

# ***European Living Lakes Association (ELLA):***

## **Saving the Lakes and Wetlands of Europe**

**Baseline Report 2023**

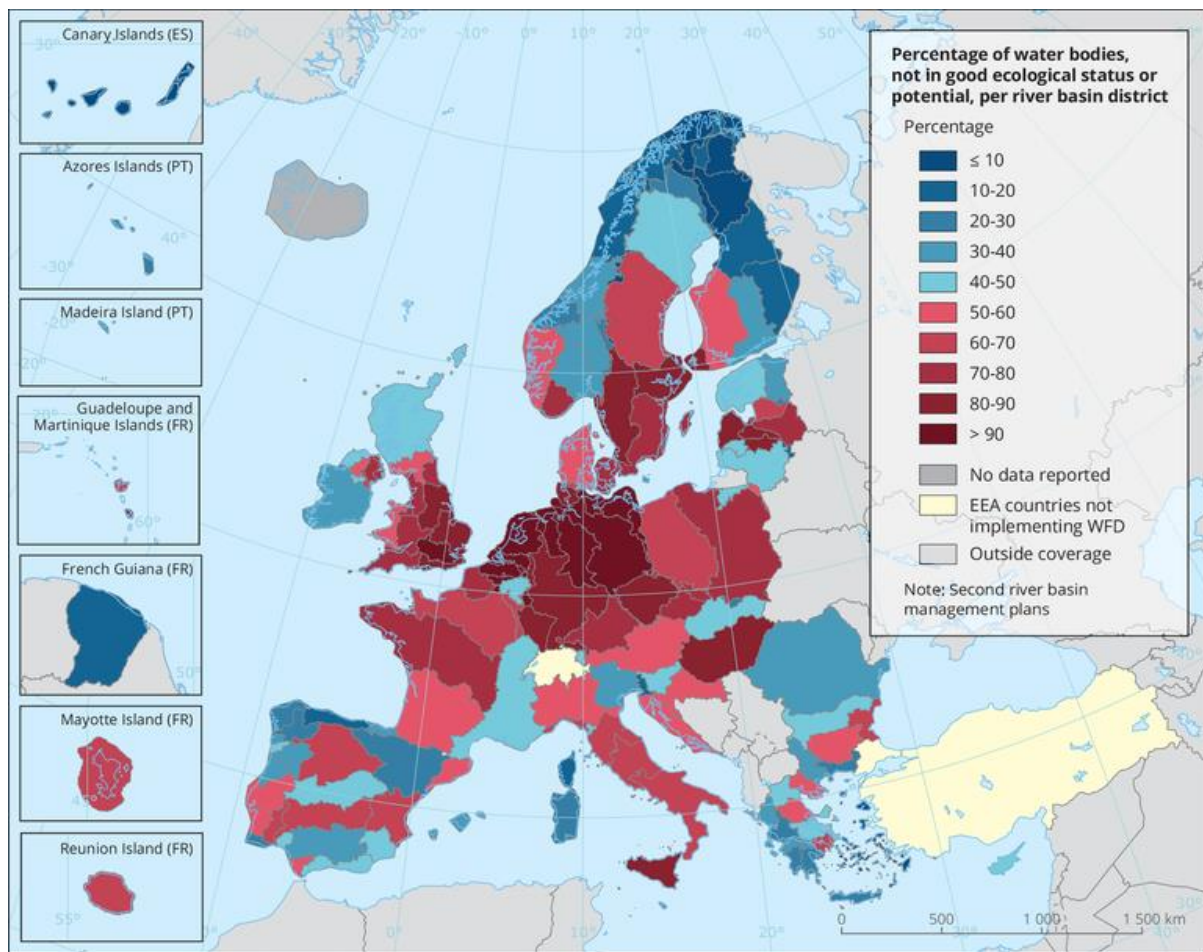


***European Association***



## The State of Lakes and Wetlands in Europe

Lakes and wetlands are among the most threatened ecosystems in the world. According to the European Environment Agency (2021), less than 50% of the water bodies in Europe show good ecological status. Water bodies in northwestern Europe have the lowest ecological status, with Belgium, northern Germany and the Netherlands having more than 90% of surface waters with less than good status. Recent studies also show that most European countries have lost more than 70% of their original wetland surfaces over the last centuries (Fluet-Chouinard et al. 2023).



Percentage of water bodies not in good ecological status or potential per basic district in countries of the European Economic Area (EEA). Source: European Environment Agency (2021).

Some of the main contributors to the degradation of freshwater ecosystems include eutrophication, pollution, invasive species, land use changes, water abstraction and the impacts of navigation, traffic and tourism. All these factors are aggravated by the effects of climate change and have severe repercussions on the ecological health of lakes and wetlands, their biodiversity and the ecosystem services and natural resources they provide. The restoration and protection of these habitats has therefore become an urgent topic and measures should be implemented on a continental scale in order to reverse the loss of EU's lakes and wetlands.

