Module - What is a wild river?

1. Aim of this module

What are wild rivers? And how can we find out more about them? This module introduces you to wild rivers. It does so with instructions that enable you to take the first steps towards the identification of a wild river. Maybe there is a wild river in your home region? Or you saw one during vacations? With this module, you can learn more about this rare kind of ecosystem!

2. Module instruction

On the next page, you will find instructions about wild river identification – first steps!

We have simplified the criteria to eight very important criteria. Working with these criteria allows you to test, if your river of choice is a wild river.

It will take your group about 1 day to visit the river + 1 day to collect information and fill out criteria, this can vary with river length.

3. Communication

If you think that you have discovered a wild river, send your wild fellow to us (info@bigjumpchallenge.net) or post it to the big jump challenge facebook. If your group or community is serious about taking the identification to the next step, we will be happy to facilitate the contact to the "Wild Rivers" program carried out by ERN in France.

4. Further resources

- More about wild rivers and the criteria to identify them: www.wildrivers.eu.
- Examples of three wild rivers in the Balkan region http://www.balkanrivers.net/en/key-areas

5. Permissions

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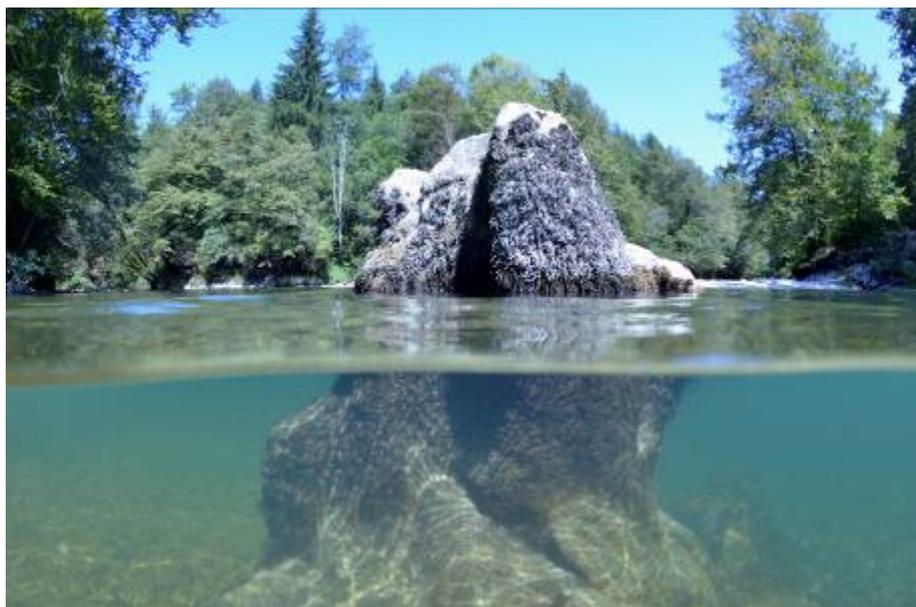
What is a Wild River?

A wild river is alive and well preserved. It flows freely and welcomes in its high-quality waters and unmodified banks an exceptional biodiversity.

In Europe, most rivers have been heavily modified by engineers. Often the course of rivers was straightened, the banks were artificially built (often at the cost of floodplains) and dams were built for energy and for flood prevention. Thus, very few rivers have preserved their wildness.

Moreover, the most important European Water legislation, the Water Framework Directive, does not specifically recognize such "excellent", high quality rivers. Therefore, there are also no specific monitoring or protection program.

In an effort to save these few, remaining jewels, the "wild rivers" program was created in France in 2011 by the NGOs WWF France and ERN France, scientists and naturalists. It specifies a set of 47 criteria for the identification of a wild river. It offers an official label for communities to have "their" wild river recognized.

As of February 2017, nine rivers in France where officially recognized as wild in this way (see photos below). Now, ERN France is working towards a European adaptation of the French "Wild Rivers" label.

La Valserine
© image-riviere.com - Yannick Gouguenheim

La Dorches - © ERN France

La Vézeronce - © CD 01

Le Pic - © Mathieu Tijeras - CD23

La Gioune - © Mathieu Tijeras - CD23

L'Artoise - © Philippe Collet

La Beaume - © F. Schwaab - SMRBD

La Drobie - © F. Schwaab - SMRBD

Le Nant Bénin - © Association Nant Sauvage

Source: http://www.wildrivers.eu

Activity: Discover your wild river!

Choose a river that you feel is natural and free-flowing, and find out if it could be one of the last European wild rivers!

*Note: you can choose **a section of the river.** A fully wild river, from its spring to its confluence, is very rare in contemporary Europe. But if you choose a section, it should not be too short. We propose that is minimally 7 kilometers long.*

Brief presentation of your river (or section of the river)

Name of the river	
Total length of the river	
Length of the wild section *7 km minimum is recommended*	
Width of the river at the downstream boundary of the section	
GPS coordinates of the downstream boundary of the section	
Aquatic and wetland management, protection or recognition in this section such as Natura2000, Natural Reserve, National Park, etc…	

Wild river criteria

To check for these criteria, use maps, aerial views (Google Earth), visit the river by walk or canoe and try to meet local management structures.

Criteria	YES	NO	Comment, details
Feeling of wildness: when I walk along the river, I feel I am in a natural environment. *Low noise and visual pollution, low human frequentation and impact.*			
More than 90 % of the course of the river bed is natural. *The river bed is naturally winding, meandering. Mankind often modified the route to make it straight or divert the watercourse.*			

More than 90 % of the lengths of the banks is in a natural condition. *Banks are not stabilized with rocks, concrete or other non-natural material.*			
No dam interrupts the continuity of the flow. *Continuity impact occurs when the dam is impassable or poorly passable for fish (salmon or brown trout) and sediment (sand, gravel…)*			
Across the wetted river: less than 1 human built structure per km *e.g. bridge, weir, pond, etc… with low impact on continuity.*			
Land use: less than 10 % of the bottom of the valley is used for intensive agriculture, human settlements (villages, towns) and infrastructures (roads etc.). *The bottom of the valley is the land at each side of the river with a width 20 times larger than the river. Intensive agriculture: grain, corn, vegetables…*			
More than 80% of length of the banks is occupied by appropriate species. *E.g. of inappropriate species: softwood planting, poplar planting, invasive species (Japanese knotweed, primrose willow, etc.)*			
The river achieves "high status" or "good status" according to the European Water Framework Directive			

If the answers are "yes" for the 8 criteria, your river is very likely one of the most preserved rivers in Europe!

It is a candidate for the "Wild Rivers" label!

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