

UNESCO

Model regions
for sustainable
development

Biosphere Reserves in Germany



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German Commission
for UNESCO

UNESCO Biosphere Reserves in Germany

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World Network of UNESCO Biosphere Reserves

The UNESCO program 'Man and the Biosphere' was launched in 1971 with the objective of developing innovative approaches to sustainable human-environment relations. UNESCO biosphere reserves, as model regions for sustainable development, are committed to this very purpose worldwide. Their aim is to combine ecological, economic, social and cultural dimensions and to develop and implement sustainable ways of using natural resources. The involvement of the local population is central to reach this goal.

UNESCO biosphere reserves ensure a balanced relationship between human uses of resources and natural cycles and, thus, also contribute to regional value creation. More than 740 UNESCO biosphere reserves in over 130 countries are part of the constantly growing global network.



Model regions for sustainable development

UNESCO Biosphere Reserves in Germany

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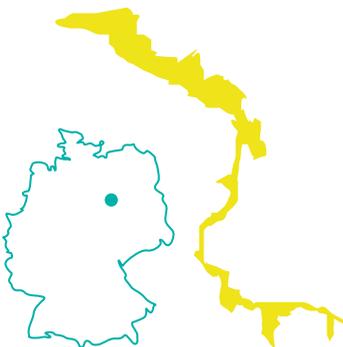
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UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Elbe River Landscape

World culture on wild shores



© Hilgers



States
Schleswig-Holstein,
Mecklenburg-Western
Pomerania, Lower
Saxony, Brandenburg
and Saxony-Anhalt

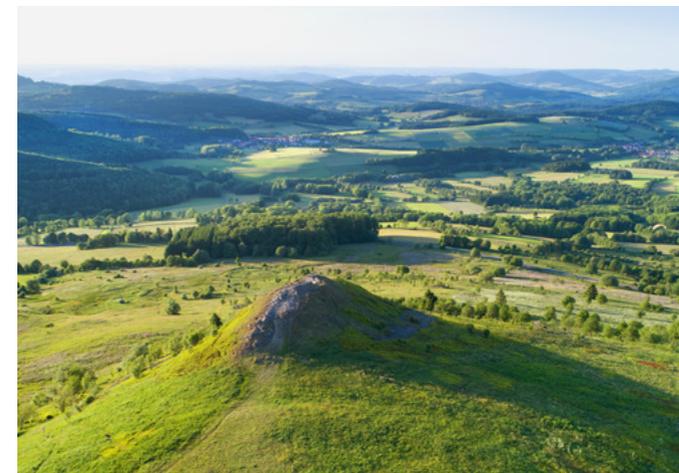
Size
2.822,5 km²

Website
www.flusslandschaft-elbe.de

Recognized in part as a biosphere reserve by UNESCO in 1979, it was extended in 1997 to become the Elbe River Landscape Biosphere Reserve. Today, at approximately 282,250 ha, it is the largest inland, transnational biosphere reserve in Germany. It is one of the last near-natural river landscapes in Central Europe. More than three-quarters of Germany's floodplain forest are in the Biosphere Reserve. This diverse landscape is home to numerous plant and animal species. A special characteristic of this region is the Elbe beaver, the largest rodent in Europe, which was on the verge of extinction. The Garden Kingdom of Dessau-Wörlitz was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2000 and has been under UNESCO protection since 1988 as the Dessau-Wörlitz Cultural Landscape in the Middle Elbe Biosphere Reserve.

To give children an insight into the special features of the Biosphere Reserve, and to inspire them about conservation and sustainable development, there is the Junior Ranger programme. Under the guidance of rangers, they become scientists and can thus contribute to the preservation of the valuable floodplain landscape.

UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Rhön Land of open spaces



© Arnulf Müller



States
Bavaria, Hesse,
Thuringia

Size
2.433,2 km²
(core area: 78,7 km²,
buffer zone: 526,6 km²)

Website
www.biosphaerenreservat-rhoen.de

Rhön UNESCO Biosphere Reserve – in the tri-border area of Bavaria, Hesse, and Thuringia – is characterised by rough hilltops and imposing forests, as well as picturesque valleys, forest-free highlands, and large areas of colourfully flowering mountain meadows. All of these habitats are arranged in a mosaic, which allows for an enormous variety of species. Rare bird species such as the black stork, red kite, and black grouse are at home in the Rhön – and, of course, the Rhön sheep, which is not only the mascot of the region, but above all an indispensable keeper of the landscape.

