

Donau-Auen National Park Management Plan 2019 – 2028



Part I

Guiding Principles and Strategic Objectives

Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	3
2.	Guiding Principles	5
3.	Special Framework Conditions Applying to the Donau-Auen National Park	8
4.	Status Report: Development of the National Park 1997–2018	12
5.	Strategic Objectives 2019–2028	16

1. Introduction

The Donau-Auen National Park lies on both sides of the Danube in the Austrian provinces of Vienna and Lower Austria. Nestled between the capital cities of Vienna and Bratislava, the National Park extends from the Upper Lobau of Vienna's 22nd district, through Lower Austria, continuing all the way to the Slovakian border. The National Park preserves one of Central Europe's last remaining natural riverine wetlands ("Auen") of significant size. Its rich variety of species and habitats is of national and European importance. In Austria, this riparian and wetlands landscape has been protected since 1997 as the Donau-Auen National Park, meeting the criteria of Category II Protected Areas of the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources), in order to protect this precious ecosystem for the benefit of future generations.

1.1. Origins of the National Park

Two factors led to the preservation of this "...absolutely unique and isolated piece of wilderness found in the immediate proximity to a world capital," as described by Crown Prince Rudolf of Austria in 1888. The alpine character of the Danube's river regime – marked by much-feared ice jams and severe summer flooding – curtailed the development of human settlement and agriculture. Large portions of the area remained an exclusive imperial hunting domain until the end of the Austrian monarchy. Major Danube regulation starting in 1870 fundamentally changed the riverine landscape, yet the dynamics of this free-flowing stretch were retained to a certain extent.

The Viennese Lobau was declared a nature preserve as far back as 1905. During times of distress in the first world war, extensive fields were cultivated to grow crops. From

1938 to 1945, the majority of what is now the National Park was deemed the "Hunting and Nature Preserve of the German Reich," which however did not prevent during this era the construction in the wetlands of an oil harbour, including a refinery and pipeline, or the Danube-Oder River canal.

In 1978, after years of public debate, the Lobau – much beloved among Viennese as a recreational area – was declared a nature protection area. The Lower Austrian portion of the Danube wetlands was declared a landscape protection area in 1983. Upon Austria's accession in 1983 to the Ramsar Convention, the Danube wetlands were entered in the "List of Wetlands of International Importance" (Ramsar List). At the beginning of the 1980s, the planning offices of Vienna, Lower Austria, and Burgenland collaborated to create the first draft concept of a "National Park East" encompassing the Danube wetlands, the Danube-March-Thaya wetlands, and Neusiedlersee-Seewinkel.

Also around the beginning of the 1980s, plans for the construction of a hydroelectric plant near Hainburg began to take concrete form. This would have meant the destruction of the only remaining longer section of the free-flowing Danube in Austria. A broad movement initiated by citizen and environmental groups led to nationwide protests and the now legendary occupation of the wetland forests at Stopfenreuth in December 1984. Although the power company had obtained all the necessary building permits, the construction project was eventually halted. After twelve years of planning, lively public debate, and a successful public fundraising campaign to secure the Regelsbrunn wetlands area, the decision was taken by policymakers in 1996 to establish the Donau-Auen National Park.





1.2. Statutory foundations

Foundation for the establishment of a Donau-Auen National Park across Austrian provinces is the agreement in accordance with Article 15a of the federal constitution between the Federation and the provinces of Lower Austria and Vienna for the establishment and maintenance of a Donau-Auen National Park, signed on 27 October 1996. On the basis of this agreement, the provinces of Lower Austria and Vienna enacted the respective National Park laws and regulations. The Donau-Auen National Park is also part of the Natura 2000 network in accordance with the Habitats Directive on the conservation of natural habitats, and of wild fauna and flora; and the Bird Directive. The Viennese portion of the National Park was thus declared in 2007 a European Protected Area, followed by the Lower Austrian portions in 2007 and 2011. The Lower Lobau as well as the entire Lower Austrian part of the National Park are listed as "Wetlands of International Importance" under the protection of the Ramsar Convention.

Overall statutory foundations of the Donau-Auen National Park:

- Agreement in accordance with Article 15a of the federal constitution between the Federation and the provinces of Lower Austria and Vienna for the establishment and maintenance of a Donau-Auen National Park
- Federal Law on the foundation of and share in the Nationalpark Donau-Auen GmbH

Vienna: Statutory foundations of the Donau-Auen National Park:

- Law on Donau-Auen National Park (Vienna National Park Law)
- Ordinance of the Vienna Provincial Government regulating the determination and apportionment of the National Park area (Vienna National Park Ordinance)
- Ordinance of the Municipal Departments of the City of Vienna concerning the decreeing of a hunting management plan for the Donau-Auen National Park (in the most current version)
- Ordinance of the Municipal Departments of the City of Vienna concerning the decreeing of a fishing-related management plan for the Donau-Auen National Park

(in the most current version)

- Ordinance of the Vienna Provincial Government in regard to the declaration of the Donau-Auen National Park as European Protected Area (European Protected Area Regulation)

Lower Austria: Statutory foundations of the Donau-Auen National:

- Lower Austria National Park Law
- Ordinance on the Donau-Auen National Park
- Ordinance on the marking of the Donau-Auen National Park
- Ordinance in regard to the European Protected Areas

Any possible duties to obtain permits for the measures described in this Management Plan are derived from these statutory foundations.

