



Press release - 21 April 2021

New WWF analysis reveals the possibility of freeing 8130km of rivers in France !

A report released on 19 April 2021 by WWF shows that 935 river obstacles present a strong potential for removal in France.

The study demonstrates the massive potential of barrier removal to restore free-flowing rivers in Europe.

The report '[The potential of barrier removal to reconnect Europe's rivers](#)' analyses a sample of 30,000 barriers on large and medium-sized rivers in Europe, and assesses their reconnection potential for the whole continent, the EU27, and by country, based on the length of river which could be reconnected and the ecological quality of reconnected rivers which could be achieved through barrier removal.

Out of the sample studied in the report, which totals less than 3% of Europe's estimated 1 million barriers [3], 732 barriers were identified in the EU as having a high reconnection potential, which would allow to reconnect about **11,500 km** of large and medium-sized rivers (Figure1). A further 6,628 were identified as having a good reconnection potential, **making a total of nearly 50,000 km of rivers that have a high and good potential to be made free-flowing again.**

In Central Western Europe, including France, the density of barriers is the highest across Europe. In this region, the removal of **2 800** barriers with a good and high potential could restore **21 110km** of free-flowing rivers (Figure 2)

Specifically for France, **935** barriers have a good or high potential. The removal of these barriers could free **8 130km** of rivers.

Dam removal is the fastest, easiest and cheapest measure to restore a river. Its efficiency has been proven on dams all over the world. The time between removal and total recovery of the river is very short. Within a few months the stream has regained its territory, water quality improves dramatically, forests grow back to life, wildlife's numbers – aquatic and terrestrial – boom and the overall services that a river in good ecological status provides to humans, are again functioning. WWF offices all across Europe have come together to raise the importance of Dam Removal through the [Rivers Unlocked](#) 2021 action.

On the political arena, the upcoming revision of France's River Basin Management Plan offers a unique opportunity to include measures and budget to restore rivers, floodplains and wetlands to ensure the proper implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive, while contributing to reach the objectives of free flowing rivers stated by the 2030 Biodiversity Strategy. Recovery funds, meanwhile, can still offer a last minute chance to finance this kind of operations.

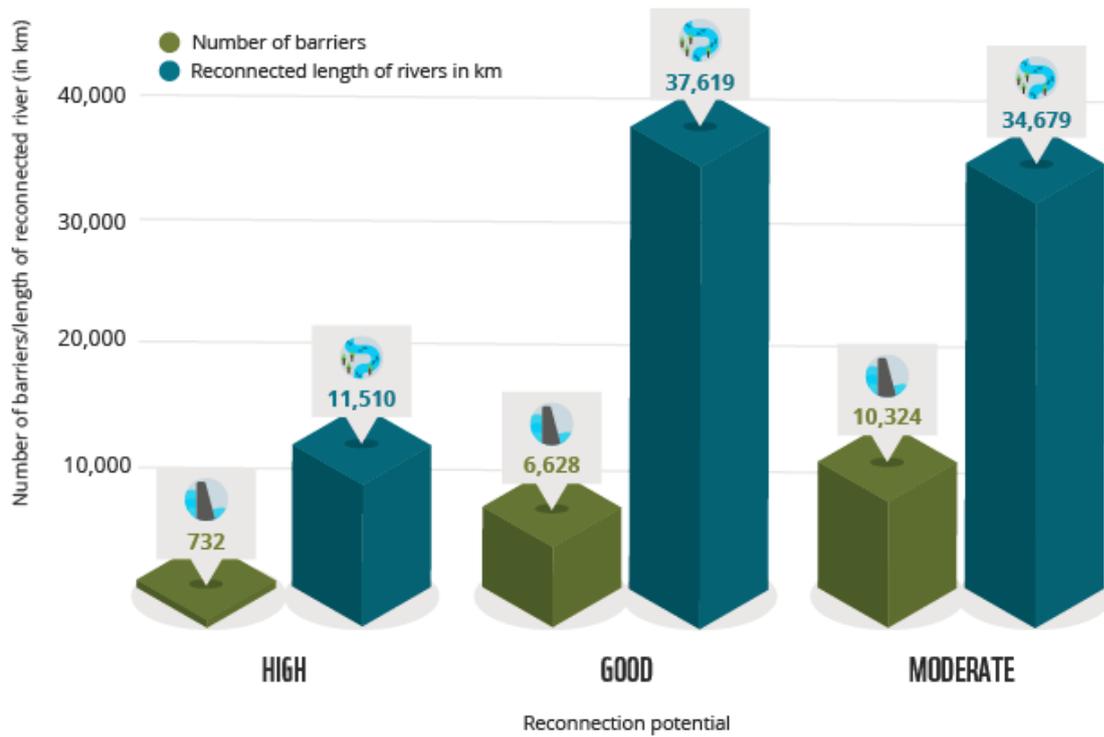


Figure 1 : Distribution of barriers with removal potential in the EU27. Source: The potential of barrier removal to reconnect Europe's rivers, WWF, April 2021.

