

## Press Release

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# Largest karst plain in Bosnia and Herzegovina achieves international recognition

Radolfzell, Germany – EuroNatur, Youth Center Livno and WWF, applaud the new designation of Livansko polje, the largest karst plain in Bosnia and Herzegovina and South Eastern Europe, as a wetland of international importance, under the International Ramsar Convention.

The 45,868 hectare Livanjsko Polje<sup>1</sup>, near the southwestern town of Livno in Bosnia and Herzegovina, contains an impressive network of surface and underground water bodies, including rivers, springs, sinkholes, lakes and oxbow lakes.

It is the largest wetland of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with important populations of rare birds and significant communities including corn crake, Montagu's harrier, lesser spotted eagle, redshank, snipe and great bittern.

Livanjsko Polje vegetation is a very special mix of northern European grasslands and forest as well as Mediterranean plants, while large areas are covered with oak, ash and alder forest important to conservation.

“Bosnia and Herzegovina's karst areas are among the best preserved in Europe but they are still unprotected and some are directly threatened by water extraction and unsustainable use of the resources. The protection of Livanjsko Polje is not only vital for maintaining its unique natural assets but will also make all the difference between short term and perpetual use of the area's resources to benefit local people.” said Francesca Antonelli, Head of the Freshwater programme at WWF Mediterranean.

The riches of Livanjsko Polje is threatened by inappropriate land use and water management. New planned threats include flood areas being dried out, with water being collected and kept in reservoirs or transferred through impervious canals or tunnels eventually putting in peril traditional economic activities, mostly based on livestock and cheese and which currently sustain the livelihood of some 600 families.

*Livanjski Sir*, the cheese from the site, is the most famous product and a good reason to preserve the temperated grassland. The traditional land-use is important as the Dalmatian coast in Croatia receives its drinking water from the upper Cetina basin with Livanjsko Polje as the key wetland.

EuroNatur, Youth Center Livno and WWF fully support the decision by the Bosnian government to designate Livanjsko Polje under the International Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. This new site will be added to the two sites already protected by the Convention in the country<sup>2</sup>. The international recognition gained through Ramsar nomination is giving a chance to the long term preservation and sustainable use of the goods and services provided by this unique ecosystem.

“EuroNatur together with YCL and WWF is happy that the government ensures that the “wise use of wetlands<sup>3</sup>” principle of Ramsar is taken for the further development of Livanjsko Polje, e.g. in the spatial planning process. We also recommend that Livanjsko Polje will be developed as an unque part of the national protected area system”, added Martin Schneider-Jacoby from EuroNatur.

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<sup>1</sup> A karst polje (translates as plain or field) is a typical flat karstic area created by the solution of limestone and filled with impermeable sedimentary deposits and often flooded in rainy seasons.

<sup>2</sup> The other two are Hutovo Blato (nominated in 2001) and Bardaca wetland (nominated in 2007).

<sup>3</sup> One of the pillars of the Ramsar Convention is the “wise use of wetlands” which “is their sustainable utilization for the benefit of humankind in a way compatible with the maintenance of the natural properties of the ecosystem”.

## **END NOTES:**

- The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands — signed in 1971 in the city of Ramsar, Iran — is an intergovernmental treaty which provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. There are currently 146 Contracting Parties to the Convention, with 1,458 wetland sites, totalling over 125.4 million hectares, designated for inclusion in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance.
- Member countries of the Ramsar treaty are obliged to: manage all wetlands in a sustainable manner, promoting the wise use of all wetlands within their territory; consult with other Parties about the implementation of the Convention, especially with regard to trans-frontier wetlands, shared water systems, shared species, and development; and designate wetlands that meet the criteria for inclusion in the List of Wetlands of International Importance for conservation.
- Satellite pictures, paintings, photos of landscapes and animals as well as topographic and historic maps of the Livanjsko Polje are displayed in the Gorica Museum of the Franciscan Monastery in Livno.