1.3. The Management Plan as an overall master plan

The National Park administration is to attend to its tasks as laid out in a Management Plan. This Management Plan has been drafted with the participation of stakeholders as an overall master plan in accordance with Article V, Section 1 of the agreement for the establishment and maintenance of the Donau-Auen National Park. It is an overall strategic document applied to the whole National Park area, and for a planning period of ten years. It encompasses the entire scope of National Park management tasks. Regulating the years 2019 to 2028, it is both a Management Plan in accordance with Paragraph 10(2) of the Lower Austria National Park Law; and a Management Plan in accordance with Paragraph 5, Section 7 of the Vienna National Park Law. In the province of Vienna, regulation of hunting and fishing are governed by separate ordinances (hunting and fishing management plans). This Management Plan contains the respective nature conservation objectives of the European Protected Areas "Danube wetlands east of Vienna" and "Donau-Auen National Park, Viennese section."



2. Guiding principles

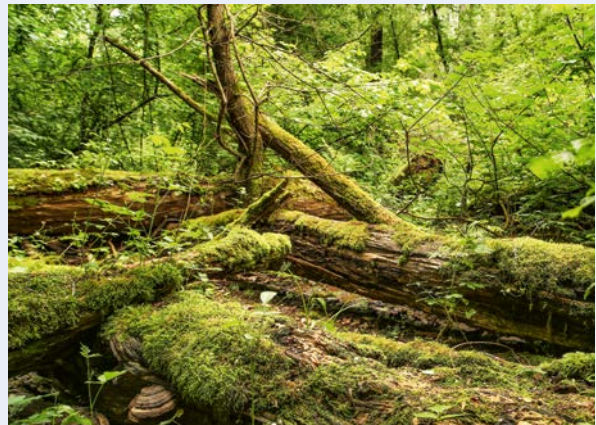
1. Maintain the free-flowing river stretch in perpetuity

Preservation efforts are guided by a visionary river morphology concept derived from the historic state of the river, meaning prior to the major Danube regulation. The free-flowing stretch of the Danube exhibiting dynamic morphology and hydrology (with periodic flooding and varying groundwater levels) and the diversity of the concomitant wetland waters should be preserved in perpetuity. Active bedload management and restorative river engineering should encourage and preserve the living conditions of typical riverine and wetland species as well as their populations and habitats. The aim is the most natural development possible of riverine morphological processes.



2. Protect natural processes

Ensuring a generally undisturbed flow of natural processes in nature zones (which according to IUCN Category 2 guidelines must make up at least 75% of the total National Park area) is achieved by permanent cessation of forestry and hunting operations which have dominated the area in the past. This cessation applies to all nature zones, even those farther away from the river; and also to areas no longer susceptible to flooding, and not exhibiting natural potential to develop as riverine forests in the future.



3. All wild animals are equal

In the National Park, all wild animals are of equal value and importance, regardless of their legal status as “hunnable” or “not hunnable” species. All wild animals should be able to behave in accordance with their natural or near-natural states for the full duration of their natural life cycles.



4. Protect endangered flora and fauna and their habitats

As a habitat of national and European significance, the Donau-Auen National Park has a special responsibility to protect endangered and protected species and their habitats. This also applies to man-made structures and elements such as meadows, allées, dyke vegetation, landmark trees, and more. These habitats and landscape elements in managed nature zones or special zones (such as the Marchfeld flood protection dyke) must be actively preserved, provided that the natural development of surrounding nature zones is not impaired.



5. Enable up-close experience of true nature

As the IUCN states, National Parks should provide “a spiritual and emotional experience for their visitors”, and “serve the purposes of research, education and recreation.” The Donau-Auen National Park enables its visitors to experience true nature up close in the immediate proximity of the capital cities of Vienna and Bratislava. The National Park makes it possible to rejoice in the beauty of nature, to discover the value of all life forms, and to feel more connected to the many creatures of the universe. This is why the National Park establishes and maintains a network of publicly accessible trails and visitor infrastructure.



6. Sensitize visitors to the National Park mission

Appealing visitor centres, high-quality educational programmes and excursions, but also ongoing public relations activities not only inform and educate visitors. They enhance appreciation for and identification with the goals of the National Park: protecting and preserving nature for future generations. Broad support among the public for the National Park’s mission ensures its continued existence in the future. Along with the other Austrian National Parks, the Donau-Auen National Park sees itself as a pioneer in nature awareness and environmental education.



7. Provide continuity in research and monitoring

The quality and gearing of protected area management is served by continuity in research and long-term monitoring. Profound scientific knowledge about the natural environment and the fabric of the ecosystem, as well as the timely identification of potential dangers or threats, are indispensable for effective nature conservation. Moreover, long-term research and monitoring activities deliver essential input for nature interpretation programmes and public awareness campaigns.



8. Ecological network

The National Park area is a central component of an ecological network between the Alps and Carpathians. The National Park administration sees its role as a regional competence centre for nature conservation.



9. Contribute to quality of life in the region

The National Park makes an essential contribution to quality of life in the region. It is an important factor in the municipal development of Vienna as well as in the cultural and tourism-related development of the National Park region in Lower Austria.



10. Cooperation as guiding principle

The National Park administration sees itself as a competent partner in local, regional and cross-border cooperation, as well as in nature conservation-based cooperation..



11. "Nationalparks Austria"

The Donau-Auen National Park is one of six Austrian national parks, each of which share the same values, principles and strategies. Situated in the central Austrian region of Vienna, the Donau-Auen National Park has a special role and task in developing and implementing the umbrella brand "Nationalparks Austria."



12. Cooperation along the Danube

The Donau-Auen National Park is part of the larger riverine ecosystem of the Danube and its tributaries. Thus there is a need for the development and implementation of joint conservation and development objectives along the entire Danube. The well-developed structure of the Donau-Auen National Park has enhanced its special role in this process.



