

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### River Mur wins 2014 IRF European Riverprize

International RiverFoundation has awarded the 2014 European Riverprize to Austria's River Mur.

Sponsored by Coca-Cola Europe, the €25,000 prize celebrates successful approaches that have overcome the challenges to river restoration, ecosystem health, water quality and climate change within the social and political context of the European continent.

In collaboration with the Styrian Government (Department 14 – Water Management, Resources and Sustainability) freiland Environmental Consulting Civil Engineers has been working to restore priority stretches of over 22km of the River Mur, which has been badly degraded by widespread development since the late 19th century. Since 1997, extensive work has been done to re-establish the natural conditions of the river and restore natural habitats for the many species that rely on the river and surrounding environment.

Representatives from the River Mur accepted the award in front of an audience of European river professionals at the Riverprize Gala Dinner at Vienna City Hall on Tuesday 28 October. The dinner was held in conjunction with 6<sup>th</sup> European River Restoration Conference, where all finalists were given the opportunity to showcase their decades of work.

"Winning the Riverprize is a great achievement for the team, and an affirmation for river restoration work on the River Mur in recent years. We hope that the Riverprize will serve as a contribution to improve public awareness of our river," said a River Mur representative.

The River Mur rises in the Austrian Eastern Alps and flows into the Drava River in Croatia. Home to the second largest alluvial forest in Austria, the river basin area comprises one of Europe's most species-rich habitats. Works to restore this river have benefited both the environment and the communities in the area, with additional activities including increased flood protection and the creation of leisure and nature activities for the local residents.

Mr Bart Fokkens, Chair of the European Riverprize judging panel, said that the Mur River restoration was very well planned, implemented with intensive public participation, stakeholder engagement and transboundary cooperation from the very beginning.

"The project performance shows a high level of integration, going far beyond ecological restoration and demonstrating innovation with respect to land, land use planning and sustainable land management. This is the result of a remarkable combination of persistent, creative and professional behavior of the river planners and managers withstanding the special circumstances," said Mr Fokkens.

The River Mur will now automatically qualify for stage two of the Thies International Riverprize in 2015.

The other finalists in the 2014 European Riverprize were two different projects on the renowned Danube River. The first, a transnational initiative by DANUBEPARKS, involves the development of a network of Danube protected areas which look after the most valuable sites in a common and coherent ecosystem. The second involves restoration activities on the 172km stretch of the Danube running through Slovakia, rehabilitating the river and wetlands which were degraded as a result of man-made interventions in the river.

This year, the International RiverFoundation also awarded the 2014 Thies International Riverprize to the River Rhine of Europe, and the Australian Riverprize to the Lake Eyre Basin.

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**About the River Mur**

**(freiland Environmental Consulting Civil Engineers and Office of the Styrian Government – Department 14 Water Management, Resources & Sustainability)**

Through systematic river regulation and development beginning at the end of the 19th century, the River Mur has been significantly altered. River loops, branches and floodplain forests were separated and the construction of hydro-power led to a loss of habitat for many species.

In spite of these man-made changes to the river, the Upper Mur is considered to be one of the most ecologically valuable rivers of Austria. A natural spawning ground for the Danube salmon, the cross-border part of the River Mur also has the second largest alluvial forest in Austria and comprises one of Europe's most species-rich habitats. In restoring the River, the main focus has been on the restoration of old structures and the recovery of natural river habitats by increasing connectivity with the dynamic river system.

Added benefits from these restoration activities include increased flood protection outcomes and the creation of leisure and nature facilities for the communities along the river. A regulation zone that excludes power plants is also being implemented, ensuring the sustainable management of the River Mur well in to the future.



Pictured (L): Rudolf Hornich, Steirischen Landesregierung; Ulrike Sapiro, Coca Cola Europe; Susanne Brandstetter, Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management; Christine Konradi, freiland Umweltconsulting Zt GmbH; Hans-Jörg Raderbauer, freiland Umweltconsulting Zt GmbH; Norbert Baumann, Steirischen Landesregierung; Theodor Wimmer, freiland Umweltconsulting Zt GmbH; Viktoria Hasler, Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management; Dr Nick Schofield, CEO, International RiverFoundation

More images are available on request – please contact [patricia@riverfoundation.org.au](mailto:patricia@riverfoundation.org.au).