

FREE-FLOWING FUTURE: DAM REMOVAL ACTIONS SURGE ACROSS SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

- **135 activities**, including training sessions, stakeholder workshops, and policy initiatives, in **16 countries** boosted the dam removal movement in 2024 and the first half of 2025
- **33 barriers** were removed in **7 countries** in the same timeframe
- *Slovakia* led the way in scaling up efforts, while *Italy, Romania, and Croatia* emerged as regional frontrunners
- Today, on October 8, the **1st ever [Dam Removal Day](#)** will be celebrated, with at least **30 events** organized in **24 countries**, including a **flashmob** and a **stunt**
- A new short film calls governmental authorities, barrier owners, practitioners and the general public to take action and restore river connectivity
- The winner of the **[4th European Dam Removal Award](#)**, will be announced on October 16 and will be awarded with **20000 euros**

Once lagging behind Southeastern Europe is now seeing growing action to dismantle outdated dams, weirs, and culverts that fragment rivers, disrupt fish migration, degrade water quality and pose risk of failure. A new report reveals that river restoration through barrier removal—a critical tool to revive Europe’s freshwater ecosystems—is gaining unprecedented traction in Southeastern Europe (Figure 1). The breakthrough comes as EU Member States prepare their **National Restoration Plans** under the **EU Nature Restoration Regulation**, which requires **25000 km of rivers to be restored to free-flowing conditions by 2030**.

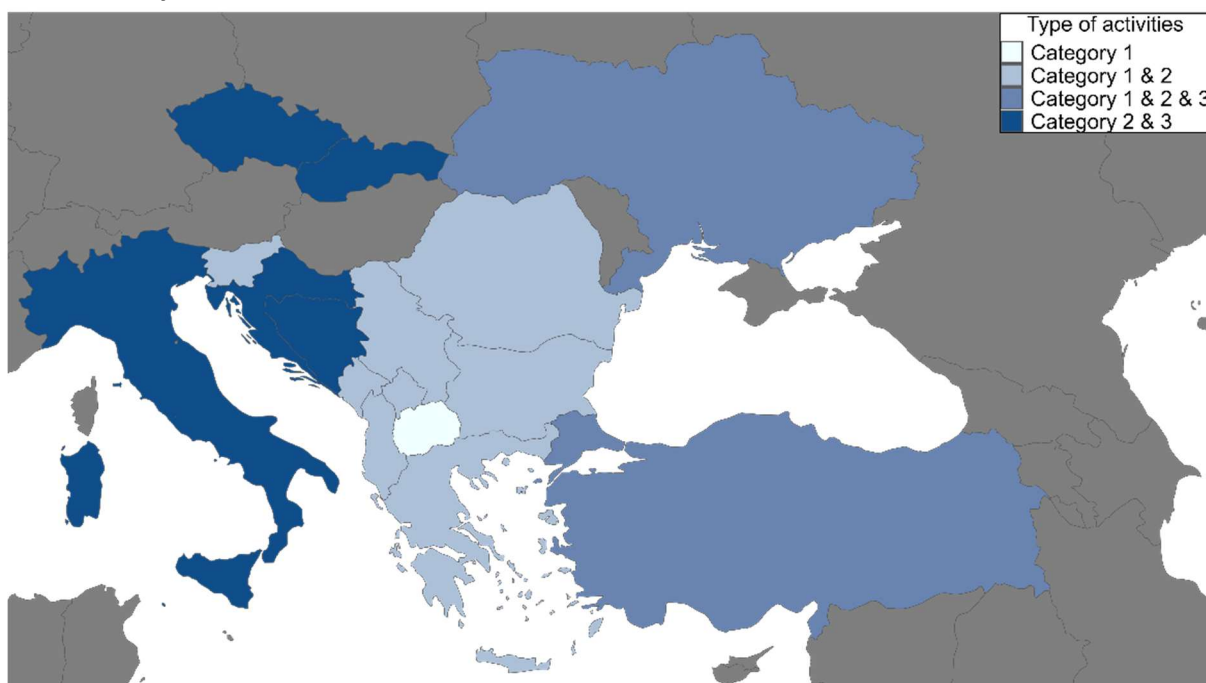


Figure 1. Implementation of barrier removal and/or actions leading to potential future infrastructure demolitions in Southeastern Europe between 1/2024 and 6/2025. Category 1 = Scaling up barrier removal movement, Category 2 = Preparatory works, Category 3 = Barrier removals

The *Southeastern Europe Barrier Removal Movement Progress Report 2024–2025*, documents **135 activities**, including **33 barrier removals across seven countries in just 18 months**, signaling a turning point for a region long behind the rest of Europe in reconnecting its rivers. The activities presented in the report were classified into: (1) those contributing to scaling up the implementation of barrier removal (e.g., seminars, stakeholder engagement, knowledge dissemination, efforts to influence policy and legislation), (2) the preparatory works (e.g., barrier mapping and assessment, and hydrological, archaeological, etc. surveys), and (3) the actual barrier removals (Figure 1).