3. Special framework conditions applying to the Donau-Auen National Park

1. Waterway and flood protection

The Danube wetlands of the National Park are not an undisturbed ecosystem. The most decisive interventions include the major Danube regulation in the second half of the 19th century; river navigation in the 20th century; and the construction of the dams in Vienna/Freudenau and Gab ikovo (Slovakia) in the early 1990s. The effects of these and other interventions have accumulated over the decades. Even when heeding the fact that flood protection and the Danube as an international waterway continue to be established parameters for the National Park, this stretch of the Danube does in fact exhibit high potential for renaturalization.



2. Drinking water supply

Crucial components of wetland environments include the geohydraulic and hydrodynamic aspects of groundwater, and water quality. These influence both the microbiological as well as the local aquatic and terrestrial populations. In addition to the protection of the dynamic conditions that are characteristic of riverine environments, the potential use of groundwater for drinking water supply is to be maintained in accordance with the agreement for the establishment of the Donau-Auen National Park while heeding ecological objectives.



3. Historic land use

For centuries up to the establishment of the National Park, land use by humans had a strong impact on the riverine wetlands. Human intervention created open landscapes. A close-meshed network of forestry roads was built, and clearings for hunting were created. Prior to the establishment of the National Park, humans determined in large measure the structure of forests and the types of trees found there.



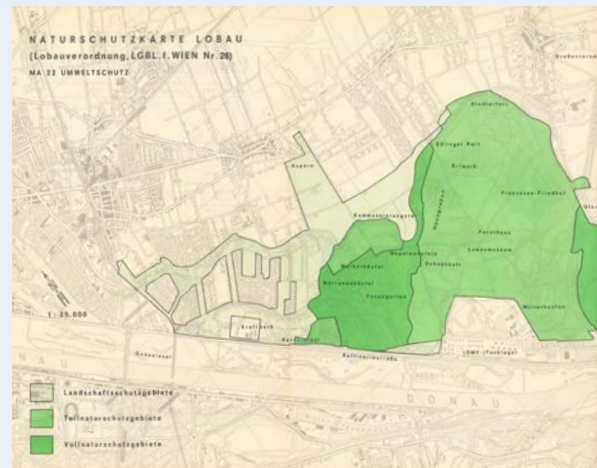
4. Unique aspects of the Lobau

Due to its close proximity to Vienna, the Lobau has been more heavily and consistently affected by human intervention than other parts of the National Park located farther away from the city: its detachment from the river since the 1875 construction of the Marchfeld flood protection dyke; the oil harbour, the Danube-Oder channel; the lowering of the groundwater table; large-scale agriculture; extraction of drinking water and designation as water protection area; and its heavy use as recreational area. Yet as a polder-type floodplain retention area specified by periodic high waters and a marked longitudinal gradient, the Lobau wetlands have special value for nature conservation. Its ample backwaters, ditches, trenches, xeric habitats and other unique environments have made it a precious habitat for select flora and fauna which formerly thrived on the edges of the wetlands.



5. Early nature conservation efforts in the Viennese part of the National Park

In 1978 – before the founding of the Donau-Auen National Park – the Lobau was declared a nature protection area. Starting at this time, conservation-related aims took precedence over commercial ones, resulting for example in the conversion of agricultural land to organic farming, and a stop to the planting of hybrid poplars.



6. A narrow green ribbon

The National Park forms a narrow green ribbon running through a cultural landscape dominated by dense human settlement and intensive agriculture. The lack of substantial buffer zones brings the ecosystems of the National Park in direct interplay with the surrounding human environment. The Donau-Auen National Park currently has an area of around 9,600 ha, thus not yet reaching the 11,500 ha of wetlands to be found between Vienna and the national border, and designated by the agreement for the establishment of the National Park.



7. Rising number of visitors

Each year, more than 1.5 million people visit the National Park – and the trend continues upwards. Due to its unique location stretching from Vienna to Bratislava, the National Park must fulfil the specific demands placed on it as an urban catchment recreational area. Foreign or out-of-town tourists play second fiddle to day-trippers. As the predicted population growth in the Viennese conurbation and in Lower Austrian regions surrounding the National Park comes to pass, new challenges arise in regard to informing and channelling visitors that must also be addressed by creating new recreational facilities in National Park environs.



8. In the focus of science

The Donau-Auen National Park area is among the most researched natural ecosystems in Austria. The conflict centred on the Hainburg hydroelectric plant in the early 1980s sparked major scientific interest in the Danube wetlands, which was further stimulated through the planning and establishment of the National Park and by way of a range of other major projects. The geographic proximity to research institutions in Vienna and the wealth of existing data increase the appeal of the National Park for researchers.