## The Importance of Lakes and Wetlands

Water is the source of life. As a critical part of our natural environment, healthy lakes and wetlands support a wide diversity of organisms and help maintain the functionality of ecosystems and landscapes. They also deliver a variety of environmental, economic and social services of great importance for the human population. These functions contribute to protect and improve people's life quality and help building resilient communities for a safe and sustainable future. Some of the most important roles of lakes and wetlands are:

### Disaster risk reduction



Floodplains, ponds and marshes can absorb floodwaters and prevent soil erosion and drought. Coastal wetlands can reduce waves and storm impacts, and lakes in high altitudes can contain cloudbursts, all of which helps to mitigate natural hazards.

### Climate change mitigation



Lakes and wetlands help to minimize the negative impacts of climate change and boost climate resilience. Wetlands are extremely important natural carbon sinks, storing around 35% of the world's terrestrial carbon (Copernicus Climate Change Service 2023).

### Provision of natural resources



Lakes are primary reservoirs of drinking water and wetlands act as wastewater filters. Fish and shellfish from these ecosystems are a major source of animal protein, and several wetland plants and algae can be harvested for food, fuel and fiber.

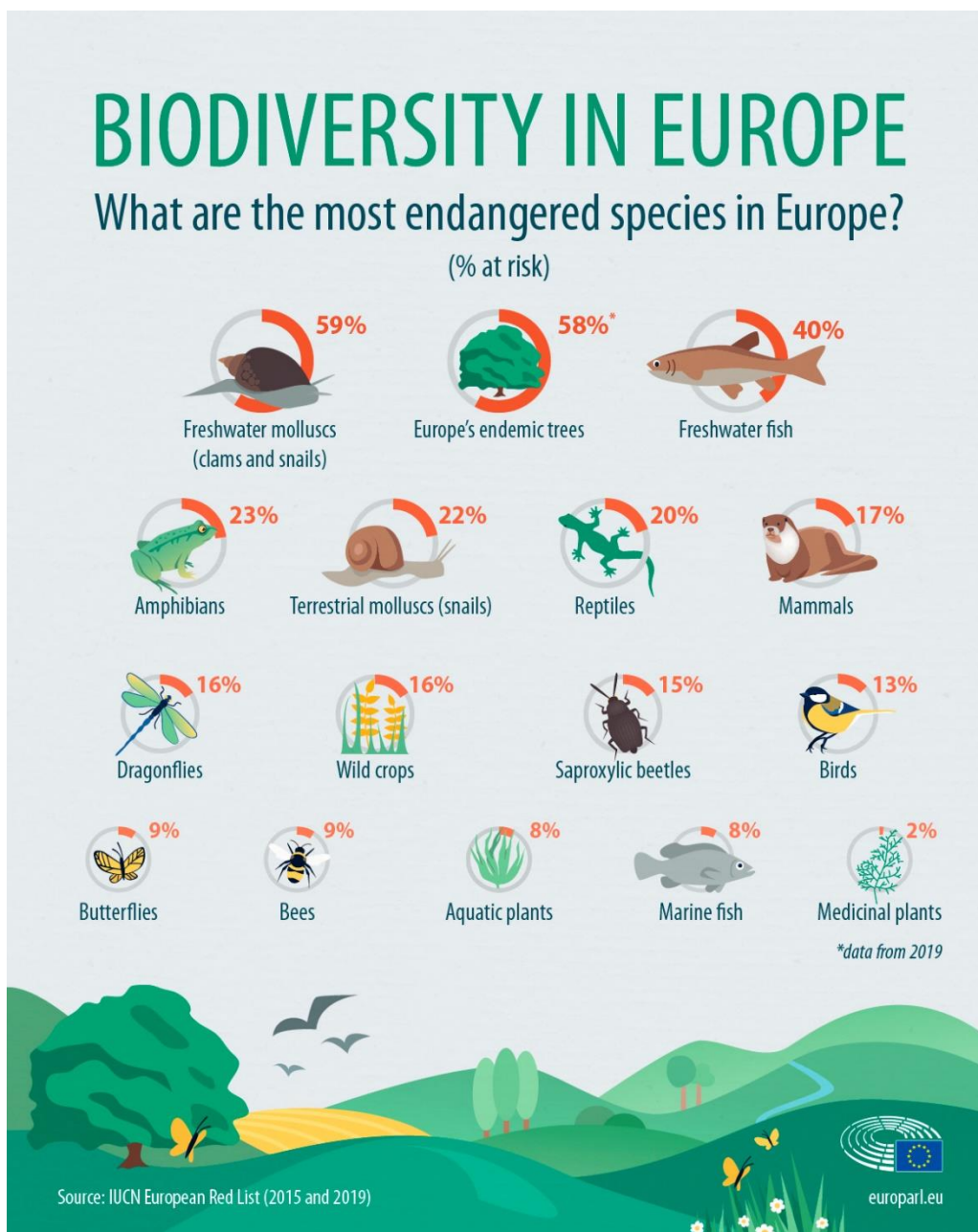
### Culture & recreation



Lakes and wetlands provide space for recreation and cultural activities. They are important touristic destinations and offer optimal locations for the practice of water sports. Additionally, they are a source of rich cultural traditions and historical events.



