

**Annual Report 2025**  
**on the nature and protected landscape of the**  
**"Wollmatinger Ried - Untersee - Gnadensee" (Germany)**

<b>Reporting period:</b>	1 October 2024 to 30 September 2025
<b>Country:</b>	Germany
<b>Name of the area:</b>	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 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 finalised Maintenance and Development Plan (PEPL) (see section 1c) provides the technical justification and recommendations for expanding the nature reserve, both on the water side up to the national border with Switzerland and in several areas on the land side. Due to the international legal obligations set out in the 2021 Annual Report, any expansion, particularly on the water side, is a complex procedure. Now that the technical foundations are in place, the study on the legal possibilities of extending the nature reserve can be finalised. Given the dramatic decline in public support for land use restrictions in favour of nature and species conservation, the timing of such a controversial issue as the water side expansion of the protected area must be considered very carefully (see also section 2a).

**b) “Schnegglisand-Wälle”, silting areas and natural processes preserved**

*(Reject any proposals or plans aiming to eliminate naturally-built barriers like the so-called Schnegglisand 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 Schnegglisand 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) has been finalised. The measures developed in the PEPL with regard to the recommendations of the Council of Europe are presented in detail in section 2 of this annual report.

## **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)*

Once the PEPL has been finalised (see section 1c for more information), the technical basis required to justify the conservation value of the cross-border shallow water zones of the Ermatingen Basin will be in place. In order to complete the legal study on the extension of the nature conservation area (condition under section 1a) and thus harmonise the protection provisions, the next step is to assess the need to protect the relevant natural resources, particularly the waterfowl. This is because both of these characteristics are prerequisites for extending the nature reserve. In this context, contact would then also have to be made with the responsible Swiss authorities or bodies (possibly involving the responsible state ministries).

**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 maintenance when the B33 trunk road is extended. These maintenance measures must be continued and consistently 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 (see section 1c for more information), could ensure their preservation over the long term. The connectivity function continues to be impaired by planned building developments (see also section 2f).

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)*

Despite observations of individual flight reactions, no significant adverse effects on breeding, moulting or wintering waterfowl or reed birds were identified as being caused by fishing in previous years during the intensive study that led to the preparation of the PEPL (see section 8.3.4 of the PEPL for more information), nor in this reporting year. This demonstrates that modified and responsible fishing practices are compatible with nature conservation objectives. If the Protected Area Ordinance is amended in the future, consideration should be given to specifying the fishing practices permitted under the existing Nature Reserve Ordinance based on the actual practices.

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 the road transport authorities, the old cycle path along the conservation area boundary to the south of the B33 lost its official cycle path status in 2016. There were no new attempts to officially reopen the former path in this reporting year either. Use of the cycle path can lead to disturbance, particularly in the area of the green bridge. The PEPL (see also section 1c) recommends, among other things, that the areas of the former cycle path be incorporated into the protected area should it be extended.

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)*

Following informational discussions with the Zeppelin-Reederei (Zeppelin aircraft manufacturing company) and Verkehrslandeplatz Konstanz (Constance airfield), only isolated flight reactions of waterfowl caused by the Zeppelin-NT flying past or small aircraft approaching and departing from the Constance airfield were observed during the reporting period. However, this did not lead to any significant impairment of the waterfowl populations. The situation has therefore improved compared to previous years. In May, the NABU-Bodenseezentrum (German Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union, Lake Constance Centre) launched a project funded by the state of Baden-Württemberg to promote nature-friendly aquatic sports in a section of the lower lake between the nature reserves "Wollmatinger Ried–Untersee–Gnadensee", "Markelfinger Winkel und westlicher Gnadensee" and "Radolfzeller Aachmündung". Representatives of aquatic sports were involved in analysing the existing problems. If the project continues over the next three years, aquatic sports enthusiasts will be encouraged to adopt nature-friendly behaviour. Signposting will be improved and aquatic sports will be managed more effectively, particularly near the shore. Monitoring and information on the water will also be intensified.

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)*

The municipality of Reichenau is pushing ahead with the designation of the new "Lindenbühl-West" building area between the railway line and the psychiatric centre, located approx. 300 metres north of the conservation area boundary. These areas, which were previously used for agriculture, also serve as foraging grounds for breeding birds in the Wollmatinger Ried, among others. However, against the backdrop of legally guaranteed municipal self-administration, the ability of the nature conservation authorities, recognised nature

conservation associations, and other public bodies to influence such planning is limited.

The amendment to the land use plan required for the construction area is currently in the public consultation phase. However, the extensions of the protected area on the land side proposed in the PEPL would make it possible to permanently secure important parts of the remaining buffer and connectivity zones in other areas.

### **3 AREA MANAGEMENT**

On 15 March 2025, Ms Bianca Eblen, who was previously responsible for nature conservation issues, moved from the Higher Nature Conservation Authority (Ref. 55) to another department within the Freiburg Regional Administrative Authority. Her previous responsibilities for nature conservation in Department 55 of the Regional Administrative Authority for the District of Constance have been taken on by Dr. Thekla Stollhof.

### **4 BOUNDARIES**

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

### **5 OTHER INFORMATION**

Prolonged flooding in the previous year led to reduced flower development in many valuable plant species within the protected area in 2025. The winter water level was above average once again. Nevertheless, the conditions were favourable for waterfowl to rest and winter, and the number of individuals present exceeded 30,000 this winter. Once again this year, this confirmed the international importance of the conservation area for waterfowl that rest and winter there. The low water level from April to June, with only brief rises, led to the lowest breeding success of grebes since 1980. Similarly, the red-crested pochard had below-average moulting populations. The regular, extensive landscape maintenance programme was implemented as planned. In addition, the first measures from the PEPL were implemented with the mowing of areas around the banks.

The major changes in the water levels of Lake Constance, caused by climate change, are having a significant impact on the animal and plant populations in the protected area. Continued high levels of recreational activity also lead to disturbance and impairment of the protected area.

### **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. The international character of Lake Constance, with the corresponding rights of co-determination and participation of the neighbouring states, poses a particular hurdle due to the restrictions on existing uses associated with an extension of the protected area on the water surface up to the national border, in particular aquatic sports and the Bodenseeschiffahrt (Lake Constance shipping) on the heavily frequented route between the Upper and Lower Lakes. 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.

However, the limited effectiveness of the European Diploma was evident in the development of the new “Lindenbühl-West” building area. Despite references to recommendation 2f during public participation, there has been no change to the project.