9. Vienna-Bratislava region

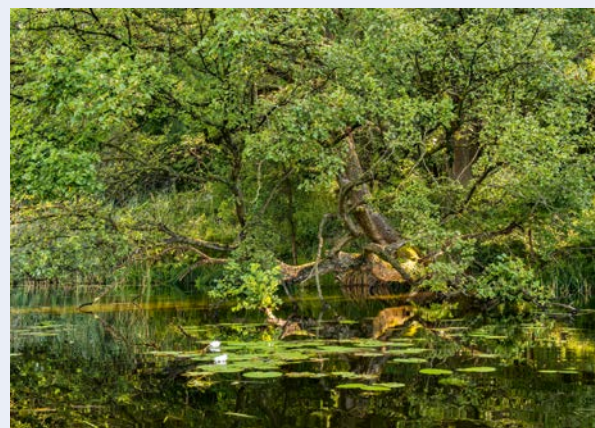
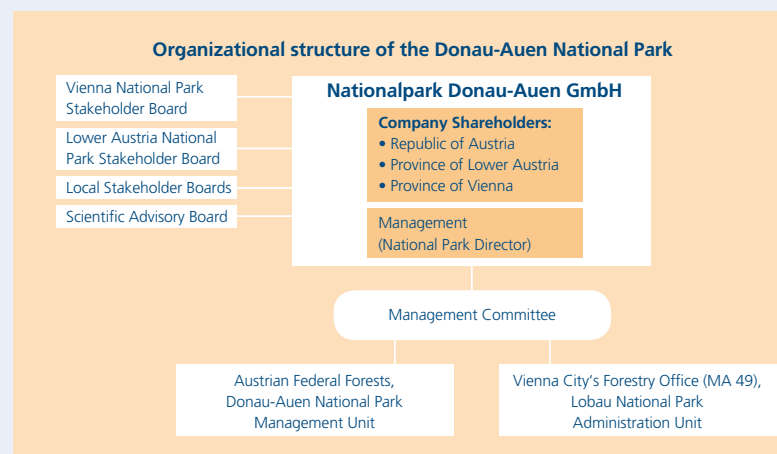
The Vienna-Bratislava corridor has become a dynamic Central European region. Rapid population growth and settlement, paired with huge infrastructure projects, may potentially lead to conflict with the National Park. There is no such thing as a “typical” National Park region. While some areas surrounding the National Park are urban, others – in particular many Lower Austrian villages – are still rural. Yet even these are experiencing population influx. The Lower Austrian regions of Marchfeld and Römerland-Carnuntum are following their own path in regard to regional and tourism development. These regions are characterized by a rather underdeveloped tourism structure that lacks hotel and other accommodations, and has little experience or tradition in tourism. However, they are well established as popular destinations for day trips, with Schloss Hof and the Roman archaeological site of Carnuntum as leading tourist magnets.

10. Special administrative organization

The Donau-Auen National Park encompasses two Austrian provinces and is thus backed by both of these, along with the federation. All three are parties to the agreement for the establishment of the National Park, which regulates the organization and financing of the park. The National Park administration also includes the respective National Park forest management units: Donau-Auen National Park Management Unit of the Austrian Federal Forests, and Lobau National Park Administration Unit of the Vienna City's Forestry Office (MA 49). Sovereign responsibility lies with nature conservation authorities in the respective province. Important management responsibilities in the National Park area also lie with other public agencies, in particular viadonau - Österreichische Wasserstraßen-Gesellschaft mbH (Austrian Waterways Limited Company), and the Vienna Municipal Department 45 (Water Management).

11. Cessation of commercial exploitation

The permanent cessation of commercial exploitation in the National Park is ensured not only by provisions of the National Park Law (nature zone, nature zones with management), but also by way of ongoing and/or one-off compensatory payments to private as well as public landowners.



4. Status report: Development of the National Park 1997–2018

1. A turnaround in river engineering

The establishment of the National Park in 1996-1997 not only spelled the end of the planned hydroelectric plant east of Vienna. It reversed the objective of river engineering on the Danube. Pioneering pilot projects have received national and international acclaim, and have been replicated elsewhere. These projects include reconnecting backwaters; restoring natural river banks by removing hard embankments; and altering hydraulic structures to regulate low water. Building on this experience, the National Park administration and viadonau drafted an overall restoration programme and a bundle of measures for the entire length of the Danube in the National Park. However, the intended implementation as part of a comprehensive infrastructure project ("Integrated River Engineering Project on the Danube 2006") failed. Now, this programme must be implemented by a sequence of separate projects carried out over a longer period of time in a step-by-step fashion.

2. New bedload management

The concept to counteract riverbed erosion by coarsening the bed material could first be tested in the field in the framework of the Bad Deutsch-Altenburg pilot project. Field tests proved that the method was less efficient than laboratory and computer models had predicted. Building on the results of the field trial, a new concept for ongoing bedload management was developed. It calls for an increase in the amount of artificial gravel feeding below the power plant at Vienna-Freudenau, and a transfer back upstream of dredging material and gravel reclaimed from other gravel traps. The latter has been undertaken by viadonau since 2015-2016. For the first time since the establishment of the National Park, it has been possible to substantially slow down the progressive decrease in water levels on the Danube due to missing upstream bedload.

3. Partnership with viadonau

The basis for river engineering measures in the National Park has been and continues to be the well-established partnership between the National Park administration and viadonau, the Austrian Waterways Company. Viadonau's current "Catalogue of Measures for the Danube East of Vienna (M.KAT.OST)" contains the requisite maintenance and optimization measures which are essential for the National Park: ongoing bedload management, water connectivity, and riverbank restoration. The measures should be implemented by 2030.

4. Water for the Lobau

Since 1995, water has been introduced into the Mühlwasser system from the New Danube in order to improve water conditions in the Upper Lobau. Water connectivity plans for the Lower Lobau as well as other planned replenishment projects have not yet been realized because possible adverse effects on groundwater quality (drinking water supply) or groundwater levels (potential flooding of low basements in the environs) cannot be ruled out.



5. Forest Transformation

In nature zones, initial forest transformation management is allowed for a period of 30 years. Measures contain suppression of neophyte species like the Ailanthus and the Maple Ash or reduction of the Hybrid Poplar in favour of autochthon trees. Active forest transformation has already been ceased in most parts of the National Park. In the Management Plan of 2009–2018 (for the Lower Austrian part only), those areas were declared as “nature zones with forestry management completed.”