Aside from the ecosystem services that people benefit from, lakes and wetlands play an essential role as habitats for numerous plant and animal species. Complex and dynamic relationships among these organisms result in the formation of irreplaceable communities and food webs. However, these finely balanced networks are often disturbed and damaged by pollution, landscape transformation and unsustainable use of natural resources, which can lead to the loss of key species and groups in these environments. According to the IUCN European Red List (2015 and 2019), 59% of freshwater mollusks, 40% of freshwater fish and 23% of amphibian species in Europe are at risk. All these groups depend on clean water and unspoiled ecosystems for their survival. Several freshwater species have already become extinct in recent years, including snails, carps and salmons.



Most endangered species in Europe, as percentage of species at risk among the different groups, according to the IUCN European Red List (2015 and 2019). Source: European Parliament (2020).

## **ELLA: Challenges and Opportunities**

The protection and restoration of European lakes and wetlands as essential elements of the biosphere is imperative, but also a considerable challenge. To achieve the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, intense involvement of the private sector is crucial, as well as mainstreaming successful solutions and collaborating with organizations and institutions working towards lake and wetland protection. On this basis and following years of joint project work, Global Nature Fund (GNF), Lake Constance Foundation (LCF), Fundación Global Nature (FGN), Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation (Peipsi CTC) and Lake Balaton Development Coordination Agency (LBDCA) started the EU Life funded project “**ELLA - European Living Lakes Association**” in May 2022, leading to the establishment of ELLA as registered nonprofit association.



## **The Goals of ELLA**

The Living Lakes Network was born in 1998 and now joins more than 100 organizations working on lake and wetland protection all over the world. The European Living Lakes Association will follow the work line of the international network focusing their activities in Europe. The main goals of the association are:

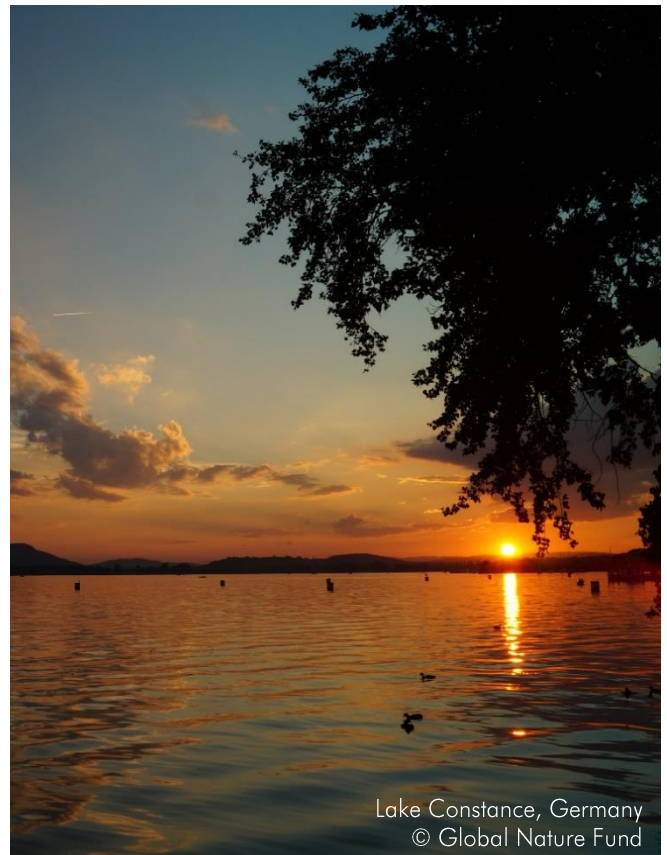
- The promotion of nature conservation and landscape management and environmental protection, including climate protection, coastal protection, flood protection and nature based solutions
- The promotion of rural development and sustainable agriculture
- The promotion of education on environmental protection issues
- The promotion of animal protection and animal welfare
- The promotion of science and research
- The promotion of development cooperation

## The Activities of ELLA

The goals of ELLA will be achieved through the implementation of different measures on local, regional and international levels, relying on the collaboration with other environmental organizations, policy makers and stakeholders. These measures consist of:

