbara Hendricks, 15.8.2017 (Ute Machel)

Page 59 Award winners and presenters of the German Environmental Award on 29.10.2017 (Toni Mader)

Page 60: Kai Frobels and Hubert Weiger receive the German Environmental Award on 29.10.2017 (Toni Mader)

Page 61: A crane in Salzwedel Forest (Dieter Leupold)

Page 62: Goldmoss stonecrop (*Sedum acre*) (Helmut Schlumprecht)

Page 63 Top: A Green Belt Sponsorship Certificate; Middle-right: A Green Belt Share Certificate

Page 64 Top: The Green Belt's mascot, Bandi, looks at an information board (Ute Machel); Left: Bandi the mascot (spehzi.de)

Page 65: Copper butterfly (*Lycaena virgaureae*) (Helmut Schlumprecht)

Page 66: A German delegation from the BUND (Liana Geidezis) and BfN (Uwe Riecken) visit the DMZ in South Korea (Uwe Riecken)

Page 67 Top: Anniversary conference in Seoul, South Korea, to mark 60 years of the DMZ (Uwe Riecken); Right: visit of a Korean delegation to the BUND Department Green Belt in Nuremberg (Martin Kuba)

Page 68 and 69 Top: Participants at the 10th Pan-European Green Belt Conference in the Wappensaal of the Wartburg in Eisenach, October 2018 (Johannes Buldmann)

Page 68: Otter (*Lutra lutra*) (Wolfgang Willner)

Page 69: Little ringed plover (*Charadrius dubius*), Brietzer Teiche, July 2018 (Dieter Damschen)

Page 70 Top: The Iron Gate in Romania (Liana Geidezis); Left: remnants of woodland swamp at the Green Belt Bavaria-Czech Republic (Martin Kuba)

Page 71 Top: Participants at the 10th Pan-European Green Belt Conference (Johannes Buldmann); Right: Green Belt at the Thuringia-Lower Saxony border (Klaus Leidorf)

Page 72 Top: Hubert Weigner recognises the Haidmühle municipality, represented by Mayor Margot Fenzel, as a model municipality of the Green Belt (Melanie Kreuz); Left: water buffalo in the Green Belt on the Austrian-Czech border near Leopoldschlag (Liana Geidezis)

Page 73 Top: Liana Geidezis, Hubert Weiger, Anja Siegesmund, Elsa Nickel and Uwe Riecken at the press conference at the 10th Pan-European Green Belt Conference (Johannes Buldmann); Right: the Ulster Valley in the Wartburg district (Matthias Kirsten)

Page 74: Panelists Joachim-Felix Leonhard, Anja Siegesmund, Martin Geilhufe, Stefan Leiner and Gabriel Schwaderer at the 10th Pan-European Green Belt Conference (Johannes Buldmann)

Page 75: Participants at the Pan-European Green Belt Conference hold out their hands across the border patrol track and celebrate European friendship (Katharina Grund)

Page 76 and 77 Top (L-R): 27 June 1989, former Hungarian and Austria Foreign Ministers, Gyula Horn and Alois Mock, symbolically cut through the signal fence at the border near Sopron (dpa); 14 January 1990, opening of the border between Schwärzdorf and Sichelreuth (Kai Frobels); 9 December 1989, opening of the border at Mödlareuth (Museum Mödlareuth / A. Schaffner); 19 June 2002, Mikhail Gorbachev with a Share Certificate at the opening of the West-Östliches Tor (Jürgen Schmidt); Top right: an interview with Hubert Weiger during the first press tour to the Green Belt in April 2004 (BUND Department Green Belt); Middle right: Former East German soldiers searching for mines near Duderstadt in 1992 (Klaus Schmidt); Bottom right: a common snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) (RTL1)

Page 78 and 79 Middle-left: Footpath signs in the Green Belt (Liana Geidezis); Top (L-R): June 2014, a press tour organised by the BUND Department Green Belt to mark 25 years of the Green Belt (Daniela Leitzbach); October 2015, the first international conference for the Central European Green Belt is held in Mitwitz (Thomas Rebhan); Tourists in front of an original stretch of the Wall near Heinersdorf-Welitsch (Andreas Hub)

Page 80 and 81 Top left: Green Belt near Pferdsdorf in the Wartburg district (Matthias Kirsten); Middle: A kingfisher (*Acedo atthis*) (Heinz Klöser); Right: The prize-giving ceremony for the German Environmental Award (Toni Mader)

Back cover The cold Moldau River forms roughly two kilometres of the German-Czech border. On the right of the image is the land acquired by the BUND in the Haidmühle municipality (Josef Limberger).