6. Tending meadows

On the basis of maps created since 2003 for xeric and meadow habitats, around 90% of wetland meadows continues to be cultivated as meadows because these are deemed to be rare types, support conservation of biodiversity, or are characteristic landscape elements. The intervention and upkeep programme developed for xeric habitats is being implemented with the regular assistance of volunteers.

7. Reconstruction the Marchfeld dyke

Protection from flooding was further enhanced in the years 2009–2012 as the height and stability of the Marchfeld dyke was increased on the section extending from the Lobau to the Schönaauer Schlitz. In order to preserve as much as possible of this protected dry habitat and its unique flora and fauna, the path of the dyke has been slightly altered. Innovative new methods have been developed to salvage valuable vegetation layers in order to transplant them to the newly-restored areas of the dyke. Since the autumn of 2017, the reconstruction of the dyke has proceeded to the mouth of the Russ creek.

8. Transforming agricultural fields

One-third of the extensive agricultural fields of the Lobau has been converted into forest (nature zones). For another third, attempts are currently underway to develop natural and biodiverse meadow habitats (nature zones with management). Crops are still cultivated in the remaining third using organic agricultural methods only. To realize these transformations, the city of Vienna purchased 208 ha arable land from the former leaseholder in 2009. Smaller pockets located on ÖBf land were being converted step by step into forest or meadows, most recently as forest compensation areas during the restoration of the Marchfeld dyke.

9. Expanding the National Park in 2016

In 2016, the area of the National Park was enlarged by 277 ha thanks to contracts with landowners (Petronell wetlands, 260 ha) and via purchase (Fischamend wetlands, 17 ha). The respective 2018 amendment of the Lower Austria National Park Ordinance also implemented the integration of most of the arable land into the nature zone or nature zone with management. Several meadows that were difficult to tend have been incorporated into the nature zone.



10. Conservation through the safeguarding of habitats

In the Donau-Auen National Park, safeguarding natural habitats and allowing ecological processes to unfold freely are the primary means of preserving biodiversity and native natural resources. For those species most in need of protection, the National Park has developed a special conservation programme aimed at learning more about them: about both individuals and the population, how to ensure successful propagation, and in some cases to ensure that reproduction takes place by implementing specific measures (protecting the clutch of the European Pond Turtle is one example).



11. Cessation of commercial hunting activities

All activities related to commercial hunting, including the feeding of game, have been discontinued entirely. Wildlife kills are permitted only under special conditions and within the framework of wildlife regulation for hoofed game populations. These are carried out in a coordinated manner with neighbouring hunting grounds (e.g. Lobau gamekeepers, Donau-Auen game region, etc.)



12. Winners and losers

Twenty years' National Park management have led to marked changes in the natural environment. These are clearly visible when comparing the Donau-Auen National Park wetlands to those upstream, such as the Tulln wetlands. There are clear winner species, such as the White-tailed Eagle and the Eastern Imperial Eagle, both of which have now resettled in the Danube wetlands after decades of absence. Other species and populations have profited from the increased accumulation of deadwood. On the other hand, there is a progressive decline in fish biomass despite ongoing river restoration efforts. While the decline is not as rapid as in other sections of the Danube, it is still alarming, and a clear indication that further improvements in both quality and quantity are required to establish adequate aquatic habitats.



13. Managing visitors to the National Park

The already high number of people visiting the National Park continues to grow. While there is an uneven pattern to the distribution of visitors across the area, no part of the National Park remains untouched. While this clearly impacts wildlife, it is difficult to provide an objective definition of a breaking point. National Park personnel encourage visitors to always be more respectful of nature, wildlife and other visitors. The most efficient visitor management is however provided by the natural and landscape structures themselves, as well as existing recreational infrastructure.



14. Designing trails for visitors

Visitors have different expectations and demands when it comes to experiencing the National Park and using its network of trails. The well-maintained trails and navigational system are based on existing forestry roads, and there are few nature experience paths. While aftereffects of former land use and forestry operations are still widely engraved on the landscape, the number of deadwood structures is steadily and visibly increasing.

15. Visitor and educational programmes

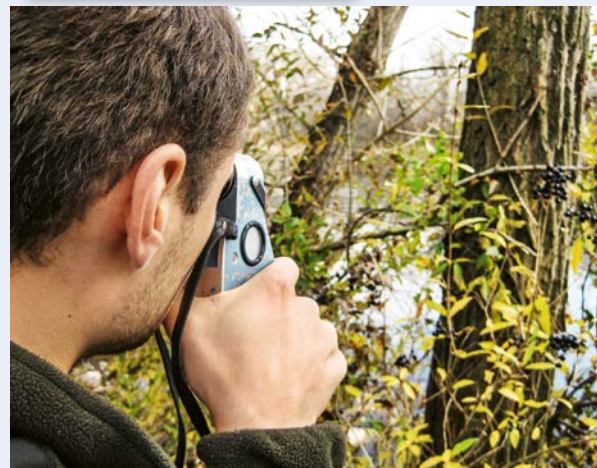
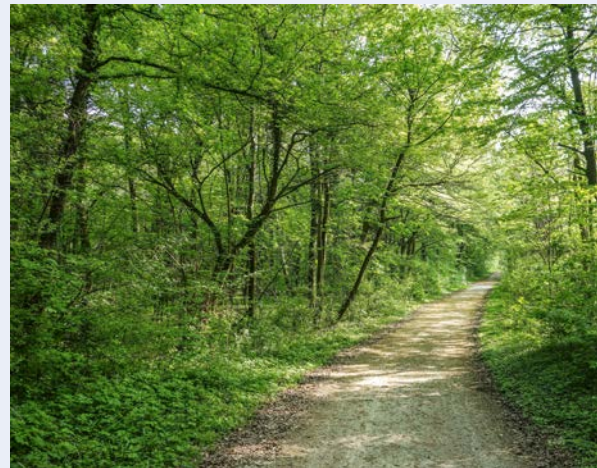
In the first management period, the National Park administration developed a comprehensive range of visitor and educational programmes of the highest quality: the schlossORTH National Park Centre; the wien-lobAU National Park House; the National Park information point at Schloss Eckartsau and other visitor facilities; boat excursions; guided walks; and the National Park camps. Each year, around 100,000 guests participate in visitor programmes offered by the Donau-Auen National Park. Visitor feedback is overwhelmingly positive. Apart from fluctuations due mainly to weather events, the number of participants and visitors has remained constant for years. The schlossORTH National Park Centre has become a popular tourist destination.

