



Regional Action plan for Oder Delta, Europaregion Pomerania

January 2022 – Version 3

EUROREGION
POMERANIA



POLSKA
DEUTSCHLAND



Deutsche Umwelthilfe

Part I – General information

Project: Wildlife Economy
Partner organisation: Municipal Community Europaregion Pomerania reg. Ass
Other partner organisations involved (if relevant): Deutsche Umwelthilfe (Environmental Action Germany)
Country: Germany
NUTS2 region: DE80N Vorpommern-Greifswald
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Part II – Policy context

The Action Plan aims to impact:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Investment for Growth and Jobs programme
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	European Territorial Cooperation programme
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other regional development policy instrument
Name of the policy instrument addressed:	"Development and Action Concept of the Euroregion Pomerania (EHK) 2021-2027" and consequently "Interreg VI A Mecklenburg-Vorpommern/Brandenburg/Poland 2021 - 2027"	

Part III – Details of the actions envisaged

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Introduction

The actions presented in this Regional Action Plan team up to pave the way to position the Oder Delta region as one of the top 10 wildlife observation destinations in Europe, and thus to find strategies and solutions to generate income that flows back to the benefit of wildlife and nature conservation.

The Regional Action Plan is based on the lessons learned throughout the Wildlife Economy project, the exchanges and discussions with the partners and experiences from the practical examples during the partner meeting in Alava in November 2019, and the study visit to the Danube Delta in October 2021.

The actions presented will be carried out in the area of the **Oder Delta** along the border of Poland and Germany, a diverse landscape rich of nearly pristine terrestrial, semiterrestrial, limnic and marine ecosystems. More than 80% of the total area covering 450,000ha are part of the European Natura2000 network.

Aside from the inshore waters of the Szczecin Lagoon (70,000ha), a great variety of nearly pristine areas, notably in the Peene Valley (around 6,000ha) and the northern and eastern Ueckermünde Heath with its Polish component of Puszcza Wkrzanska (10,000ha), as well as large areas of unused land on the Polish side of the Oder river and to the east of the lagoon offer wide opportunities to foster nature tourism in the region, thus strengthening local tourism enterprises in the hinterland. This would enable to counterbalance the very strong developed beach tourism along the Baltic coast, and to prolong the beach tourism season in the autumn, winter and spring through wildlife observation activities (e.g. crane observations in the autumn).

DUH together with other regional stakeholder organisations from both Germany and Poland, started an initiative in 2012 to declare the Oder Delta as one of the ten European rewilding areas, coordinated by Rewilding Europe, a non-profit organisation based in The Netherlands. Rewilding Europe aims to give more space for wild nature, wildlife and natural processes, but also to link this with economic benefit for the local population so that people can make a living within and from the rewilded landscapes.

Since then, a cooperation of nature conservation and tourism organisations in Poland and Germany have successfully initiated a range of nationally and internationally funded projects, which in 2019 led to the creation of the independent Rewilding Oder Delta association (ROD).

Nature tourism in the Oder Delta

The Oder Delta provides a unique mosaic of forest, river, wetland and coastal landscapes home to a wide variety of animals and plants now rare in Central Europe. The area is home for the so-called "Big Seven"; seven species all of whom returned to the region naturally. The Big Seven comprise the Baltic sturgeon (*Acipenser oxyrinchus*), European beaver (*Castor fiber*), elk (*Alces alces*), grey seal (*Halichoerus grypus*), white-tailed eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*), European bison (*Bison bonasus*) and wolf (*Canis lupus*). All of them find ideal habitat conditions in the Oder Delta and serve as main attractors for visitors.

The area is easily accessible by different public and private transport means not only from the closest main big cities Berlin and Szczecin, but also from abroad and offers a good touristic infrastructure with many bike, hike and water trails. Overnight and gastronomic facilities in different comfort and price categories do already exist.

These different facilities however should still be improved and better connected, also in a transnational vision to further develop a high-standard and diverse sustainable nature tourism offer to national and international guests.