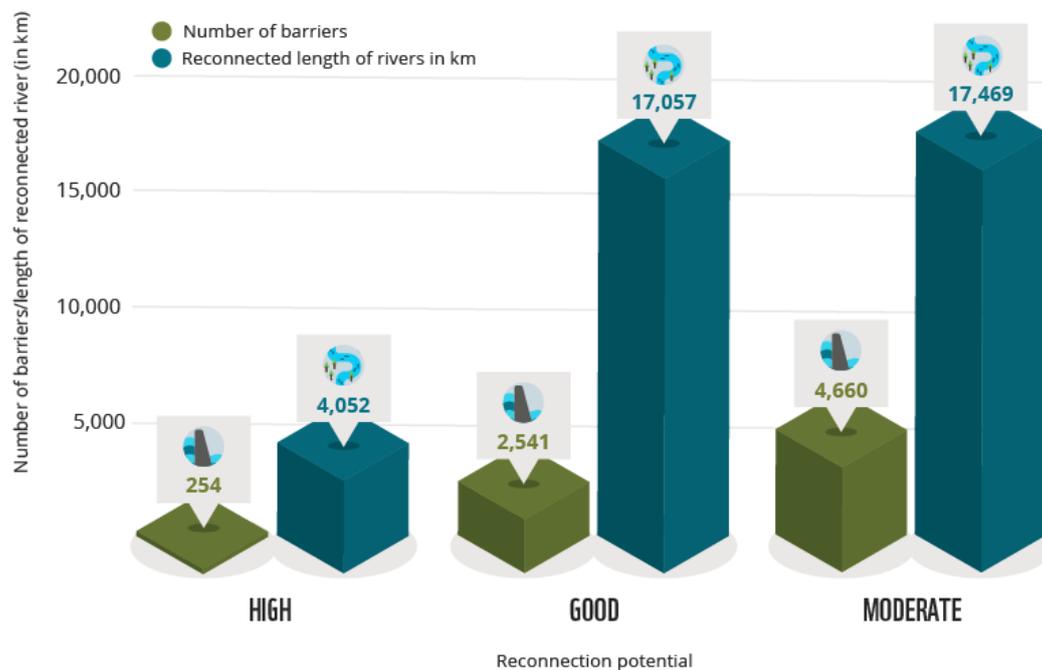


Figure 2 : Distribution of barriers with removal potential in Central Western Europe. Source: The potential of barrier removal to reconnect Europe's rivers, WWF, April 2021.

Andreas Baumüller, Head of Natural Resources, WWF European Policy Office said:

“We only studied 3% of the estimated 1 million barriers in Europe. And this sample alone represents a reconnection potential for the EU27’s rivers of nearly 50K kilometers! This is double the current target of 25K km set by the European Commission in the 2030 Biodiversity Strategy.

This analysis makes clear that the European Commission in its Restoration Law should aim much higher than its current target, to maximize restoration potential for freshwater ecosystems.”

The European Commission will release its proposal for legally binding EU nature restoration targets by the end of 2021. The target on free-flowing river restoration through barrier removal is crucially needed to halt the decline in freshwater biodiversity and complement the requirements set by the Water Framework Directive.

*“The removal of obstacles from rivers is a key tool to recover the functionality of rivers”, said **Eva Hernández, WWF’s Living European Rivers Initiative Lead**, and adds “If we want to reach the Green Deal objectives, if we want a resilient landscape that allows nature and people to adapt to climate change, we need to look at our rivers and start freeing them from all the obstacles that have piled in them over the last century”.*

Further information

- [1] [European Environmental Agency, briefing Tracking barriers and their impacts on European river ecosystems, February 2021](#). Out of 34 % of surface water bodies where hydromorphological pressures are a significant pressure, 20% failed to reach good ecological status because of the presence of barriers.
- [2] <https://www.wwf.eu/?uNewsID=364693>
- [3] [More than one million barriers fragment Europe’s rivers](#), Nature, 436–441(2020)
- [4] [Finnish Nature Panel report](#), page 3, (in Finnish)
- [5] [Bending the Curve of Global Freshwater Biodiversity Loss: An Emergency Recovery Plan](#), Bioscience, 2020

Other media resources

- WWF Living European Rivers facts and general information on [RiversUnlocked.com](#)
- European Rivers Network’s website : <https://www.ern.org/>

Contacts

- Roberto Epple – President of European Rivers Network – roberto.epple@ern.org +336 08 62 12 67
- Emma Liberati – Project officer of European Rivers Network – emma.liberati@rivernet.org
- Eva Hernández – WWF Living European Rivers Lead – ehernandez@wwf.es +34 690 762 3