

DANUBE WATCH

Runoff remedies

■ A pilot project using reed beds to filter agricultural runoff has shown farming communities around the Danube Delta a way to help reduce the flow of pollution into the Black Sea.

The pioneering initiative took part in the catchment area of the Prut River, a tributary of the Danube that flows through parts of Moldova, Ukraine and Romania. The work targeted the widespread problem of high organic pollution that feeds algae blooms in the Black Sea, which deprives other aquatic organisms of life-giving oxygen.

The work was supported by a EUR 30,900 grant from the Danube Regional Project, an initiative of the United Nations Development Fund/ Global Environment Facility.

The project organisers, Eco Counselling Centre Galati, an NGO based in Romania, and the Ecological Movement of Moldova, identified the main source of pollution in most of the basin's rural areas as farm waste that is collected but then deposited directly on the ground. Excess nutrients subsequently leach into ground and surface waters. Area farmers not only lack the funds to change their practices, but also the necessary knowledge to do so. This characterised the problem in the villages where the pilot work was carried out, Mastacani, Romania, and Baurci Moldoveni, Moldova.

Meetings addressing the problem were held in both Romania and Moldova involving 450 people, including local officials, school staff, farmers and students. Participants selected a few approaches for solving the problem: environmental education initiatives, the establishment of composting facilities, and the planting of trees and reed beds to buffer rain runoff into surface waters.

Students and other members of the pilot communities planted reed beds last year, although unexpected floods destroyed much of the work. Despite this setback, water-quality tests in the



pilot communities showed that nitrate levels dropped roughly 50 percent in runoff passing through the surviving reed buffers.

Organisers implemented an educational programme that included the development of educational kits for students and teachers, the training of almost 200 teachers and environmental classes that introduced students to biodiversity, water and health, and human impacts on water ecosystems. Theoretical lessons were combined with practical activities involving water analyses and the organisation of compost facilities at schools.

It is hoped the lessons learned from the project can help guide similar initiatives in other communities around the basin.

For more information, please visit: <www.cceg.ro/eng/projectPrut.htm>.

DANUBE WATCH

Tuzla armed with information

In the heart of a stunning green valley bisected by a river flowing through Tuzla canton lie some of Bosnia and Herzegovina's dirtiest factories. Concrete cooling towers, ore smelters, and cement plants operate right on the banks of the river, polluting the air and water and, hence, posing serious health risks to the people of Tuzla. The pollution also affects the nearby settlement of Lukavac as well as the Modrac reservoir.

The Bosnian NGO Eko-Zeleni Lukavac believes public information is key to solving these problems. People who live in the area need to know what's spoiling their water and air and how pollution affects their lives. This information can be used to raise general public awareness and lead toward appropriate solutions. With support from a pilot project managed by the Regional Environmental Center, Resources for the Future and New York University School of law (and funded by GEF/UNDP via the Danube Regional Project), Eko-Zeleni Lukavac is carrying out a demonstration project designed ensure that local residents get the information to which they are entitled under Bosnian law.

The project began with a survey of area residents and interviews with government authorities. This research showed local interest in receiving regular reports and having the opportunity to make individual information requests. However, the multiplicity of authorities and layers of bureaucracy impede information flow. Moreover, the information that is available is difficult for laypersons to understand; it needs to be provided in more user-friendly language and format.

After analysing the interviews, Eko-Zeleni Lukavac held a roundtable discussion and capacity building meeting in **name location on add date**. These events examined the problems highlighted in the interviews and survey and also raised possible solutions.

One idea that emerged from the roundtable was to produce a "plain language" brochure that could explain rights that citizens have to information and how they can exercise these rights. The brochure would provide a clear picture of which authorities are likely to have water-related information and what kinds of information can be obtained. The brochure would contain contact information for authorities from industry as well as public officials at the local, cantonal and ministry levels. A sample information-request letter would be included.

Eko-Zeleni Lukavac believes the pilot project is an important first step in the process of changing attitudes. Equally important, the NGO found an important partner in local government who has indicated a willingness to seek further funding so that the process will continue.