



Nature and environment

Nature and landscape protection

The Austrian-Slovak border region is characterised not only by the existence of two urban agglomerations, but also by a high share of natural particularities. The area situated directly at the border along the March/Morava river, tangentially to the two capitals, occupies a special position as a so-called "low wetland area". This area, which is extremely sensitive to ecological influences, was designated a landscape or nature protection area both in Austria and in Slovakia, so that only a limited scope of building activities is permitted there. The wetlands along the Danube from Vienna to the national border were designated a national park in 1996 and thus fall under the highest category of protection. Another cross-border national park was established on the eastern shore of Neusiedlersee and in the adjacent Seewinkel areas.

Beside national parks, nature reserves are among the most strictly protected areas in Austria. The majority of the protected areas in Austria, are protected landscape areas. These are to a large extent semi-natural areas with outstanding landscape features and a high recreational value. The protection's objective is to maintain the landscape's appearance and ensure recreation and tourism. The objective of the nature parks is to convey knowledge on nature, accordingly, central focus is placed on their educational and recreational value. Nature conservation is also given top priority in Slovakia. Schemes to protect the ecosystem in the Bratislava region stipulate three regional biocorridors (Danube, Malý Dunaj and March/Morava) as well as the landscape protection areas of Záhorie (along the March) and the Lower Carpathians/Malé Karpaty, where special attention is to be given to nature and landscape preservation in order to maintain their quality as recreation areas within easy reach of the city of Bratislava.

A coherent European ecological network of special areas of conservation is set up under the title **Natura 2000**. The protected areas designated according to the Bird Directive are integrated into the Natura 2000 network. The EU Member States are establishing the conservation area network Natura 2000 based on two directives, one on bird protection (Bird Directive) and one the protection of habitats of flora and fauna (Habitat Directive). Natura 2000 aims to lastingly protect the habitats and animal and plant species of European significance mentioned in the Annexes of the Directives. In this context, the European Commission emphasises the essential role of spatial planning for the preservation of species diversity and sets out how spatial planning can contribute to both the preservation and sustainable management of ecosystems. Each Member state has designated relevant areas for each of these regions.