



The Green Belt a natural heritage

What is the Green Belt?

In the area of the former Iron Curtain, which formed an inhumane border between East and West, over the last decades a belt of mostly valuable habitats has developed. This Green Belt harbours many endangered species and ecosystems. In Germany alone it is home to more than 600 species from the German Red Data Book. It stretches all the way from the Barents Sea in the North to the Adriatic and the Black Sea in the South and East.



An ecological network

Due to its integrity and linear character it connects many large natural landscapes and forms an important backbone of an ecological network within Germany and through Europe. It touches the habitats and migration routes of large mammals and contains breeding and resting places of many migrating bird species and thus supports animal migration and genetic exchange.

A natural heritage

The Green Belt traverses most German landscape types and has been declared an important part of the German national natural heritage. It also forms a cross-section of most biogeographic regions in Europe and includes many areas especially rich in biodiversity.



The Green Belt a living monument

The impact of the iron curtain

The Green Belt is also a living historic monument which reminds people of the former division of Germany and Europe. This border divided not only countries but also the people, villages and families. For many people it is still associated with personal, often tragic memories. Today especially young people, who did not witness the time of the Iron Curtain, are addressed by the historical aspects of the Green Belt.



Intact border strip

of the border is documented in border museums and through testimonies of contemporary witnesses.

Traces to be seen today ...

The structure of the border fortifications does not only trace through in today's vegetation. Over long distances the concrete track for the border police and the anti-vehicle ditch still exist. Locally remnants of the fence and watchtowers have been preserved. The history

Remaining fortified borders

Although the Iron Curtain as such fell in 1989, strong border fortifications still exist in parts of the Green Belt, like along the border between Finland and Russia.



Midlereth - split village



The Green Belt threats & chances

Situation in Germany

A habitat mapping project of the Inner-German Green Belt funded by BfN in 2001 showed that about 85% of the area of the border strip had not yet been degraded. However, around 11% had been converted into intensively used arable land and grassland and an additional 2.4% had been destroyed by traffic infrastructure, buildings and settlements. Here increased efforts need to be taken, to secure and regenerate the Green Belt for nature conservation purposes.



Perspectives elsewhere

In other parts of Europe threats to the Green Belt arise from changes in agricultural practices after EU accession, uncontrolled regional development activities, increasing traffic infrastructure and huge investment plans for mass tourism. River systems protected by the iron curtain are now exposed to regulation, the construction of hydropower plants or other exploitation.

Challenges

To prevent uncontrolled regional development which mostly is to the disadvantage of nature and local people, alternative perspectives for a sustainable regional development need to be developed. The Green Belt offers a chance for this.





The Green Belt and its pearls

Focus areas for nature conservation



Focus areas German Green Belt

Based on a mapping project of the German Green Belt 32 focus areas for nature conservation have been identified. These are either in a very good state and thus of high value for nature conservation or have been degraded but possess a high potential for restoration or development. In some of these areas large scale nature conservation projects are funded by BfN or in preparation.

Large scale nature conservation projects

Schaalsee-Landscape:

A characteristic landscape with woodlands, lakes, reed beds, fens and extensively used meadows.

Elbe floodplains at Lenzen:

Through relocation of the river dyke flood

dynamics can model the floodplain landscape in a natural way so that large floodplain forests can redevelop.

Drömling:

The hydrology of this extended wetland area is regenerated to conserve and develop the remaining typical wetland habitats.

Eichsfeld-Werratal:

An ecological network with the Green Belt as backbone is to be developed integrating dry grasslands, heathers, natural forests and small rivers.

Rodachau-Lange Berge-Steinachtal:

A unique landscape formed by valuable forests, dry and wet grasslands, framed by two important river valleys.



The Green Belt nature experience

Potential for sustainable tourism

For many people the Green Belt has already developed towards a recreation area, a place to enjoy nature und to search for historic traces. This unique combination of attractions offers a chance for the development of sustainable tourism.

Project "Experience Green Belt"

To assure the preservation of the Green Belt and to develop sustainable nature tourism a Project 'Experience Green Belt' is supported by BfN. It is intended to increase the local acceptance of the Green Belt, to improve its visibility and thus the possibility to experience its landscapes with their



Guided tour on the Green Belt

specific history. The project is implemented in three model regions. It includes measures for habitat management, the establishment of bicycle and hiking routes, exhibitions and points for border experiences and the development and marketing of touristic offers in the context of 'nature-culture-history'.

Cooperation

Transboundary cooperation is an important issue in all model regions. This concerns the overcoming of administrative borders but also of borders between different disciplines like nature conservation, agriculture, forestry and tourism.



Elbe at high water level



The European Green Belt Initiative

The Green Belt Vision:

The European Green Belt runs along the borders of 23 countries, traverses most biogeographic regions in Europe and, in its course, meets with a great variety of natural, historical, cultural and political conditions. In spite of this heterogeneity the initiative is guided by one common vision:



"To create the backbone of an ecological network, running from the Barents to the Black Sea, that is a global symbol for transboundary cooperation in nature conservation and sustainable development."

The initiative at work

The initiative is coordinated by IUCN, supported by regional coordinators and national focal points. It integrates national authorities and NGOs. This working group has set up a "Programme of Work" naming the main tasks and activities for the initiative, initiates projects and tries to rise funding for Green Belt activities.

Cooperation

International cooperation is the most important basis for the Green Belt initiative. Accordingly it offers a unique chance to overcome the old boundaries and barriers between East and West. It can work as a living symbol for a Europe growing together.

Further information and contacts: see [Green Belt brochure](#)

