

In the area of the former Iron Curtain, which formed an inhumane border between East and West (Fig. 1), the only winner was nature. The specific conditions existing along the Iron Curtain promoted the conservation or development of valuable habitats:

- Nobody was admitted to enter the border strip itself, i.e. this area was comparatively undisturbed and underwent no cultivation or intensification of land-use.
- Due to their remoteness and restrictions the situation was similar in large areas in the border regions.

As consequence of these favourable conditions the Green Belt harbours many endangered species and habitat types.

The Importance of the Green Belt for species and habitat protection

A habitat inventory raised in the summer of 2001 has proven this importance for the German section of the Green Belt.

The survey was part of a „Testing and development project“ run by the Bund Naturschutz in Bayern e.V., the Bavarian branch of the BUND (German section of friends of the earth) nature conservation organization, funded by the Federal Agency of Nature Conservation (Schlumprecht et al. 2002; Bund Naturschutz in Bayern e.V. 2003).



Fig. 1: Former border between East and West near Wildeck Germany (Photo: Ritter)

Habitat types covering the Green Belt

- 16 % of the area covered by Annex I habitats (EU Habitats Directive 92/43/EWG)
- 48.8 % of the area covered by endangered habitat types (Riecken et al. 1994)
- 85.2 % of the area have not yet been adversely effected e.g. by agricultural intensification (11 %), forestal intensification (1 %), or the construction of roads, sealed tracks or built-up areas (2.4 %).

Species in the area of the Green Belt

Although there was no systematic survey of species, data on vertebrate animals and plants originating from various other sources indicate the importance of the Green Belt for rare and endangered species.

Conservation status of the Green Belt

Large areas of the Green Belt and its surroundings are protected (Fig. 2).

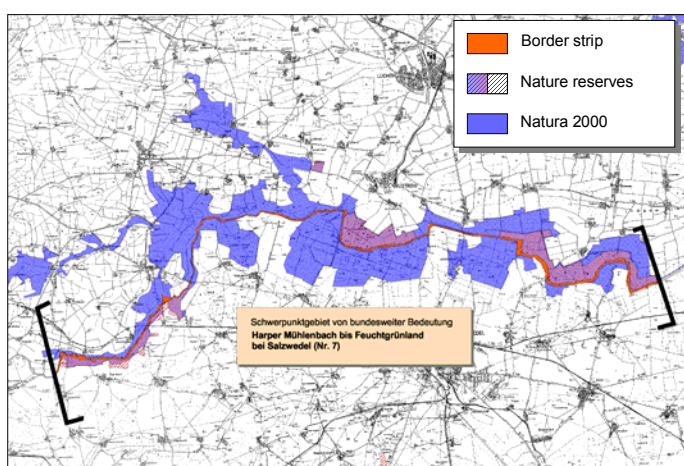


Fig. 2: Location of areas proposed for NATURA 2000 and nature reserves concentrating in the proximity of the Green Belt.

- 28 % of the area is protected as nature reserves
- about 38 % of the area are proposed Sites of Community Interest (pSCI – EU Habitats Directive) or Special Protected Areas (SPA – EU Birds Directive)
- about ¼ of the area is covered by legally protected habitat types (German Federal Nature Conservation Act)