Restoration Success Stories

- [Croatia](#): Eight obsolete barriers were removed, the first ever in the country, at Plitvice Lakes National Park reconnecting 7.6 km of river and restoring habitat for the endangered Danube trout (Figure 2).
 - [Italy](#): Five barriers on the Giovenco River were removed, reopening 11 km of free-flowing river and revitalizing local wildlife and ecotourism (Figure 3).
 - [Bosnia & Herzegovina](#): Multiple barriers (n=9) were dismantled for the first time in the country, at Hutovo Blato Nature Park and thus 2.5 km were restored for critical fish migration routes and important endemic species.
 - [Slovakia](#): Removal of five barriers in the region of the original channel of the Danube reconnected a vital side arm, boosting biodiversity, flood protection & ecosystem resilience.
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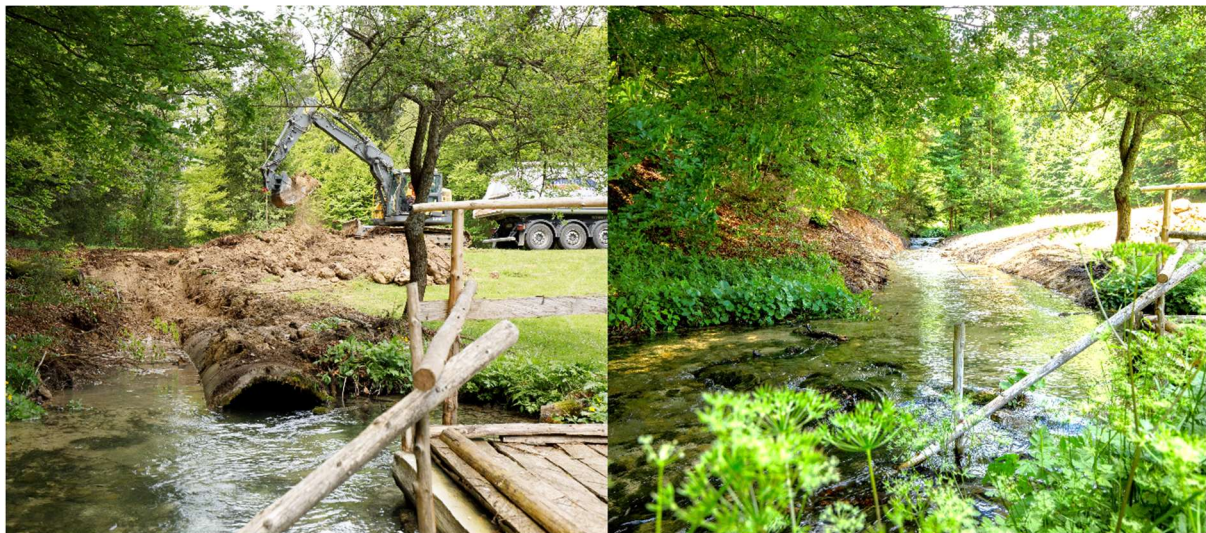


Figure 2. Barrier (culvert) at Plitvice Lakes National Park, Croatia: (left) during and (right) after the removal works © WWF Adria

“Southeastern Europe holds some of Europe’s most ecologically valuable rivers, yet they remain heavily fragmented. With the EU Nature Restoration Regulation now in force, there has never been a better moment to scale up barrier removals, unlock funding, and prioritize free-flowing rivers as natural solutions to biodiversity loss and climate impacts.” said Jelle de Jong, CEO WWF-Netherlands