- Anchoring the protection of water ecosystems, their biodiversity and other properties and functions in Europe
- Implementing demonstration and model projects, in particular in the topic of ecosystem based adaptations
- Developing statements and position papers to improve the political and legal framework for the protection of aquatic ecosystems
- Promoting exchange and cooperation between the different stakeholder groups in lake regions in order to strengthen the protection of lakes as well as the sustainable development of lake regions
- Promoting scientific cooperation and the elaboration and public dissemination of knowledge on all topics related to lake and wetland protection
- Generating and disseminating knowledge and publicity to improve appreciation and protection of lakes and wetlands

The activities carried out by ELLA are documented and shared with interested parties to allow the transfer of ideas and experiences and to mainstream lake and wetland protection into the public and private sector. These activities include capacity building on relevant topics for a sustainable lake and wetlands management and the implementation of innovative methodologies for biodiversity protection in the corporate sector of lake regions, such as **Biodiversity Checks**. With this tool, companies will be informed about the importance of the ecosystem services and natural resources of lakes and wetlands and trained on how to integrate lake biodiversity into their functions and sustainability strategies.

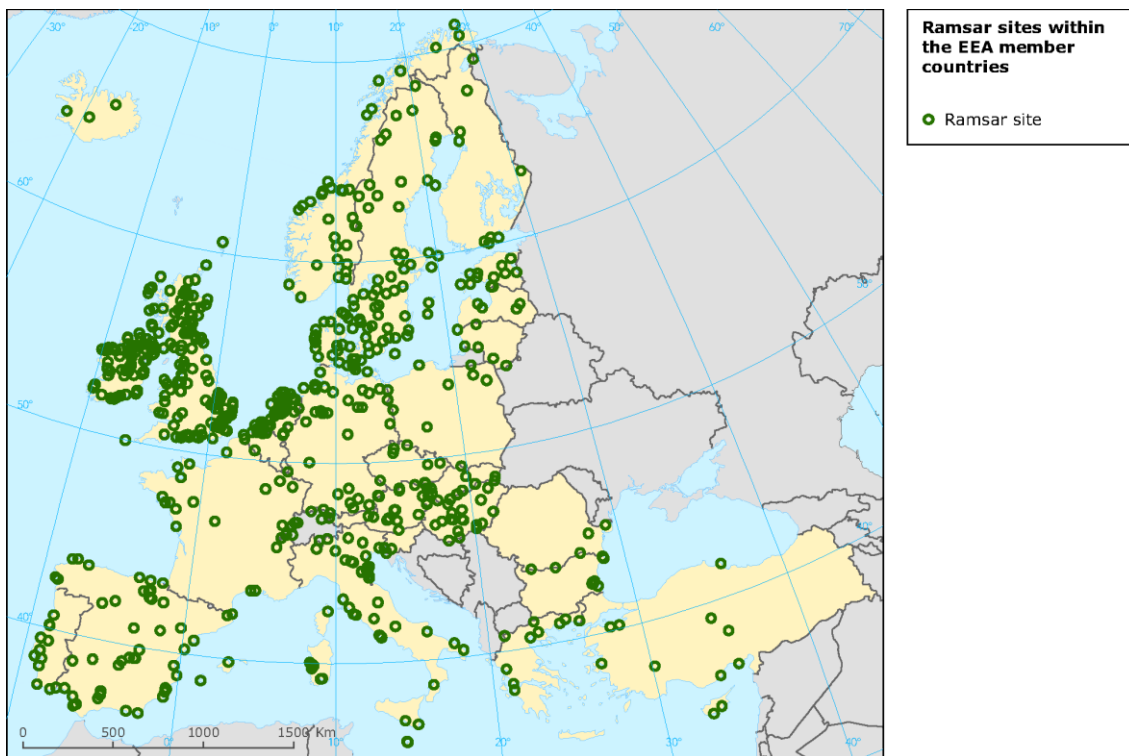


Lake Constance, Germany  
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## Outreach

There are more than 1000 Ramsar sites in Europe, all of international relevance for environmental protection and biodiversity conservation. We have mapped over 70 European NGOs and scientific institutions working towards a more sustainable management of freshwater ecosystems, and see a variety of opportunities for synergies and cooperation to achieve different common objectives.



Map of distribution of Ramsar sites within countries of the European Economic Area (EEA). Source: European Environment Agency (2015).

## ELLA Membership

Members of the association can be all legal entities, but especially NGOs, which operate in Europe and have demonstrable interest in the protection of lakes and wetlands in Europe. Current members of ELLA are:



The goal is to have an outreach to different regions and countries in Europe and to welcome new members to ELLA every year!

## Do you want to know more about ELLA or become a member?

Please contact:



European Association

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A photograph of a field of tall, golden-brown reeds or grasses against a clear blue sky. The reeds are in the foreground, and the sky is in the background.

Lake Peipsi, Estonia  
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