16. The National Park brand

Thanks to regular and ongoing public relations work, the Donau-Auen National Park is one of the best known of the National Parks in Austria, second only to the Hohe Tauern National Park. The term National Park is perceived to be “highly relevant” and “appreciated.” A brand development process for the umbrella brand Nationalparks Austria led to the identification of shared and unifying values, and the creation of a clear brand personality across all the Austrian National Parks.

17. Research and monitoring

In the area of research and monitoring, the National Park administration focus is on cooperation with universities and other scientific institutions, e.g. for theses, dissertations, basic research, excursions; and in data management, including geodata archiving and documentation, National Park GIS, the knowledge database parcs.at, locality database, etc. The National Park regularly monitors the forest areas; open country; the red deer population; and “game bite” and other effects caused by browsing, nipping, or rutting. The National Park administration draws on surveys, studies and datasets prepared by other institutions in order to document the development of aquatic habitats and abiotic conditions. At present, there are partial rather than comprehensive efforts in regard to regular observation and long-term documentation of ecosystem development, and the compilation of a systematic inventory of species.



18. The New Lobau

In order to protect green spaces during a period of intense residential development activity, the City of Vienna in 2015 declared sizeable portions of the 22nd district to be a landscape protection area. In order to reduce the burden on the National Park and to establish a buffer zone, 240 ha of arable land adjacent to the Lobau were developed as the recreational area "New Lobau." The EU-sponsored ETZ project "urbANNatur" (2010-2013) coordinated the design of 15 ha of the New Lobau; since then, both the area itself and its trail network has been expanded.



19. National Park and National Park region

At the time it was founded, around 80% of residents in neighbouring Lower Austrian communities were against the establishment of a National Park. Today, it has become a partner to a diverse range of regional organizations and activities: municipalities, partner schools, tourism institutions, LEADER and regional development associations. Thanks to the schlossORTH National Park Centre and Schloss Eckartsau, the National Park also belongs to the Marchfelder Schlösserreich group. The regulations governing access and recreational activities in the National Park that came into effect in 1999 have proven to be widely accepted. The National Park stakeholder boards include representatives from local communities and other stakeholders; board members consult and ratify the annual programme put forth by the National Park administration.



20. National Parks Austria

The National Park administration is actively and constantly involved in cooperation with other Austrian National Parks by way of the coordination committee led by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Sustainability and Tourism, as well as Nationalparks Austria and its working groups. Since 2012, joint projects in the EU rural development programme have been carried out via Nationalparks Austria, whereby the Donau-Auen National Park took the lead in 2017 for the rural development project "publicity" for Nationalparks Austria.



21. The Danube River Network of Protected Areas

Since 2007, the Donau-Auen National Park has led efforts to develop DANUBEPARKS, a transnational network of protected areas along the Danube river from Bavaria to the Danube delta. With head offices in Orth since 2014, DANUBEPARKS received the Natura 2000 award from the EU Commission. The Donau-Auen National Park initiates and acts as lead partner for transnational INTERREG projects that embrace the entire spectrum of activities devoted to protecting the Danube and its habitats.



5. Strategic Objectives 2019–2028

Nature & Wildlife

1. Bedload management

Sustained, institutional anchoring of the bedload management programme in order to maintain and even increase in the long term the low and medium water levels of the Danube by way of active bedload management. This requires on the one hand adherence to the polluter-pays principle in regard to the chain of power plants (compensation for holding back gravel); on the other, maintenance of Danube water levels must become a confirmed standard aspect of water management equivalent to maintenance of fairway depth for navigation.



2. Renaturalization of the Danube

Active participation in the implementation of renaturalization ("optimization") measures included in viadonau's "Catalogue of Measures for the Danube East of Vienna." National Park priorities include improved connectivity of major side channels to the Danube, and the enabling of new inflow areas that better correspond to current conditions by restoring river banks to their natural state wherever possible.



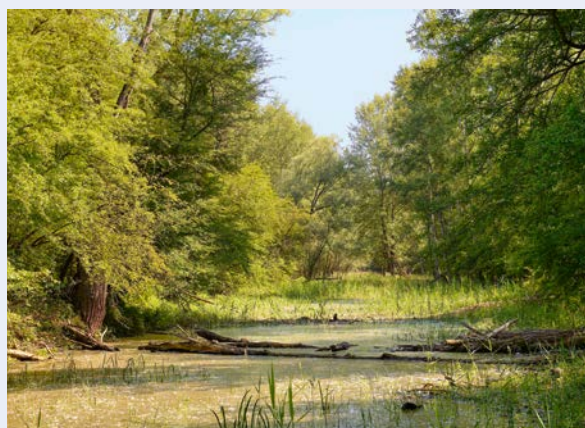
3. Innovation in river engineering

National Park administration should show initiative and take the lead in nature conservation-related discussions on objectives, scope and effects of river engineering measures in order to promote the best possible implementation in practice. It should use its professional expertise to prepare and evaluate new monitoring and evidence-related data in order to use new insights to develop innovative concepts for any necessary river engineering measures.



