

Five countries sign for 'European Amazon' reserve

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Croatian children stand on the shore of the Danube river near the village of Batina, some 300 kms east of the capital Zagreb, in 2010. Five central European countries signed an accord to launch a cross-border nature reserve in an area known as Europe's Amazon at a meeting of environmental ministers that ended Saturday.

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The declaration signed by Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Serbia and Slovenia paves the way for the creation of the world's first five-country protected area, international environmental group WWF said, hailing the accord.

It will be "a first in the region and the first created by five countries," added Hungary's Rural Development Minister Sandor Fazekas at the meeting close to the capital Budapest where the area to be covered by the reserve was described as "Europe's [Amazon](#)" because of its rich biodiversity.

The reserve will create [Europe's](#) largest riverine protected area, covering 700 kilometres (435 miles) along the Danube, Dra (Drava), and Mur (Mura) rivers, WWF said in a statement.

It includes rare floodplain forests and river islands and is home to Europe's highest density of breeding pairs of white-tailed eagle and endangered species such as the little tern, black stork and otters, it said.

The five countries are to establish a coordination team to work on obtaining natural reserve status for the area.

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