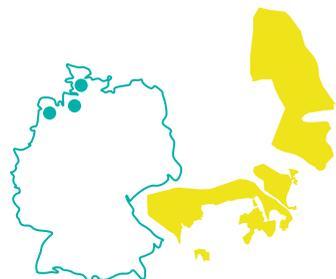
However, the Rhön is not only impressive in daylight, but also by night. Thanks to sparsely populated protected areas and targeted actions against light pollution, there are preserved natural night landscapes where a starry sky can be experienced. The Biosphere Reserve is recognized as an international Dark Sky Reserve. Another highlight of the Biosphere Reserve is the Rhön Umbrella Brand: as the first partner initiative in Germany, it has been supporting committed Rhön businesses in the marketing of sustainably manufactured and high-quality products for decades, thereby strengthening regional value creation.

UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Wadden Sea

Seabed meets horizon



© Norbert Hecker/NLPV



States

Hamburg, Lower Saxony, Schleswig-Holstein

Size

117 km², 4.171,31 km², 4,449 km²

Websites

www.nationalpark-wattenmeer.de/schuetzen/biosphaerenreservat

The Wadden Sea is a young, dynamic, natural and cultural landscape shaped by high and flats. Islands, salt marshes, dunes, and beaches meet lighthouses, harbours, mills, and other impressive examples of building culture in the marshland and on the sandy, slightly higher areas, called the Geest. The animals and plants of the Wadden Sea have adapted perfectly to their environment and the constant change of water levels caused by the tides. The people who live and farm here are also aware of the special features and the challenges of living in harmony with their environment.

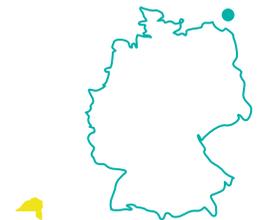
There are three Wadden Sea Biosphere Reserves – in Lower Saxony, Hamburg, and Schleswig-Holstein. They are model regions whose special focus is on sustainable management in a unique habitat. This includes sustainable agriculture and sustainable tourism as well as measures for climate protection, energy efficiency, education, and culture.

UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Southeast Rügen

Culture, landscape, sea, and more



© Timm Allrich



State

Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania

Size

228 km²
(core area: 7,13 km²,
buffer zone: 34,73 km²)

Website

www.biosphaerenreservat-suedostruegen.de

Southeast Rügen Biosphere Reserve was established in 1990, and in 1991 it was recognized by UNESCO and thus incorporated into the worldwide network of the MAB programme. Land and sea are closely connected. Over the centuries, the people living here have shaped a cultural landscape of classic avenues and flowering meadows alongside the sandy beaches and rugged cliffs.

Evidence of human activity ranges from Neolithic megalith tombs to Bronze Age burial mounds, medieval churches, spa architecture of the 19th century up to the modern day. The Bodden waters of Southeast Rügen are ideal breeding and resting grounds for waterfowl. With projects such as the restoration of Göhren peat bog, the Biosphere Reserve promotes intact habitats and, at the same time, responds to the challenges of climate change.

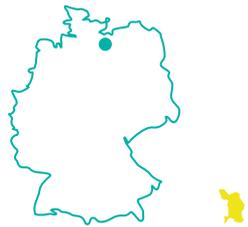
UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Schaalsee **Resting place** for migratory birds



© Felix Gaensicke

Wetlands and lakes, fields, pastures and wet meadows, natural beech forests – with Lake Schaalsee in the middle. The 24 km² lake is at the heart of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and gives it its name. The inner German border once ran through Schaalsee.

Since then the Biosphere Reserve has developed from a tourist no-man's-land to a popular local recreation area. The species richness of the landscape and the variety in the mosaic of small and large habitats make the area between the cities of Hamburg, Lübeck, and Schwerin so special. In conservation projects, special emphasis is placed on the restoration of wetlands and waters. This helps groundwater and soil protection, as well as improving the living conditions for many plant and animal species.



