

Report of our project partners EuroNatur and Riverwatch

10 years of hydropower data: 2024 update reveals ongoing threats and wins for Balkan rivers

Radolfzell/Wien, March 14, 2025 – Over a decade after the first systematic data collection on hydropower development in the Balkans, the latest [Balkan Hydropower Update 2024](#) reveals a mixed reality: While significant advocacy efforts have successfully halted many destructive projects, the region's rivers continue to face ongoing threats. Despite persistent resistance, thousands of hydropower projects are still being planned, with almost 100 currently under construction. Half of the planned or constructed projects are located within protected areas. Explore the new data on our [interaktive map](#).



Upper Neretva: The Ulog dam is about to be put into operation - a devastating blow for the once pristine stretch of river. Protected species such as the softmouth trout and the white-clawed crayfish are among those affected. What was once a clear, living ecosystem is now another victim of hydropower. © Bruno D'Amicis

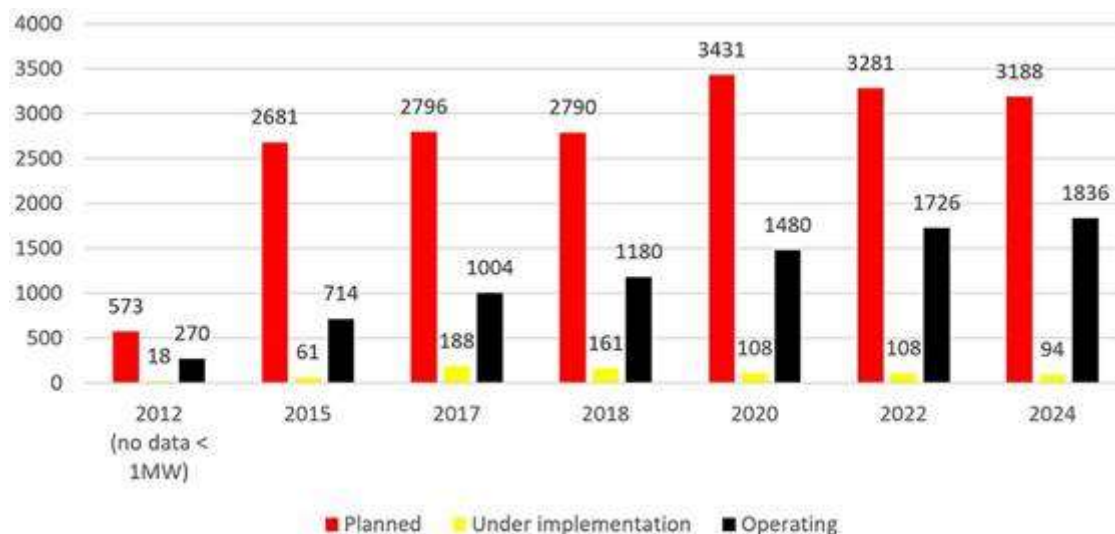
The ongoing threat

The 2024 data update found that

- 3,188 hydropower projects (HPPs) are planned in the region, 94 are currently under construction, and 1,836 are operational;
- 92 percent of the planned projects are small HPPs (less than 10 MW), producing minimal energy and causing irreversible damage to rivers and local communities;
- almost half of the projects are planned or under construction within protected areas, contradicting the very purpose of protected areas, which is to protect nature from destruction in specially designated areas;
- since the last update in 2022, 110 HPPs have come into operation, leaving another 1,100 river kilometres devastated; and
- Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Albania, and Serbia are the hotspots of dam construction and river devastation, with Greece and Croatia also expanding projects.

A decade of resistance: hard-fought victories in the battle for river conservation

Over the past ten years, thousands of kilometres of rivers have been lost to hydropower. Yet, NGOs such as EuroNatur, Riverwatch, their Balkan partners, local communities, scientists, activists, lawyers and many others as part of the Save the Blue Heart of Europe Campaign have prevented even greater destruction. A comparison of the data since 2015 (see figure below) shows that we succeeded in slowing down the dam tsunami. “The significant increase in overall hydropower development between 2015 and 2022 (from 714 to 1,726) has been prolonged but appears to have slowed down in the last two years”, the study states (p. 3). Furthermore, the number of projects under implementation has steadily decreased since 2017.



According to the latest data update, this success is also reflected in the suspension of 452 HPPs, which are no longer considered feasible for implementation. Notably, these include 26 HPPs in the Vjosa Wild River National Park in Albania, which celebrated its second anniversary on March 13th. Additionally, fifteen projects along the Neretvica River in BiH have been halted by political decisions, and 405 projects in Greece have been officially classified as "rejected" in the country's current planning system. In BiH, additional suspensions are expected following recent changes to the Law on Electricity in the Federation of Bosnia & Herzegovina (FBiH), leading to the suspension of at least 116 projects.

“We see these results with mixed feelings. On the one hand, we have lost so many rivers in the past ten years, which is sad, and each new dam is one too many. On the other hand, the data also show that fewer hydropower plants are being built, and more rivers are being saved. And that shows we are on the right track. But no doubt, we have to continue the effort to keep Europe's Blue Heart beating,” says Ulrich Eichelmann, CEO of Riverwatch.

"Although our efforts in the context of the Blue Heart Campaign are bearing fruit and fewer rivers are being destroyed by hydropower overall, the fact that more than 50 percent of the hydropower plants planned and under construction are located in protected areas is extremely worrying. Not only does this defeat the very purpose of protected areas, but it also sets a bad precedent," stresses Annette Spangenberg, Head of Conservation at EuroNatur.



One of our successes: the Vjosa remains free of hydropower plants. With the proclamation of the Vjosa National Park, 26 dam projects became obsolete. © Nicolas Jehly

The ‘Dam’aging countries: where destruction is happening now

Bosnia & Herzegovina, Albania, and Serbia remain hydropower hotspots, with destructive projects still threatening some of the most valuable river ecosystems in Europe. For example,

- in Bosnia-Herzegovina, two iconic rivers are the most heavily threatened in the Balkans, facing an onslaught of large and small-scale dam projects:
 - Neretva. More than 50 HPPs, small and large scale, threaten the entire river network—the Neretva and every single tributary. Among them is the recently completed large-scale Ulog Dam, which cuts through its alpine environment, as well as the Upper Horizons project, the largest dam project in Europe.
 - Upper Drina. One of the most heavily threatened river systems, the Upper Drina is facing a wave of large and small-scale dam projects, putting the globally threatened Huchen (Danube salmon) severely at risk.
- Albania continues to be a major hotspot for hydropower development in the region, with 27 construction sites and 346 in the planning stage. Some of the most concerning projects include
 - Shkumbini. One of the worst cases of hydropower overdevelopment, where there is literally no tributary left dam-free. Even protected areas are not spared, as Shebenik-Jabllanica National Park remains under pressure from ongoing small hydropower proposals.
 - Devolli. The completion of the Banja and Moglica dams in the Devolli River cascade has permanently transformed the upper stretch into a series of reservoirs, disrupting the river’s longitudinal connectivity and severely affecting the ecosystem, also downstream.



Upper Drina: Three dams are under construction on the Bistrica river, a tributary of the Drina near the town of Foca. This scenic river was the most important spawning site for the globally threatened Huchen (*Hucho hucho*) in the Drina basin. However, the authorities of Republika Srpska decided to ignore this fact and started to destroy these rivers with financial support of China. © Bruno D'Amicis