

# “WILD RIVERS” LABEL EXPANDS ACROSS EUROPE

**The European Fishing Tackle Trade Association (EFTTA) is keen to protect wild rivers across Europe, a crucial part of its efforts to ensure waterways are available for future generations of anglers. In this special report, we highlight a key initiative that began in France but is now being extended throughout the continent, in partnership with EFTTA.**

Since the creation of the Wild Rivers label in 2014, France has gathered 23 watercourses from all over the country. This program, recognised as being of general interest by key French institutions, is now progressively expanding to Europe.

The “Wild Rivers Site” label is a non-regulatory tool managed by an NGO (non-governmental organisation) and a fund, whose main objective is simple: going far beyond the “Very Good Ecological State” of the Water Framework Directive for our last

free-flowing pristine rivers. From the Leguer River in the Breton bocage, to the Alpine Cians River or the Grande Leyre River in the Landes forest, these are watersheds whose differences allow rich exchanges between their managers.

Indeed, since 2016 the programme has received financial support from the French Agency for Biodiversity to proceed to the European translation of the label. River managers have been contacted across a dozen of exceptional catchments, spread over a

total of 8 countries. EFTTA (the European Fishing Tackle Trade Association) was the first private partner for the construction of this European label. The financial assistance by EFTTA since 2017 helped to build the “Wild River Site” label.

If the action opportunities are very different from one territory to another, the interest in the tool has been confirmed.

For example, the upper Noguera Pallaresa, a Catalan river of the Ebro Basin, is currently threatened by a mining concession project





that could start in a couple of years. This jewel is, however, classified by multiple regulatory areas (Natura 2000, Nature Reserve, fish genetic reserve ...). In order to offer it international recognition and therefore better protection, the Alt Pirineu Natural Park and its partners (municipalities and fishing federations) are strongly interested in the label.

The Irish Owenduff River is subject to different interests. For this exclusive and highly regulated fishing site, which mainly flows across private lands, the "Wild Rivers Site" label is mainly seen as a potential consultation tool to link the Ballycroy National Park, which borders the river, to the private landowners. Locally, the label also represents an additional tool to develop a qualitative eco-tourism. Furthermore, the meetings held around this river basin have also created a link with the ambitious Irish "Blue Dot Program", whose purpose is to protect and restore high ecological status to a network of river and lake catchment.

Another example of the interest of the label for a better cooperation in a watershed is that of the Houille River. Indeed, the tool could make it possible to accentuate exchanges between French and Belgian institutions on this 25km-long cross-border river. Currently, an evaluation of its wild potential is launched to test its eligibility for the label.

Since 2017, the European Rivers Network NGO has also worked with the Alpine Arc




WWFs to identify the wild rivers of this territory. This work allowed the recognition of four rivers: the upper Soča in Slovenia, the upper Lech in Austria, the upper Ammer in Germany and the Ova Chamuera in Switzerland. These are all watercourses with exceptional preservation states. For instance, the Ova Chamuera River obtains a score of 97.5 / 100 according to the Wild Rivers evaluation grid developed by the network's Scientific Council. Diagnosis work and implementation of specific action programs continues today on this basin as well as two others, the Veyron River and the Beverin River, with the participation of WWF Switzerland with a certification goal by 2019-2020.

To achieve it, the project now faces several issues. How to create a label that would allow strengthening the protection of our rivers at European level, while maintaining flexibility that made it successful? What certification process should be put in place to maintain reliable audits? What is the most appropriate economic model? If many solutions exist, it's

the exchanges with the territories that will define the best one.

That's why the "Wild Rivers" team remains open to any exchange with interested structures, NGOs, National Rivers Restoration Centres, public institutions, private actors... to reinforce this work in 2019. It's the involvement of the greatest number that will determine the success of such a project.

 [www.rivieres-sauvages.fr](http://www.rivieres-sauvages.fr)

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