State
Mecklenburg-Western
Pomerania

Size
310 km²
(core area: 17,5 km²,
buffer zone: 92,6 km²)

Website
www.schaalsee.de

UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Drömling **Land of thousand ditches**

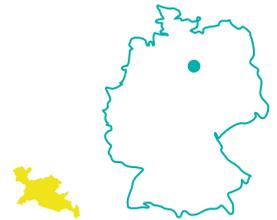


© Biosphärenreservatsverwaltung Drömling

The Drömling is a historically evolved cultural landscape with a fenland character on the border between the federal states of Lower Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt in northern Germany.

The biosphere reserve is a fenland-rich and grassland-dominated lowland area of international importance in terms of nature conservation and an example of a culturally and historically unique land use system along Europe's largest biotope network system, the European Green Belt.

Hydraulic engineering, cultural and settlement technology have created significant witnesses of cultural history in the Drömling. This open cultural landscape dominated by grassland reflects more than 200 years of history of reclamation of a formerly impenetrable "marshland" into a cultural landscape emphasizing groundwater. Of particular importance for the preservation of the Drömling cultural landscape is the long-term establishment of uses that are compatible with the protection goals and at the same time economically viable, which are continued in dialogue with the farmers.



States
Saxony-Anhalt and
Lower Saxony

Size
452,2 km²
(core area: 16,5 km²,
buffer zone: 141,4 km²)

Website
www.biosphaerenreservat-droemling.de

UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Schorfheide-Chorin

Created by glaciers, shaped by humans



© Fred Pechardscheck, 2020



State
Brandenburg

Size
1.292 km²
(core area: 36 km²,
buffer zone: 241 km²)

Website
www.schorfheide-chorin-biosphaerenreservat.de

Founded in 1990, the UNESCO biosphere reserve Schorfheide-Chorin is, with an area of 129,161 ha, one of the largest protected areas in Germany. For more than 30 years, the main objectives have been to preserve the landscape with its natural and cultural treasures and, at the same time, to improve and promote sustainable forms of use such as nature-friendly tourism and organic farming. Therefore, Schorfheide-Chorin Biosphere Reserve is the largest organic farming region in Germany today.

Beech forests traversed by small lakes and peatlands, extensive lakes, and a hilly cultural landscape with numerous small bodies of water characterize the Biosphere Reserve. Its diverse landscape was created during the last ice age. Since 2011, the Grumsin beech forest has been part of the UNESCO World Heritage site “Ancient beech forests and primeval beech forests of the Carpathians and other regions of Europe”.

UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Spreewald

Where forests are reflected in water



© Susann Troppa

The 47,500 ha Spreewald Biosphere Reserve extends about 100 km southeast of Berlin. The special attraction of Spree Forest lies in its park-like landscape, criss-crossed by numerous rivers. This unique cultural landscape provides a habitat for approximately 5,000 animal and plant species. The otter still has a stable population here, the beaver has found a home again after 150 years, and the kingfisher occurs regularly on renovated rivers.

At the same time, approximately three million people visit the Spree Forest every year. Specific guidance methods – from traditional signposts to modern apps – ensure coexistence in the Biosphere Reserve. More than two-thirds of the agricultural land in the Biosphere Reserve is farmed organically and many Spree Forest products come under the umbrella brand Spree Forest trade.



State
Brandenburg

Size
475 km²
(core area: 14 km²,
buffer zone: 89 km²)

Website
www.spreewald-biosphaerenreservat.de

UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Oberlausitzer Heide- und Teichlandschaft

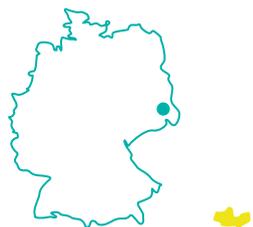
Land of a thousand lakes



©Steffen Krausche

In a mosaic of dunes, forests, wet meadows and fields, floodplains and heathlands cultivated by man for almost a thousand years, there are hundreds of ponds which are mainly for carp breeding. The small-scale mixture of diverse habitats is home to rare species such as fire-bellied toad, otters, and bog violet.

The heathland and pond landscape is also the traditional home of the Sorbs, who as a minority language and culture enrich beyond the borders of Lusatia. Projects for sustainable management such as “Upper Lusatian Organic Carp”, “Preservation and use of ancient grains”, and the establishment of flower pastures provide incentives for a promising livelihood for people in the biosphere reserve region. They simultaneously protect and develop habitats of many protected species.



