

**Annual Report 2024
on the nature and landscape conservation area
"Wollmatinger Ried - Untersee - Gnadensee" (Germany)**

Reporting period:	1 October 2023 to 30 September 2024
Country:	Germany
Name of the area:	Wollmatinger Ried–Untersee–Gnadensee Nature Reserve
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1 CONDITIONS

The renewal of the European Diploma for the Wollmatinger Ried up to 28 November 2029 was approved by the Council of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 4 September 2019 and was linked to three conditions.

- a) Study and report on the expansion of the core zone of the nature reserve**
(Prepare a study on the legal possibilities to enlarge the strict core zones of the Wollmatinger Ried–Untersee–Gnadensee Nature Reserve and report to the Secretariat by 2024)
- The Maintenance and Development Plan (PEPL) is almost completed (cf. Section 1c). The plan, which is based on the survey data, calls for expansion of the nature reserve on the water side up to the national border. Thus, according to the preliminary results of the legal review presented in the Annual Report 2021, it will be possible in the coming year to prepare the required report on the legal options for expanding the nature reserve.

- b) “Schneggliand-Wälle”, silting areas and natural processes preserved**
(Reject any proposals or plans aiming to eliminate naturally-built barriers like the so-called Schneggliand and silting areas and to enable undisturbed natural processes without human intervention in a larger area, except in case of public interest e.g. flood protection)
Natural silting and erosion processes continued in the entire protected shallow water zones throughout the reporting period. There have been no calls for the estuaries to be dredged. If the Nature Reserve Ordinance (Naturschutzgebietsverordnung) were amended, an assessment would be carried out to determine whether existing prohibitions on making changes to the geology and water areas can be stipulated more precisely to ensure with complete certainty that the Schneggliand remains undisturbed.
- c) Management plan**
(By 2022 draft and adopt a management plan meeting the provisions and objectives of the European Diploma for Protected Areas and addressing the recommendations attached to the renewal of the Diploma)
The Maintenance and Development Plan (PEPL) is now in the final phase of completion. Following the conclusion of the faunistic and floristic surveys, internal technical consultations and round tables with external stakeholders were held in recent months. On 19 September 2024 a draft report, inventory maps of all target species and action maps were completed. These are now in the first correction phase. The results of the PEPL will be presented to the public as soon as this work is completed. Completion of the PEPL is planned for spring of 2025. Initial measures are already being implemented.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the conditions stated above, the Council of Ministers has also issued six recommendations that, when implemented, will secure progress in the following areas:

- a) Harmonisation of the protective provisions and NSG (nature reserve) extension on the water side**
(In co-operation with the Swiss authorities, assess the possibilities to harmonise the regulations for the protection of nature at both shores and to extend the Wollmatinger Ried–Untersee–Gnadensee Nature Reserve to the state border in order to enlarge the water zone, which is especially important during low water periods in winter)
Following elaboration of the technical basics through completion and rapid publication of the PEPL, the resulting legal options (cf. section 1a) will first be evaluated internally by the German authorities. Then, together with the Swiss nature management and cantonal authorities, the possibility of harmonising nature conservation legislation on both shores will be explored. The goal will be to extend the protected water zone by expanding the nature reserve Wollmatinger Ried–Untersee–Gnadensee up to the national border.
- b) Improvement of the connection between the NSG (nature reserve) and the hinterland**
(Pursue the efforts to improve the connections between protected sites in the hinterland and the Wollmatinger Ried–Untersee–Gnadensee Nature Reserve in connection with the extension of the trunk road B33, including the enlargement and/or adaptation of the nature reserve’s boundaries. Compensation measures should be continued and the construction has to be carried out with the least impact for the protected area)
The function of the designated compensation areas as connection axes will gradually be improved through targeted maintenance when the B33 trunk road is extended. These maintenance measures must be continued and optimised particularly in the area of Stiegelengasse and the green bridge east of the Kindlebild junction. The inclusion of these areas in the nature reserve, as recommended in the PEPL draft, could additionally ensure their preservation over the long term (cf. section 1c). The connecting function of these areas is still impaired by cyclists and other people crossing through the sensitive area of the green bridge on the former cycle path south of the B33 (cf. section 2d); animals avoid this area because of human activities.

c) **Ending fishing in the most sensitive zones**

(End fishery in the most sensitive areas, mainly Schläuche and southern Hegne Bay, under the provisions of the bilateral treaty between Germany and Switzerland with the aim to improve the quality of the area as breeding ground, wintering place and moulting area)