4. Lobau: Extension of replenishment project (Lobaudotation)

Improvement of the groundwater and surface water situation in the Upper Lobau by extending and optimizing replenishment of the Lobau by way of an additional inflow supply via the Panozza lake; by ceasing to pump out ground water (deactivation of "Sperrbrunnen"); and by improving the connectivity of secondary trench systems by lowering artificial fords for path crossing.



5. Improved framework conditions for the Lower Lobau

Creation of basic conditions for a meaningful replenishment of the Lower Lobau by changing the framework conditions, while considering and ensuring the quality of groundwater for drinking water supply.

6. Conclusion of forest transformation

By 2028, the transformative measures for forests in the entire nature zone should be completed. Focus lies on the Petronell-Carnuntum National Park extension area including the adjacent "cooperation by contract area" in which commercial exploitation has been halted.



7. Eliminating hunting-related infrastructure

By ceasing to maintain hunting-related forest infrastructure (such as paths, clearings, swathes cut through the forest, forestry roads and ditch crossings) in addition to completely closing down any hunting infrastructure in areas without wildlife regulation ("Wildruhegebiete"), forest fragmentation in nature zones should be reduced.



8. Provision of firewood

Should timber become available due to forestry operations in nature zones with management, or in the course of clearing trails for the safe passage of National Park visitors, it may be used by local residents as firewood.



9. Tending meadows

Maintaining valuable wetland meadows by way of appropriate mowing practices, removal of cuttings by farmers; regular evaluation; active development of (sections of) former arable land as meadows.



10. Maintaining xeric habitats

Maintaining ecologically valuable xeric habitats by way of appropriately adapted measures, including clearing of scrub, manual and machine mowing, and grazing; may be carried out in cooperation with school classes, volunteer associations, and other partners.



11. Habitat preservation during reconstruction of the Marchfeld dyke

For the period during and after the Marchfeld dyke reconstruction: safeguarding the optimal regeneration of valuable habitats.



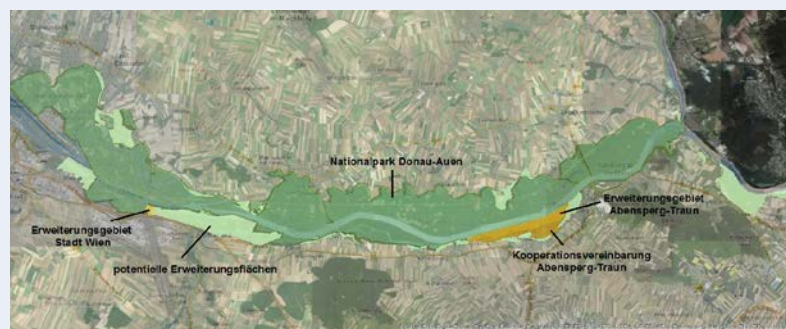
12. Management of hoofed game

To explore the potential and limitations of natural development in the nature zone, any type of hunting-related intervention should be abandoned in a step by step and scientifically monitored way: complete cessation of regulation of hoofed game in the sheltered game areas ("Wildruhegebiete"); continuance of hoofed game management outside the sheltered game areas in close coordination with neighbouring hunting grounds; developing the hunting competencies of National Park personnel active in wildlife management.



13. National Park expansion

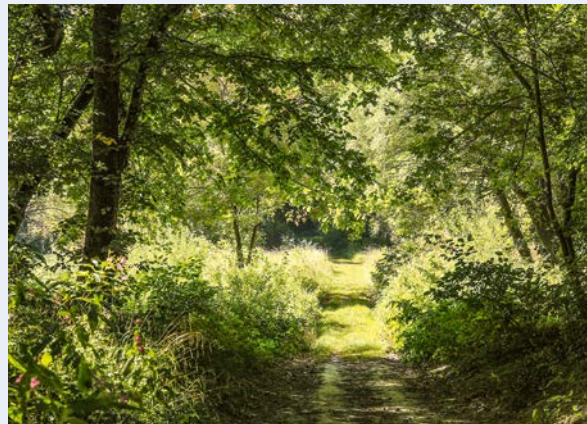
Subject to available financial means, the expansion of the National Park shall take place in accordance with the targets stipulated in the agreement for the establishment of the National Park, and on the basis of voluntary contracts with landowners.



Visitors, education, communication

1. Infrastructure development

Focus in this management period lies on the design of access points to the National Park as well as on the development of nature experience trails and the design and configuration of the network of trails and forest roads ("the landscape itself should tell the National Park story").



2. Maintenance of walking trails

Marked walking trails shall continue to be maintained as before. The aim is to ensure the safety of the trails in accordance with hazardous tree management guidelines. The National Park administration, the City of Vienna's Municipal Department 22 (Environmental Protection), National Parks Austria, and several other partners are active participants in initiatives aimed at improving the legal framework for this issue.



3. Development of visitor facilities

Maintenance and development of high-quality, existing visitor facilities such as the schlossORTH National Park Centre, the wien-lobAU National Park House, and other visitor facilities; expansion of accessible information and educational opportunities for people with special needs.



