

Abstract

How to use floodplains for flood risk reduction: the Ecoflood guidelines

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Worldwide there has been an increase not only in the number of floods but also in the number of people affected by them and in economic losses resulting from them. Currently flooding causes over one-third of the total estimated costs of natural disasters and accounts for two-thirds of people affected by them. The worldwide increase in the occurrence of flooding is reflected in Europe as demonstrated by the recent widespread flooding on many rivers throughout North Western and Central Europe. This increase in flood risk and vulnerability can be attributed to a combination of changes in the climatic, terrestrial and socio-economic systems of the world, all of which are contributing towards the degradation of naturally functioning and highly valuable floodplain habitats.

There is a growing awareness among policy makers and scientists that, on their own, structural (engineering) measures will not alleviate the increasing flood risk. It is becoming widely accepted that natural flood management strategies and integrated river basin management are sensible ways of addressing the increased flood risks, prevent the further degradation of floodplain ecosystems and meet the standards of EU policies such as the Water Framework Directive, the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive and the Flood directive.

The Ecoflood project has developed guidelines for the implementation of natural flood management strategies. The focus of the presentation in the conference is on flood risk management strategies and on the functioning of and benefits provided by unmodified and restored floodplains.