Focus areas for nature conservation and development

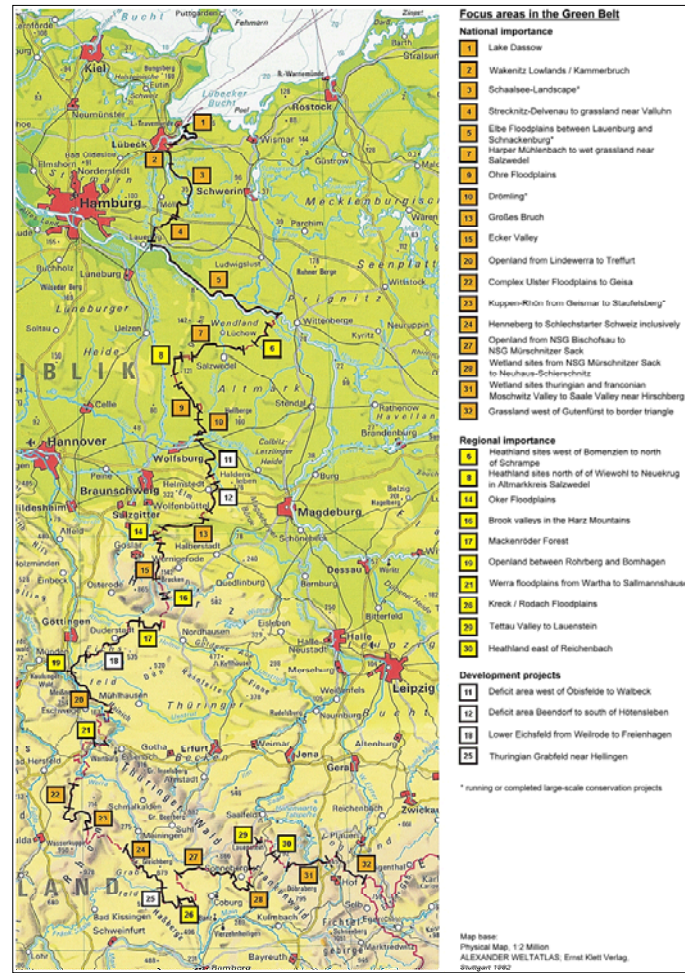


Fig. 3: Location of the focus areas (Schlumprecht et al. 2002)

Along the Green Belt 32 focus areas for nature conservation and development were selected (Fig. 3). These cover 937 km, i.e. 67 % of the length and 79 % of the area of the German Green Belt.

21 of these areas were rated as focus areas of at least national importance. These will form core areas in a national ecological network.

The Drömling (no. 10 in Fig. 3) is an example for such a focus area, i.e. an area of special value typical for the Green Belt (Fig. 4). Here cross-border cooperation is already practiced on a national level between two German "Länder" in two national large-scale conservation projects.



Fig. 4: Large scale conservation project „Drömling“ (Photo: Kaiser)

Function for habitat connectivity



Fig. 5: Green Belt in the landscape of the „Großes Bruch“ (Photo: Leidorf)

Between these focus areas large sections of the Green Belt serve as connecting areas and elements of national or international relevance. In intensively used landscapes, the Green Belt often is the only close to natural structure left (Fig. 5).

¹ Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, Konstantinstr. 110, 53179 Bonn, GERMANY E-Mail: RieckenU@BfN.de

² Bund Naturschutz in Bayern e.V. / BUND Green Belt Project Office, Bauernfeindstr. 23, 90471 Nuremberg, GERMANY, E-Mail: liana.geidezis@bund-naturschutz.de

The Green Belt as part of a national ecological network

In the year 2002 a new German Federal Nature Conservation Act came into force. It contains a new article, article 3, which demands the establishment of an ecological network on at least 10 % of the territory of the German "Länder". It has two goals:

- the conservation of native species of flora and fauna and their populations, including their habitats and biotic communities – and
- the preservation, regeneration and development of functioning ecological interactions.

It aims at the establishment of an ecological network consisting of natural to semi-natural elements relevant on a landscape scale, i.e. a large spatial scale (Burkhardt et al. 2003).

The Habitats Directive and Article 3 of the German Federal Nature Act have several basic goals in common. The main difference is that the Habitats Directive aims at natural habitats and species of Community interest, whereas Article 3 of the German Federal Nature Conservation Act regards all natural habitats and native species of wild flora and fauna.

Based on the requirements assessed, suitable areas for development, i.e. sites with an adequate potential for development, should be searched for. This approach is considered as implementation of the coherence aimed for in article 10 of the Habitats Directive in Germany.

