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## Rivers need more space

### Finally time for good practices realisation

Ljubljana – “Overflowing water into the Ljubljansko barje (marsh area south of the capital) is a natural phenomena which has existed for centuries and humans have to adapt to it. Spatial planning in the area should follow a natural water regime and not bend to the greed of the investors,” according to Mitja Bricelj, Head of Institute for Waters of Republic of Slovenia. There are proposed new strategies which will influence distribution of the EU LIFE funds.

“There are many good water resource management practices in Slovenia, but we fail to use them. One of the leading old principles required space for the water to overflow,” said **Mitja Bricelj**. Exchanging good practices from different European regions will be the main topic of the seminar this week in Ljubljana which hosts attendees from 27 countries. The European Centre for River Restoration (ECRR), with contributions from the seminar participants, will shape a proposal for the 6th World Water Forum, which will take place next year in March in Marseilles, and gathered experiences will guide the allocation of the EU LIFE funds. Environmental and flood risk management of water courses is important for adapting to climate change.

Such management mostly means widening and elongation of riverbeds, greater flood areas, reforestation of the riverbed slopes, removal of gravel from the reservoirs, enabling fish passage and removing non-native fish species (in Slovenia 16 species). **Bart Fokkens**, president of ECRR board, says that they have hitherto dealt with more research, but now it is time to begin implementing best practices. Solutions for environmental remediation of watercourses and increased flood protection will be different for different regions of Europe and Asia. **Toni Scarr** from UK, RESTORE project manager, said that information about the needs of individual countries is very important for LIFE projects.

In Slovenia, construction plans pose the main threat to the water environment, as well as water pollution due to agriculture and settlements without adequate sewage treatment. “Compared with the Netherlands, our waters are pure, because 60 percent flow through the forest. But nevertheless we cannot be complacent. Accelerated construction of treatment plants will decrease pollution in 80 percent of watercourses by 2015. We still have a problem with flood protection, because the construction lobbies do not want to adjust to the water regime and they are refusing to give up their profits,” says Bricelj who believes that we should change the land use planning.

Water areas are not inviolable, but construction plans near the water bodies should adapt to the water regime. According to Bricelj, in the Ljubljana marshes the houses should stand on piles, so the flood water would not damage them. “At present this is widely ignored, and later they then ask for state help,” says Bricelj. He added that the storage area for flood water on the Ljubljana marshes benefits not only water quality, but also gives protection against a floodwater surge along the Ljubljanica River in Ljubljana city and of the Sava River downstream from the city. Fokkens also noted that the focus should not be on problems, but on solutions. Besides this, a new, more natural management of watercourses is cheaper than the current measures for protection against flooding. “Money only needs to be reallocated for the right practices,” says Fokkens.