



The Upper Rhine Transboundary Ramsar Site again in the spotlight of international attention

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Increasingly, Ramsar Parties who share common wetland ecosystems and river basins work together across national borders for their common management. To date, 14 such ecosystems are formally declared as **Transboundary Ramsar Sites (TRS)**.

In order to build upon first experiences of such cooperation, the Alsace regional authorities on the French side of the Upper Rhine floodplain (shared with Germany) invited other TRS managers for a seminar in January 2010.



View of the rural part of the Upper Rhine plain north of Village-Neuf (France).

On 13-14 October 2011, 120km further south on the edge of the Upper Rhine TRS, the **Trinational Environment Centre** in Weil-am-Rhein (a small town situated where Germany meets France and Switzerland) invited experts on transboundary cooperation for a seminar to exchange experiences derived from different contexts in Europe. Michael Wilke, the organiser of the meeting, welcomed about 50 participants with the words of Beate Jessel, the president of the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, arguing that in the context of progressing climate change and biodiversity loss, international cooperation for nature conservation becomes more important, and only with rules and coordinated actions across borders can we achieve lasting conservation of natural resources on which we all depend. Guy Morin, the president of the Trinational Eurodistrict Basel, addressed the challenges for cooperation in this transboundary urban area and its natural surroundings. He made reference to the French priorities for the trilateral Upper Rhine Conference which include the setting up of a transboundary governance for the improved management of the floodplain habitats in the Ramsar Site. He also considered that the transboundary groundwater protection area along the Wiese river, a tributary to the Rhine on the German-Swiss border, could indeed be added as a Swiss part to the Upper Rhine Transboundary Ramsar Site.



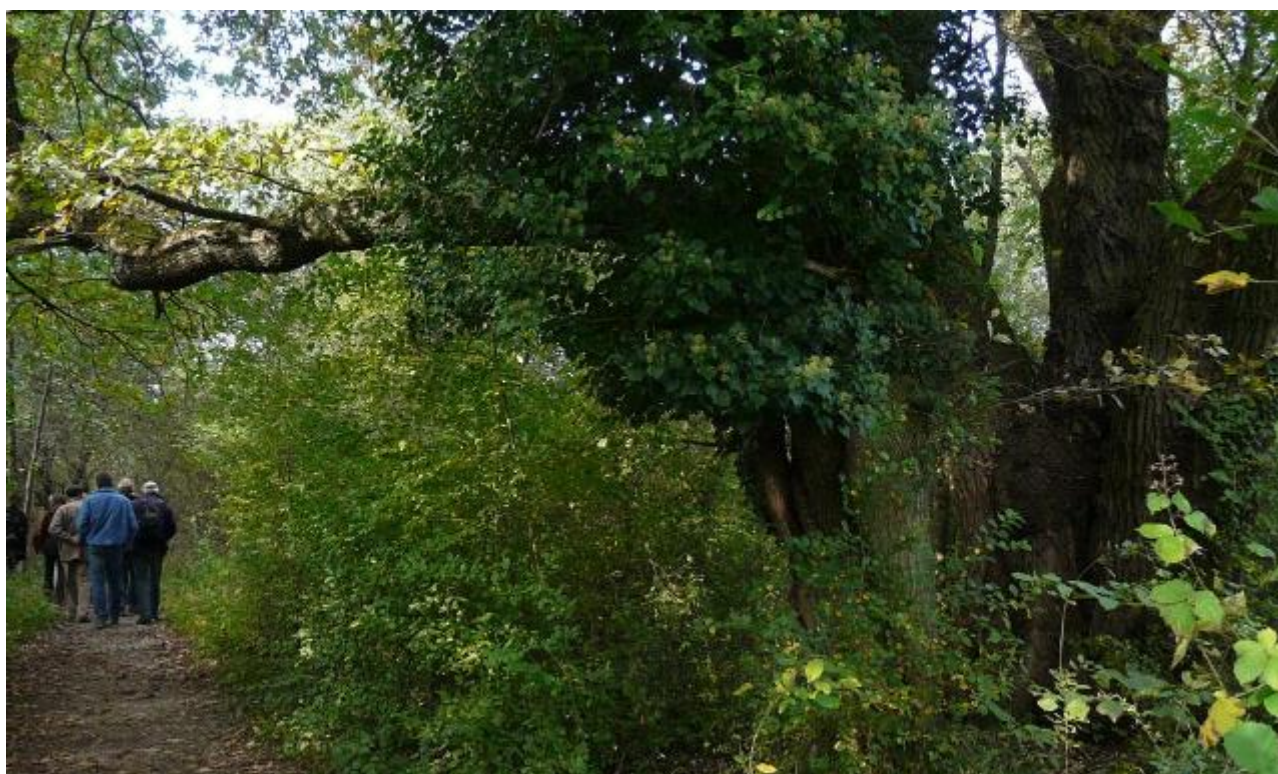
Many river embankments, dams and weirs, such as this one near Märkt (Germany), constructed for navigation, hydropower and agricultural production along the Upper Rhine, will be renovated.

Of particular interest for wetland managers were the presentations on crossborder cooperation in the Thayatal National Park in Austria (along the Dyje river marking the border with the Czech Republic), in the bogs of the Nature Park Bourtanger Moor-Bargerveen (shared between Germany and the Netherlands), in the floodplain of the lower Oder/Odra river (shared between Poland and Germany), and on a [successful training programme for young environmental experts in the Danube basin](#). The Ramsar Secretariat presented experiences with crossborder management of wetland ecosystems. [Naturefriends International](#) presented their work on tourism and wetlands, the nature trails they are establishing in several Ramsar Sites and other protected areas, and announced that the Upper Rhine will be in the spotlight of their campaign “Landscape of the Year” in 2013/14.



The participants of the symposium obtaining explanations about the freshly restored natural flood retention area at the mouth of the Kander river entering the “Old Rhine” arm.

During the second day, the participants visited the construction site of the new European high-speed rail link between Karlsruhe and Basel and its environmental compensation measures and the southernmost, newly restored, natural flood retention area of the Integrated Rhine Programme of the German Federal State Baden-Württemberg for flood protection and riparian wildlife. For an introduction to this unique restoration programme for the riverine forest and its ecological floods, [watch the excellent video on YouTube here](#). The symposium concluded with a visit of the opposite French part of the floodplain, in the [Nature Reserve of the Petite Camargue Alsacienne](#). The historic buildings were built in 1852 for the first industrial fish breeding facility in Europe. They are now serving as an exhibition area, education centre and captive breeding facility for the reintroduction programme of the Atlantic Salmon in the Rhine basin. And the restored floodplain habitats are a popular recreation area for many visitors from the surroundings and the urban centres of Basel, Mulhouse and Freiburg.



Strolling underneath an old oak in the Petite Camargue Alsacienne Nature Reserve (France).

Indeed, several partners working together in the Upper Rhine floodplain showed their visitors that this intensively populated and heavily used urban, industrial and agricultural area in Western Europe, still has important natural treasures and is rapidly learning how to make best use of the wetland ecosystem services and resources in the long term. Groundwater protection, river navigation and the renovation of aging power generation facilities (hydrological and nuclear) pose further challenges for international cooperation and wise use of the wetland ecosystems.

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