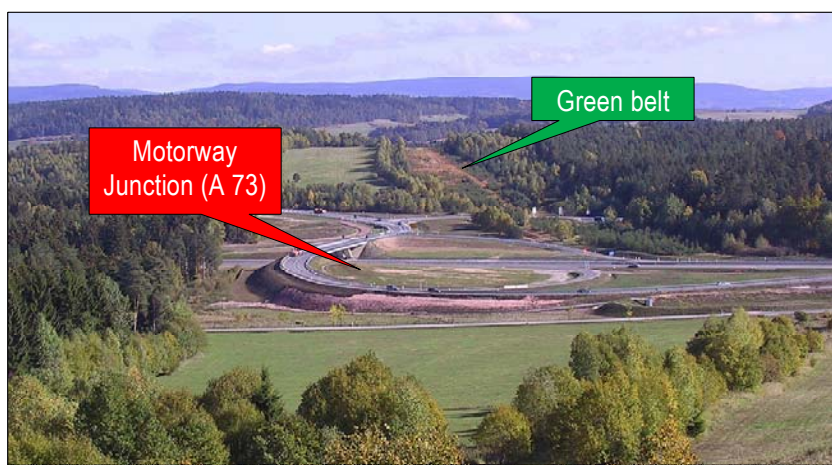


Fig. 6: Motorway junction on the Green Belt

Regarding this background, the Green Belt forms an ideal backbone of both a national as well as a European ecological network, with large core areas and connecting areas, which needs to be preserved. Within the Green Belt important gaps can easily be identified. In some cases like motorways (Fig. 6) or railways they will stay for ever. But in other cases i.e. areas with agricultural or forestry use they hopefully can be closed again.

European Green Belt

Concerning the Green Belt, there is a similar situation along the entire former Iron Curtain.

This led to the vision to establish a Green Belt from the Barents Sea to the Black Sea including the Balkan Green Belt and the borderline between Italy, Austria and Slovenia, taking into account that the latter section has not been such a strong Iron Curtain as the major parts (Fig. 7)



Fig. 7: The European Green Belt

This vision offers the chance

- to contribute to the conservation and development of a European habitat network
- to implement common international nature conservation objectives
- and to contribute to the overcoming of the historical divide in Europe

The point of departure for the implementation of the idea to establish a European Green Belt is:

- that local transboundary cooperation between national parks or other large-scale conservation areas already exists in many places, as
 - e.g. in the area of the Neusiedler See between Austria and Hungary
- that prior initiatives for bilateral cooperation already exist,
 - e.g. between Finland and the Russian Federation on administration level and among the NGOs.
- and, that the political willingness to enhance transboundary cooperation along the Green Belt is given.

For the future it is planned

- to establish a working group on ministry level with participation of national and international NGOs
- and to organize an international conference on the European Green Belt on the working, i.e. project level in 2004 as a preparation to implement further activities both in coordination and in projects.

Further information:



References

- Bund Naturschutz in Bayern e.V. (2003). Bestandsaufnahme Grünes Band. Unveröffentlichter Abschlussbericht zum E+E-Vorhaben. Erstellung: Büro für ökologische Studien & Projektbüro Grünes Band. Bayreuth und Nürnberg.
- Burkhardt, R., Baier, H., Bendzko, U., Bierhals, E., Finck, P., Jenemann, K., Liegl, A., Mast, R., Mirbach, E., Nagler, A., Pardey, A., Riecken, U., Sachteleben, J., Schneider, A., Szekeley, S., Ullrich, K., van Hengel, U. and Zeltner, U. (2003). Naturschutzfachliche Kriterien zur Umsetzung des § 3 BNatSchG "Biotopverbund". Natur und Landschaft 78(9/10): 418-426.
- Riecken, U., Ries, U. and Ssymank, A. (1994). Rote Liste der gefährdeten Biotoptypen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Bonn-Bad Godesberg, Kilda-Verlag.
- Schlumprecht, H., Ludwig, F., Geidezis, L. and Frobel, K. (2002). E+E-Vorhaben "Bestandsaufnahme Grünes Band" - Naturschutzfachliche Bedeutung des längsten Biotopverbundsystems Deutschlands. Natur und Landschaft 77(9/10): 407-414.

Bundesnaturschutzgesetz (BNatSchG) vom 20.12.1967 i.d.F. vom 03.04.2002, BGBl. I, 1193

¹ Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, Konstantinstr. 110, 53179 Bonn, GERMANY, E-Mail: RieckenU@BfN.de

² Bund Naturschutz in Bayern e.V. / BUND Green Belt Project Office, Bauernfeindstr. 23, 90471 Nuremberg, GERMANY, E-Mail: liana.geidezis@bund-naturschutz.de