Twelve disruptive events caused by legal fishing in the protected area were documented as part of the avifaunistic studies for the PEPL. This amounts to 9% of the disturbances recorded by the studies. It is not yet possible to make a final assessment of the impact of fishing on bird life and the resulting adverse effects on bird populations.

d) **Closure of the cycle path**

(Abandon the still existing cycle path between the B33 road and the protected area boundaries, which is only used by a limited number of cyclists, and include the path into the Wollmatinger Ried–Untersee–Gnadensee Nature Reserve to enable an efficient control)

According to a statement by the road transport authority to the landscape conservation association on 16 September 2024, the old path along the boundary of the protected area south of the B33 lost its legal status as an official cycling path when it was demolished in 2016. A motion submitted to the district assembly on 6 November 2023 to enlarge this former cycling path into a path at least five meters wide for fast bicycle traffic was postponed several times and has not been taken up since then. The Reichenau Cycleway Initiative also made no attempts in the reporting period to officially reopen the former cycleway.

e) **Reduction or termination of disturbances**

(Reduce or stop disturbances impacting on the protected area caused by leisure activities and sports through awareness raising and dissemination of information to boat rental companies, and to hot-air balloon and Zeppelin tour operators)

On 21 August 2024 a Zeppelin NT airship caused a mass exodus of birds when it flew over the Ermatinger Basin, north of the agreed route and near the boundary on the water side of the protected area. After being informed, the Zeppelin tour operator immediately ordered follow-up training of the new pilot, who was responsible. In addition, Zeppelin agreed to call more attention in its training programme to the disruptive impact of the airship on waterfowl. One result of the lectures at the NABU Lake Constance Centre for the Neptun rowing club was the attraction of new volunteers for the Netta protection and observation station. The monitoring and educational work performed by water sports enthusiasts is enjoying a high level of acceptance and is very effective.

f) **Consideration of interests of the protected area during constructional development of adjacent municipalities**

(Strictly consider the boundaries of the protected area, their potential for further development and the need of sufficient buffer zones to meet the objectives of the protected areas when examining the further extension of building areas in the communities concerned)

No new building areas were established in the connecting zones and buffer zones of the protected area during the reporting period. The conservation authority was not included in new planning. In this case the options are limited since the municipalities have planning authority. The extensions of the protected area on the land side proposed in the PEPL draft (cf. section 1c) would at least make it possible to permanently secure the nearby buffer zones and connecting zones.

3 AREA MANAGEMENT

There were no relevant changes in the organisation of area management during the reporting period.

4 BOUNDARIES

No legal changes were made to the boundaries of areas of conservation during the reporting period.

5 OTHER INFORMATION

Extensive and prolonged flooding of reed beds on account of high water levels in Lake Constance led in some areas to significant declines in value-determining plant species. Beginning in December, the high water level forced some waterfowl to withdraw to the hinterland and smaller bodies of water. However, the large populations of other species again confirmed the international importance of the conservation area for resting and wintering waterfowl. A rapid rise in water level in the spring caused significant brood losses in some species, whereas other birds such as grebes and moulting birds benefited in the summer. For example, the numbers of red-crested ducks recovered after two summers of low water, returning to the high levels reached in 2021.

On account of high water levels throughout the year, the planned landscape maintenance work could be carried out only on a limited basis.

The high water this year clearly showed what negative consequences a gradual loss of connection areas can have for the nature reserve. Affected species such as the scarce large blue (*Phengaris teleius*) are finding it increasingly difficult to find retreat areas that are secure against flooding. Strong pressure from leisure activities is also continuing to have a negative impact, extending into core zones of the nature reserve.

11 Effects of the awarding of the European Diploma on the area of conservation

The proposed extension of the conservation area would be an important part of the maintenance and development plan for the Wollmatinger Ried and ensure the preservation of this area in the long term. However, an enlargement of this area to include the area of water up to the national border would lead to considerable conflicts with the interests of water sports and shipping because it would come into contact with heavy traffic on the route between the Upper Lake and Lower Lake. Any restriction of water sports, shipping or fishing on Lake Constance runs into special obstacles owing to the international character of the lake, according to which the countries adjoining it have a right to participate and have a say in all activities. For these reasons, the European Diploma of the Wollmatinger Ried–Untersee–Gnadensee Nature Reserve is an important basis for preserving these important retreat areas for birds, and this is a key goal of nature conservation.