

## A Lifeline Through Europe

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In the course of its long path through Europe, the GreenBelt represents many regions: the polar and boreal conifer regions in the North, the Central European deciduous and mixed wood zones, the Alpine zone down to the Mediterranean, and the subtropical zone in the South of Europe. The GreenBelt can be seen as a cross section of Europe's natural areas and of its landscapes and cultures. Many plants and animals have found their last European hiding place along this GreenBelt, and they have also used it as a migration corridor through the continent. These circumstances were identified by a young student named Kai Frobels, who later on became the initiator of the nature conservation area along the former military zone. Today he is the head of the GreenBelt project at the German Board of Nature Conservation. This organisation is also in charge of the conservation of the Central European section of the Green Belt.

The unique value of "nature" at this borderline was already acknowledged in earlier years and many areas along the border have been under nature protection since the seventies. There exist thirty-nine national parks (see table on page 21) and many nature parks, biosphere reserves, and „Natura 2000“ areas at this moment. Four of those protection zones will be used to illustrate the singular variety of protected areas with their richness of species and landscapes.

### Zapovednik Pasvik (RU) and Øvre-Pasvik (N)

This national park is located at the meeting place of the three countries Norway, Finland and Russia. It is an example of the boreal fir tree zone. The national park was established in 1970 and was extended in 2003. It comprises the rim of the Sibiric Taiga, with hard winters and hot summers. Near the river Pasvik

a vast area of conifers can be found, which is characteristic for this region. A third of all brown bears of Norway live in this national park and there is a research centre studying them.

### National Park Bavarian Forest (GER) and Šumava (CZ)

These national parks are situated in Germany and in the Czech Republic. Together they represent the greatest compound district of woodland in Central Europe. The landscape has the characteristics of a low mountain range. The lynx has been resettled successfully – especially in the Czech part. The German part has the special motto: "Let nature be nature again". For example, this is why decayed trees are not to be removed.

### National Park Neusiedler See-Seewinkel (AT) and Fertő-Rakos (HU)

This trans-border national park is dominated by the Neusiedler See, which is the most western steppe lake in Europe, and its famous saline ponds. The park is a very important observation area for birdlife and migratory birds in particular.

### Prespa National Park (Albania, Macedonia and Greece)

This national park was established in 2000 and has a mediterranean climate. The two Prespa lakes host eight endemic species of fish. A special goal of this national park is to recover former ecological misbehaviour, which seems to be successful, and also to create a biosphere reserve to reinforce trilateral scientific research appropriate to the area.

At this point, 56% of the more than 4000 km Central European GreenBelt, is under some sort of protection and currently there is a feasibility survey for nominating the GreenBelt as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The international postgraduate Master Programme "Management of Protected Areas" is dealing with inter- and trans-disciplinary issues in the field of protected area management and planning. Thereby, this programme is equally addressing students and experts, who want to deepen their knowledge and to make use of it in their work in protected areas.

A great number of international professors and lectures is involved in the MPA programme, which is organized in modules. The courses take place in different protected areas and prepare the students for the future tasks and challenges in nature conservation. As seen in the example of the "Green Belt", the programme creates an international network of experts in the field of protected area management and planning.

Already today, several graduates of the MPA programme work in the protected areas of the "Green Belt". Especially in the countries Albania, Germany and Czech Republic, some of the MPA graduates utilize their knowledge and make use of the network of experts.

For detailed information regarding the Master Programme "Management of Protected Areas" you can visit the website [mpa.e-c-o.at](http://mpa.e-c-o.at).