

River Action Toolbox 2017

Module: Get Riverwalk-ing!

1. Aim of this module

This module aims to inspire you to plan and implement a Riverwalk! It will provide you with important background information and examples from previous Riverwalks. Don't just stand there, get walking!

2. What is a *Riverwalk*?

A *Riverwalk* is just that - a walk along a river. It could be organized as a one-day event to a multi-day adventure. It could be a small group of people or a large group walking an important stretch of a river. The scope, nature and location of your *Riverwalk* should be decided based on the aim of your project's goal: are you wanting to get lots of people involved?, then choose a stretch where many people can walk and have easy access. Want to make a point about protecting a certain "wild" river?, then find a safe, but wilder section where you can walk with a smaller group.

A *Riverwalk* could be an alternative to a big jump if there is not a safe or optimal place to have a jump. Alternatively, a *Riverwalk* can always be combined with a big jump when there is a safe place for people to make a splash!

Need some inspiration!? Check out the photos and videos from our past *Riverwalks* (and see sidebar for description of why we chose to riverwalk!) www.river-walk.eu.

Side Box:

Riverwalk Europe

Multi-week walks to discover and protect free-flowing rivers

Starting in 2014, WWF-Austria's Generation Earth, youth leadership program, and partners from different countries started organizing yearly international "*Riverwalks*." You can read all about them here: www.river-walk.eu. We've been in Austria, Italy, Slovenia and Albania. In 2017, there will be a 3-week *Riverwalk* from Switzerland, through Austria, and end in



Germany!

For us, a “*Riverwalk*” is a powerful life-changing experience for young people who want to *discover and protect wild rivers* and at the same time have an intense cross-cultural experience. It is also an “action project” that can send a clear message to people and politicians - for example:

- “*There is a need for renewable energy, but it cannot come at all costs - protect wild rivers!*”
- “*Rivers need room!*” (*restore the ecological benefits of natural, meandering, free-flowing rivers*)
- “*Develop eco-friendly tourism instead of destroying wild rivers!*”

(Our) *Riverwalk*’s main objectives are to:

- develop participants’ personal connection to nature and free-flowing rivers,
- explore topics of renewable energy, nature conservation, sustainability and eco-tourism,
- Develop youth participants’ competences such as leadership, team building, project management and active citizenship.
- Equally importantly is for participants to learn how to live and work together with youth from different backgrounds,
- resolve conflicts in a productive manner, and
- co-create a supportive, participatory, open-minded, communicative atmosphere and thus improve intercultural understanding.

Need some inspiration? Check out these films:

2016: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4_l_qMaf6g

2015: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dr_LvO8Hf6Q

2014: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yP_fwFtgCDk

3. Why do it?

Why should I (we) organize a *Riverwalk*? Good question...and that’s exactly where you need to start. What could a *Riverwalk* do for you (and wild rivers)?

As mentioned in the sidebox, previous *Riverwalks* have tried to **raise awareness** and take **political action** and focused on **protecting wild rivers from damaging development** because the number of free-flowing, wild rivers in Europe is dwindling. Therefore, it is critical to protect the most intact and ecologically important ones. So, we came up with the idea of organizing *Riverwalks* on the highest priority rivers in our area.

But there could be many other reasons for organizing *Riverwalks* too!

Think about a river in your community, region, or country... what are the reasons that you could organize a *Riverwalk*? Here are a few ideas:

- **Ecological restoration:** Let rivers flow freely - restore their ecological conditions and benefits will follow!
- **Eco-friendly economic development:** Support eco-tourism, eco-jobs around the topic of rivers
- **Public access:** Rivers should belong to everyone, and yet, more and more private owners are keeping rivers “locked up” from others to enjoy.
- **Just for fun!**

Text box:

How Riverwalk 2014 helped protect the Isel River:

Watch the trailer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yP_fwFtgCDk

Leading up to the first Riverwalk in 2014, the Isel River (East Tyrol, Austria) was under great threat of having a hydropower plant built just outside of the National Park boundaries, and near an amazing waterfall.

So, in the summer of 2014, 21 young adults walked from the headwaters of the Isel River 200+ kilometers, crossing into Slovenia, and then followed the Soca River to end in Bovec. Along the way, they participated in an Isel Riverfest, where over one hundred people came and celebrated the river, by organizing workshops, music and expert speakers. They also got in the press: newspaper, radio, TV, online, etc. by sending out press releases, statements, contacting press people, and making a political video!

The Riverwalk was part of a bigger campaign involving lots of people, citizens groups, WWF, and other organizations, and in late 2014, a large section of the Isel River was put under Natura2000 protection - a great success!

4. How to plan a Riverwalk: what you need to get started!

- The first question is: **“Why do I (we) want to organize a *Riverwalk*?”** What do I (we) hope/want to achieve with it?
- **What is the scale that I (we) could imagine:** it could be a 1-day, weekend, or multi-week event with local, regional, national or international partners/participants
- **Create a strong planning team!** Depending on the scale of your project, will determine the structure and numbers you need: Can you find other partners (organizations, schools, businesses, etc.) who can help you out? Get enough people, but not too many. We find 6-8 people are enough.
- **Create a (new) vision with your planning team:** your dream should merge with the dreams of the planning team to make sure that there is ownership of the project! More on this, find under www.dragondreaming.org/dragondreaming/what-is-it-exactly/dreaming

- **Start the planning process** - see the “Instructions” part below.

