Valley of the Sûre River jointly designated by Belgium and Luxembourg

The Sûre is a transboundary river that originates in Belgium and, after a 31 kilometer course, forms a natural border of 12km with Luxembourg before crossing that country and joining the Moselle in Germany. As is frequently true in similar situations, the effective management of this wetland requires a regular dialogue between national and regional authorities to reconcile the objectives of nature conservation, water quality improvement, and economic and social development. Most of the Sûre valley site lies within Nature Parks that were created by Luxembourg in 1999 and Belgium in 2001, and a joint management committee is composed of local representatives and staff from the government ministries directly involved. Now the Ramsar Administrative Authorities in both Parties have jointly submitted the Vallée de la Haute-Sûre site as a transboundary Wetland of International Importance -- the designation date, 24 March 2003, reflects the date of the first submission of the site nomination materials.

Ramsar's Estelle Gironnet has prepared the following brief site description for the Annotated Ramsar List:

Tributary of the Sûre, near Traimont, Belgium (All photos: Michel Fautsch)
The Vallée de la Haute-Sûre (49°53'N 005°51' E) is a transboundary Ramsar Site, covering 29,000 hectares in Belgium (région Wallone) and 16,900 ha in Luxembourg, for a total area of 45,900 ha. It has the protected status of Nature Park in both countries and SPA in Belgium. It comprises a complex of forested wetlands, acidic fen and peatlands, wet grasslands, reed beds, springs, rural zones and a barrage with a water storage area of 380 ha in the Luxembourg part. The site supports internationally threatened species, especially the otter *Lutra lutra*, the bats *Plecotus auritus* and *Pipistrellus Pipistrellus*, the badger *Meles meles* and the freshwater pearl mussel *Margaritefera margaritifera*. It shows a high biodiversity in both animal and plant species - besides the typical wetland plants such as *Comarum palustris*, *Menyanthes trifoliata*, *Eriophorum angustifolium*, the rare *Epipactis palustris* and *Pedicularis palustris* are present as well. The site is of stopover and nesting importance for many birds, notably the Black Stork, *Ciconia nigra*. Some 20 species of fish have been identified within the site, and a special construction exists to enable the fish to pass the main barrage. The barrage regulates the rises in water level and provides an important part of Luxembourg's population with drinking water. Pollution from intensive agriculture and the lack of water treatment plants have a significant impact on the water quality of la Sûre and its tributaries. Uncontrolled tourism activities such as water sports, leisure fishing, and cycling cause disturbances to the site. Authorities in both countries are collaborating closely on developing and implementing a joint management plan. Ramsar site no. 1407 (Belgian part) and 1408 (Luxembourg part).

The Sûre along the frontier near Romeldange
The Valley of the Sûre in snow, near Romeldange

Loutre européenne, European otter, *Lutra lutra*

Belgium has also designated, as of the same submission date of 24 March 2003, a further two Ramsar sites in the Province of Liège, namely the Grotte des Émotions, a newly-discovered subterranean karst system, and the Hautes Fagnes, a site rich in peatlands. They are described here.

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