State
Saxony

Size
301 km²
(core area: 11 km²,
buffer zone: 120 km²)

Website
www.biosphaerenreservat-oberlausitz.de

UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Thuringian Forest

In the heart of Thuringia



©Christopher Schmid

The UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Thuringian Forest was recognized for the first time in 1979, at that time under the name Vessertal, as one of the first two biosphere reserves in Germany.

Extended several times, it includes a characteristic section of the Thuringian Forest and is home to over 1,900 plant and over 2,500 animal species. The highest peaks in Thuringia, flowering mountain meadows, extensive mixed forests, clear mountain streams, and mysterious bogs characterize the 337 km² natural and cultural region between Suhl, Oberhof, Ilmenau, Masserberg, and Schleusingen. Around 100,000 people live and work in the cities and communities of the biospherereserve region. For more than 40 years, the model region has stood for sustainable development and forward-looking projects for and with the region.



State
Thuringia

Size
about 337 km²
(core area: 10,4 km²,
buffer zone: 79,3 km²)

Website
www.biosphaerenreservat-thueringerwald.de

UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Palatinate Forest-Northern Vosges Transboundary nature conservation



©Yvon Meyer



States
Rhineland-
Palatinate (Germany),
Départements Bas Rhin
and Moselle (France)

Size
3.061,6 km²
(core area: 96,5 km²,
buffer zone: 1.121,2 km²),
German Part:
1.785 km²

Website
■ www.pfaelzerwald.de
■ www.parc-vosges-nord.fr

The transboundary Palatinate Forest-Northern Vosges Biosphere Reserve stretches over the southern part of Rhineland Palatinate into the Northern Vosges of France. Together, these two biosphere reserves encompass the largest contiguous forested area in Western Europe. For the most part, this red sandstone mountain range is covered by forest. Above all, Scots pine grows from the sandy earth, as well as shrubs and herbaceous plants such as bilberry and heather.

The varied cultural landscape, with its open and forested areas, provides many plant and animal species with a habitat; among these species are peregrine falcons and lynx. Many projects are carried out in the Biosphere Reserve, such as those promoting grazing and the maintenance of open areas with sheeps, goats or old domestic animal breeds such as the Glan cattle, with the overall goal of preserving the natural heritage of this unique area. Important French-German projects include the promotion of transboundary biotope networks, the protection of specific animal species, and the encouragement of biodiversity in gardens. This cooperation is also tangible in the biosphere's French-German farmers' markets that are held in the region.

UNESCO Biosphere Reserves in Germany

Model regions for sustainable development

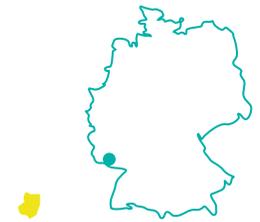
UNESCO-Biosphere Reserve Bliesgau Orchid country and savoir-vivre



© Saarpfalz-Touristik, Eike Dubois

Man and nature in harmony – this is impressively demonstrated by the Bliesgau Biosphere Reserve. It is located in the southeast of Saarland, directly on the border with France and Rhineland-Palatinate. A mosaic of extensive orchards and species-rich orchid meadows, valuable beech forests, as well as the impressive floodplain landscape of the Blies, characterizes the gently rolling landscape.

The diversity of habitats allows for a high species richness. For example, about half of all German orchid species can be found in Bliesgau. The Biosphere Reserve aims to preserve this unique landscape and its biodiversity not only through protective measures, but also through regionally adapted management and the production of regional products. Climate protection has also become a central issue. The most important supporters of the Biosphere Reserve are its committed local stakeholders, who lend a hand when it comes to the future of their own homeland and the world!



State
Saarland

Size
361,5 km²
(core area: 12 km²,
buffer zone: 72,4 km²)

Website
■ www.biosphaere-bliesgau.eu

UNESCO-Biosphere Reserve Swabian Alb

Regional delicacies



©Reiner Enkelmann

Flowering orchards of sheep-grazed juniper scrub and lush beech forests dominate the Swabian Alb and its foothills. The cultural landscape between Stuttgart and Ulm, in the heart of Baden-Württemberg, was designated as the Swabian Alb Biosphere Area in 2008 in accordance with state law and as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 2009.