Text box: Here is an example of a 1-day Riverwalk

08:45

Welcome– 30“

- Introductions (5“)
- Short overview of the day /project/ walk
- Material-Check & participants intros (10-15“)

- Info 1. Stop: Ask group to think about questions to the theme of the walk - collect with a partner (5“)

09:30

1. Stop: waterfall – 30-40“

- Collect questions from the group (to be discussed during the walk)

10:15

Start the walk

60“ walking / talking

11:30

2. Stop: Break at nice spot - discuss 1of the questions 20“

70“ walking

13:00

3. Stop: Lunch break 85“

Discussion of topics (60 – 90“)

14:45

4. Stop: Blue Lake – 100“

- Discuss safety / “rules” 5“
- Group photo „Jump in the Blue Lake“ 15“
- Final discussion round(60 – 90“)

17:00

End of the event

5. Instructions: What to do after you have your planning team

Hint: We are very open to the idea of connecting your Riverwalk with the Riverwalk Europe platform/movement (www.river-walk.eu; [www.fb.com/RiverwalkEurope](https://www.facebook.com/RiverwalkEurope)) and will try to

support you as much as we can with your planning and implementation! Please get in touch with us if you would like to discuss your ideas or need some help getting started:

- Nathan Spees (nathan.spees@wwf.at) and
- Martin Huber (martin.huber.austria@gmail.com)

After you have your planning team, set up regular (and well-run) meetings! Make sure you have a plan for each meeting (what you're meeting for). Establish clear roles and responsibilities for each partner/planning member.

- **Define the scope of the project:** length, route, number of days, events, program, etc.
- **Create a budget:** food, accommodations, events, activities (rafting, biking, etc.), insurance, transportation, brochures, video production, etc...
 - i. We always try to save money by cooking together, camping, getting sponsors, etc.
- **Create a program:** what will happen during the project. Create an hour-by-hour or day-by-day plan.
 - i. Will you meet with experts? Will you have any special side activities or events (eg. meeting with a mayor, press conference, Riverfest!, etc.)

What activities could you add to your Riverwalk?

The possibilities are endless, but here are some thoughts:

- Include a Big Jump!
- Organize discussions with experts connected to your theme
- Visit a hydropower plant, restored wetland, fish ladder, protected area, etc.
- Go rafting, kayaking, fly fishing, tubing, canyoning
- Hold a Riverfest - organize an event with music, info tables, food, activities that have to do with water, invite experts, citizens groups, water educators, etc.
- Invite celebrities, politicians, artists to join you
- Make land/river art projects
- Organize a demonstration
- Try to get hundreds of people to walk for a stretch with you
- Invite the media: write a press release
- Take lots of photographs
- ...what else could you include?

- **Make a communications plan:** How will you get the word out? It's quite possible that you can use the Riverwalk website and Facebook page! (Please get in touch with us if you would like to discuss your ideas: Nathan Spees (nathan.spees@wwf.at) and Martin Huber (martin.huber.austria@gmail.com))
- **Plan your project and make it happen!** This includes making deadlines, milestones, monitoring whether it's on track and also evaluating it!

6. Tips and tricks for success & lessons learned

- **Start small:** if you don't have much experience with organizing events like this, then start small: maybe a 3-hour Riverwalk is enough for the first try! Then, you can build on it.
- **Organize a face-2-face planning meeting!** We've found that virtual meetings are important but having at least one face-to-face meeting is critical, especially if you are working with with new and/or international partners.
- **Get to know the route:** Reduce your risks (safety, getting lost, trail problems) by getting to know the trail BEFORE you start. It's going to be an adventure anyway you do it...so having a good "feel" for the trail can help you reduce stress.
- **Connect with existing networks and partners:** Find synergies and support by working with existing river platforms (like www.river-walk.eu, WWF, citizens' groups, Riverwatch, etc.)
- **Connect with nature!** Don't forget to build in time to connect with the river, nature, and the surroundings - that's why we're doing it anyway, right? Try to build in group activities like rafting, kayaking, land art, sleeping outside, etc.
- **Share the good word!** Make sure that you plan and execute a communications plan: Who do you want to target/communicate with? and How will you do it? We've found that the media really likes these types of projects, so get them involved - invite them to join you for a part of the trip and send out press releases. Plus, use social media, the web, and any other channels you can to tell people what you are doing and why!

7. Connecting with others: partners, networks, resources

- **Riverwalk Europe:** www.river-walk.eu; [www.fb.com/RiverwalkEurope](https://www.facebook.com/RiverwalkEurope)
- Riverwatch: <http://riverwatch.eu/en/>
- Tips on planning hiking trips for groups:
 - i. <http://londonhiker.com/advice-and-tips/group-hiking-trip>
 - ii. www.thehikinglife.com/how-to/planning

8. Legal liability (we are not responsible)

- There are obviously some legal responsibilities and considerations that need to be made especially around the topic of SAFETY! It is always important to scout the route you are taking before you start, ensure that you have well-trained emergency responders on your team, carry first aid material at all times, and generally have fun, but be safe!
- No one associated with this website or the text here can be held liable for your actions - you take full responsibility for any and all decisions and problems that may ensue during your Riverwalk.

9. Acknowledgments

This module was prepared by Nathan Spees, WWF-Generation Earth / Riverwalk Europe

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