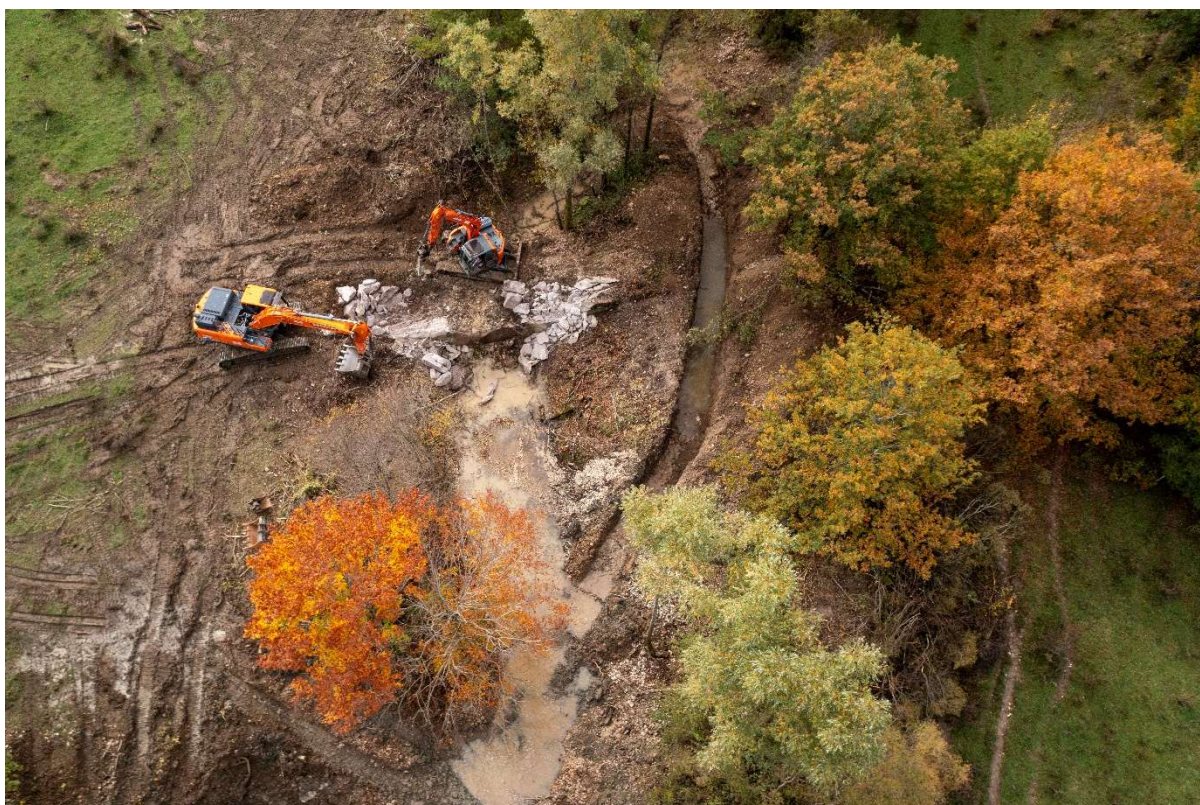


Figure 3. Removal works of a barrier on Giovenco River, Italy © Bruno D'Amicis

A Call to Action

Despite this progress, **less than 1% of all barrier removals in Europe to date have taken place in Southeastern Europe**. Extra support is needed to assist the launch of pilot projects, to promote awareness about the benefits of free-flowing rivers, to create networks for practitioners to exchange methods and lessons learned, and to shift existing policies that will enable the implementation of this practice.

In that respect, a new short film was just released to remind us of our lost connection with the rivers and to invite us to reimagine a Europe where rivers flow free once again. In addition, the first edition of Dam Removal Day, a Europe wide awareness initiative happening today, means to celebrate success stories and spread the excitement by featuring at least 30 events in 24 European countries, ranging from river visits and clean-ups to flashmobs, art performances and workshops. In city squares to remote riverbanks, communities will come together to celebrate living rivers and call for their restoration. The celebrations will peak with the announcement of the winner of the 4th European Dam Removal Award on October 16 in Luxembourg hosted by the Water Management Agency.

WWF, together with Dam Removal Europe partners (The Rivers Trust, The Nature Conservancy, the European Rivers Network, Rewilding Europe, and Wetlands International Europe) urges practitioners wishing to restore free-flowing rivers to join the movement, celebrate the successes and take action. Governments also need to use the next year to identify and prioritize obsolete barriers for removal ahead of the **September 2026 deadline** for submitting their National Restoration Plans.

About the Project

The report was produced as part of the “**Scaling up dam removal: implementation plan for Southeastern Europe**” project, coordinated by WWF Netherlands in partnership with **Fauna & Flora, MedINA Greece, WWF Adria, WWF Slovakia, Wetlands International Europe, and European Rivers Network**, with funding from the **European Open Rivers Programme**.

Full Report & Media Resources:

The *Southeastern Europe Barrier Removal Movement Progress Report 2024–2025* will be published on October 8 on Dam Removal Europe website: www.damremoval.eu

The video will be released on October 6 on Dam Removal Europe YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/@DamRemovalEurope

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