The diverse landscape not only provides valuable habitat for plant and animal wildlife, it also supplies us with food and creates marketing opportunities for regional producers. The regional brand “ALBGEMACHT” was specifically developed to promote the biodiversity on farmland, meadows, orchards, and vineyards. The various products available meet ambitious criteria that go beyond the regional origin. Thus, “ALBGEMACHT” contributes to more regional value chains, benefitting both people and nature.



State
Baden-Württemberg

Size
850 km²
(core area: 26,4 km²,
buffer zone: 354 km²)

Website
www.biosphaerengebiet-alb.de

UNESCO-Biosphere Reserve Berchtesgadener Land

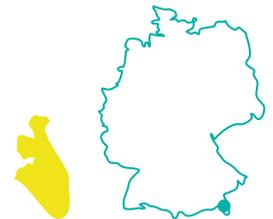
Wild mountains, gentle valleys



© Florian Mädler

Berchtesgadener Land is the only alpine biosphere reserve in Germany. It stretches from the gentle foothills of the Alps, across meadows and pastures of mountain farming, up to the rugged peaks of the Berchtesgaden Alps.

Edelweiss, golden eagle, curlew, and otter are examples of very high biological diversity. The region is known for its fascinating landscape, its famous sights and excursion destinations, the traditional ways of doing business, and its lively traditions. But it is also a dynamic business location. The biosphere region Berchtesgadener Land wants to permanently maintain the high quality of life and stay for people and nature.



State
Bavaria

Size
840 km²
(core area: 156,1 km²,
buffer zone: 78,3 km²)

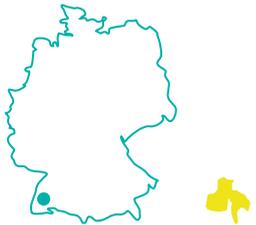
Website
www.brbgl.de

UNESCO-Biosphere Reserve Black Forest Woodlands rich in pasture



© Clemens Emmler

No other upland area in Germany has such big differences in heights in such a small area. Mountainous mixed forest of many different species intermingles with lush mountain pastures and extraordinary views as far as the Alps, the Vosges, and the Upper Rhine Valley – this all adds to the Southern Black Forest’s unrivalled uniqueness. Traditional craftsmanship, innovative medium-sized businesses, the Alemannic Dialect and culture shape the diversity of this region. The region, designated as a biosphere area under state law, received its UNESCO recognition in 2017.



State
Baden-Württemberg

Size
630 km²
(core area: 21 km²,
buffer zone: 185,23 km²)

Website
www.biosphaeren-
gebiet-schwarzwald.de

An outstanding feature here is the “Common Land” on higher grounds, traditionally used for grazing. You may spot a capercaillie cock, chamois, boreal or pygmy owl, or even more secluded animals such as the three-toed woodpecker. Almost everywhere you can find traces of the last Ice Age, such as glacial rock heaps, moraines, and wetlands, as well as the globally unique feature of “Gletscherkessel Präg” where six glaciers melted together. Glacial or Alpine plants such as the rare golden cinquefoil have endured at higher elevations.

The German Commission for UNESCO

... advises

the federal and state governments and contributes to the implementation of UNESCO values and goals in concrete political guidelines for action. This involves topics such as high-quality and equitable education, cultural diversity and participation or questions of open science. Support comes from voluntary bodies and professional networks.

... connects

the members of the “UNESCO family” in Germany: 52 World Heritage sites, around 300 project schools, 17 biosphere reserves, eight geoparks, 16 university chairs, 28 entries in the Memory of the World register, six Creative Cities and three Learning Cities are among them as well as the sponsoring groups of the Intangible Cultural Heritage or the many initiatives that make education for sustainable development possible. At the same time, the Commission is involved in the global cooperation of the National Commissions and promotes cosmopolitanism among young people through the kulturweit volunteer service.

... communicates

the diversity of UNESCO topics and activities in Germany to an expert audience and the general public alike. To this end, it offers events, workshops, publications and diverse online communication and takes a stand in social debates.

Imprint

Editor

German Commission for UNESCO
Martin-Luther-Allee 42
53175 Bonn

Contact

E eng@unesco.de
T +49 228 60 497-148
www.unesco.de

Editorial team

Florian Kübler
Dr. Stephan M. Heidenreich
Dr. Marlen Meißner (responsible)

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Stream and boat in the Spreewald
© Tourismusverband Spreewald

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