

“Sustainable agriculture, water management supported by LIFE in Natura 2000 sites across Europe”

in the framework of the LIFE project

“Lafnitz - cross-linking habitats along an Alpine -Pannonian river”

Buchschachen, Austria 6th–7th November 2006

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“Restoration of Latvian floodplains for EU priority species and habitats”*

International seminar and excursion took place in Buchschachen, Austria, from 6th to 7th November 2006. The seminar was organised by the LIFE-Nature project “Lafnitz - cross-linking habitats along an Alpine-Pannonian river”. The seminar was planned as two days of indoor meeting with short excursion in second day’s afternoon. Seminar covers several important cross-sectoral areas of nature management:



The seminar venue in Buchschachen, Austria.

1. The water Framework Directive and its interaction with grassland farming;
2. Technical aspects of grasslands restoration and ensuring their appropriate recurring management;
3. Practical examples of collaboration between farmers and nature conservationists;
4. Agri-environment programmes as grassland farming tools;
5. Making nature-oriented grassland farming economically self-sustaining.

Wolfgang Pelikan, manager of Weideverein Ramsargebiet Lafnitztal opened the international seminar. In his opening speech, Mr. Pelikan urged participants to share experience in grassland farming and water management. Further, at seminar introduction Agnes Schierhuber from European Parliament Agriculture Committee gave an overview about EU budget for the 2007-2013 period and in details tell more about planned CAP reform and ‘second pillar’. Then Franz Stefan Hauzinger and Laszlo Bolfan presented Austrian and Hungarian farmers’ experience in Agri-environment programmes applying in nature management in two neighbouring regions of these countries.

The Lafnitz LIFE project extends over an area near the Austro-Hungarian border, covering two Natura 2000 areas in Austria (Lafnitz valley – Neudauer ponds in Styria, Lafnitz water meadows in Burgenland) and a planned Natura 2000 area in Hungary

which is applying to join. So, comparison of experiences in these two countries and its collaboration were main items in next two background presentations (see in Program) in the first day of seminar.

The rest seminar indoor program was devoted to practical experiences from different projects from Austria, Hungary, Germany, Netherland, Great Britain, Sweden and Romania.

Like in our project, in many other presented projects partnership between farmers and nature conservationists were beneficial for both sides. However, restoration and management of floodplain meadows that is carried out in our project has to be regarded as only the first step in the restoration. As pointed by Julia Kelemen in her presentation, biomass utilization still remains an unsolved problem. Interesting examples how to solve biomass utilization were given in different presentations, for instance - biogas and/or compost production, using of grazing animals and organic food market development.

At 7 th November afternoon excursion to Lafnitz LIFE project sites took place - first was a cattle-shed where livestock is kept in the winter (Fig. 1.). Animals over-winter in cattle-shed but be driven on to the pastures in spring, where they stay until autumn. The combined grazing and hay mowing has so far proved successful, with a spectacular increase in the land under grazing and hay production and in the number of cattle. Starting with 5 cows and a few hectares in 1998, by 2001 50 ha were being grazed by 100 animals and 80 ha mowed. Currently there are over 300 animals and 400 tonnes of hay are mowed annually.

The riverine landscape primarily in the section between the villages of Lafnitz and Fürstenfeld is now one of the last meander rivers in Austria largely preserved in its natural form. Removing or bypassing obstacles, such as weirs and dams, has been done to reduce negative effect on fish migration (Fig. 2.).



Fig. 1. Cattle-shed for animals used in Lafnitz floodplain meadows grazing.



Fig. 2. Dam bypass to free fish migration.

Participating in this seminar was very important to obtain information about meadow restoration methods used in different LIFE projects. There were useful examples for planning further activities E.6 (Production of grassland management handbook) in our project. Giving an overview of methods used in other LIFE projects may broaden practical aspects covered by handbook.



The participants of seminar.



Discussions. Wolfgang Pelikan (left) and Anton Gazenbeek (right).