4. Guidelines for visitors

Trails open to use by National Park visitors may be used freely as long as there is no concrete and specific reason (potential damage to habitats, flora or fauna) to block access. Visitors are not charged for entering the National Park and use the trails at their own risk. Existing regulations for visitors and for traditional recreational use will be retained with minor adaptations.



5. Educational and public relations work

Work involving education, information and public relations will be further developed with the aim of sensitizing the public on the mission and work of the National Park. Focus lies on core thematic areas; conveying emotionally powerful experiences of nature; continually adapting the content and structure of programmes offered at National Park camps and at the request of schools; expanding the partner school and Junior Ranger programmes; quality assurance by way of structured opportunities for visitor feedback, and visitor counts.



6. Presence in the region

Despite the decreasing number of employees in the National Park forestry management units, efforts will be made to maintain and even intensify the presence of National Park personnel in the area. This should ensure not only the continued visibility of the National Park for visitors, but also that National Park codes of conduct are heeded. Where necessary, cooperation with law enforcement officials will be sought.



7. City and country

Media relations and events organized by the National Park administration should appeal to both urban and rural populations around the National Park. There shall be more focus on cooperation with local communities, local volunteer associations, and similar.



Research and monitoring

1. Documenting long-term development of the area

Long-term observation and documentation of area development based on select and relevant habitats and of ecosystem processes.

2. Monitoring select species

Regular monitoring and documentation of select intrinsic species to provide an early warning system, and an informative basis for potential improvement measures.

3. Knowledge and data management

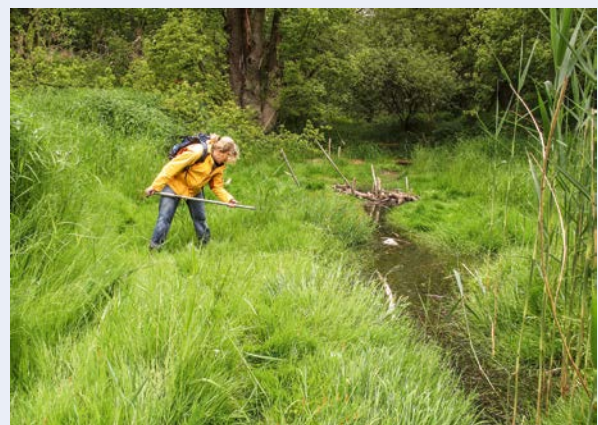
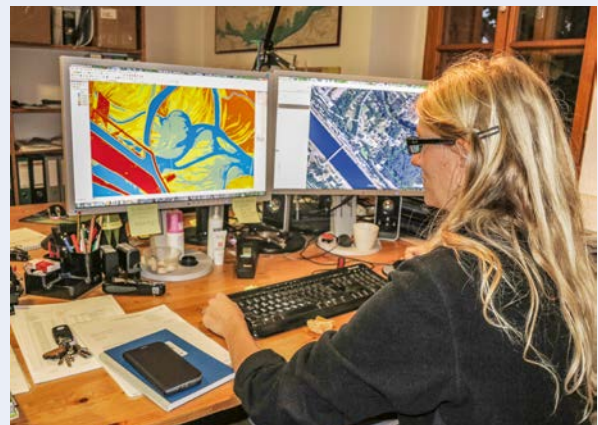
Documentation of research data and acquired knowledge (BioOffice, parcs.at, GIS), including retroactive logging of older databases.

4. Research working group

Continuation of the Donau-Auen National Park research and monitoring working group, including experts from the relevant departments of the City of Vienna and the ÖBf, to ensure targeted and strategic research activity in the National Park area; research collaboration with Nationalparks Austria, the major protected areas of Lower Austria, and with universities and research facilities.

5. Coordination

Coordination of National Park monitoring activities with the research, monitoring and evidence efforts carried out by external partners in the framework of large-scale projects.



National Park environs and regional cooperation

1. Green National Park environs

Close cooperation with the City of Vienna's municipal department experts, the 22nd district (Donaustadt), and the local organization Agenda 21 for the preservation of green spaces and biotopes in National Park environs; the continued development of attractive recreational offers that relieve the pressure on the National Park as a recreational hotspot; and the promotion of organic farming.



2. Regional cooperation

Focus of regional cooperation in Lower Austria remains close collaboration in the areas of marketing and programme development with major tourism destinations (Marchfelder Schlösserreich, Römerstadt Carnuntum), and participation in the maintenance and development of the Alpine-Carpathian corridor.



3. Partner schools

Ongoing support of, and collaboration with, regional partner schools.



4. National Park stakeholder boards

Ongoing information exchange and discussion about National Park management with stakeholders in the National Park stakeholder boards.



National and international cooperation

1. Austrian National Park Strategy

Close cooperation with the other Austrian National Park administrations for the implementation of the Austrian National Park Strategy and the umbrella brand Nationalparks Austria; stepping up of efforts in regard to coordination, cooperation, and ongoing experience and know-how exchange with National Parks in eastern Austria (Thayatal, Neusiedlersee-Seewinkel), in particular in the areas of visitor programmes, monitoring and data management, organization and administration.



2. Transnational networks

Donau-Auen National Park shall maintain its active and leading role among the Network of Danube River Protected Areas (DANUBEPARKS); deepening of transnational, neighbourly cooperation in the border region Austria - Slovakia - Hungary; consulting, support and cooperation with protected areas initiatives such as that with the Slovakian National Park Podunajsko (at Devin/Theben, and immediately adjacent to the Donau-Auen National Park), or the establishment of a nature park on the Hungarian Danube wetlands ("Schüttinsel").



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