Even though the region has a lot to offer for nature and wildlife observation tourism, it is still dominated by the classical coastal mass tourism, namely on the island of Usedom with about 6 million overnight stays per year. It is widely acknowledged that tourism plays a crucial role for the regional economy with significant potential to generate growth and employment, offering job opportunities also for young people¹ that tend to leave the region. Especially in covid times, the touristic demand in the region was even higher with long distance destinations not accessible.

Tourism depends on a healthy environment and the sustainable use of natural capital and there needs to be a balance between regional tourism development and the protection of its environment. The dense network of Natura2000 sites in the Oder Delta region not only protects the vulnerable natural habitats, but can provide recreational opportunities and contribute to sustainable growth and employment. Sustainable tourism promotes developing smaller-scale, alternative tourism products that are intended to be less damaging to the environment and society.²

¹ [EU agenda for a sustainable and competitive European tourism \(2007\) EUR-Lex - 52007DC0621](#)

² Bramwell, Bill. (2004). Coastal mass tourism: Diversification and sustainable development in Southern Europe.

Vision for a Nature Based Economy

ROD has stipulated a vision for a future nature-based economy: *“As a result of rewilding, a new economy has emerged based on wildlife watching tourism and the production of traditional products such as cheese, honey and herbs that are now produced in a landscape of wilder nature. The Oder Delta is one of the best places in Europe for observing wetland birds and wildlife watching as well as recreational fishing. Fisheries in the lagoon are far better managed with rapidly recovering fish-stocks promoting higher incomes and more sustainable harvests. These economic activities have spread into the wider economy with new enterprises based on the region’s increasing cultural iconicity such as art, food or simply as a wonderfully attractive place to live for the new generation of internet-based workers.”*

Wildlife Economy

The participation in the Wildlife Economy (WLE) project made possible a comparison, exchange and joint learning with other European regions which believe that natural resources and ecosystem services are an economic asset. PP6 Deutsche Umwelthilfe initiates innovative ways to finance nature conservation through the ecosystem service approach. Within the Oder Delta region and together with ROD and a network of 30 regional tourism and nature conservation actors, the region has become a pilot area to show that sustainable regional development and nature conservation can go hand in hand.

Connection with policy instrument

All in the following proposed actions are in line with the recommendations of the “Development and Action Concept of the Euroregion Pomerania (EHK) 2021-2027”. After a SWOT analysis of the five thematic fields “location and space”, “traffic and mobility”, “citizens and society”, “economy and labor market”, “science and research” and “nature and environment” in 2019 and a subsequent long and intensive consultation process in 2020 (where the WLE-Project was involved), a series of development priorities was defined and combined into an “Euroregional strategy 2030”.

The key statements relevant for improving the WLE-approach in the region are:

- 5.2 *strengthen an innovative, green economic growth*, and
- 5.4 *joint conservation of the natural foundations of life*.

The following selection of associated recommendations are seen necessary by a wide range of stakeholders within the Euroregion Pomerania (which encompasses the entire Oder-Delta):

- merge cross-border tourist infrastructure (cycle paths, theme routes, exhibitions...) → reference to Action 1a -1c
- coordinated management of protected areas → reference to Action 1b
- improve, extend and implement activities for a sustainable, nature-friendly economic use of the natural wealth also cross-border and by participatory processes → reference to Action 1b and 2
- network of sustainable development initiatives → reference to Action 2

Influencing the EHK was the best possibility to influence also the “Interreg VI A 2021 - 2027” program since the design of the Interreg program and later on the provision and allocation of financial resources (total budget more than 155 Mio €) will be based on the EHK recommendations.

The public consultation phase of the draft Interreg program is currently ongoing (until 06/12/2021), but it can already be noticed that the thematic content of the WLE-approach is included, even if not by the name “Wildlife Economy” itself.

Two program-priorities are important in this context:

1. Priority 2: „Coping the consequences of the climate change and preserving nature“
2. Priority 3 „Enabling a better cross-border participation through language, culture and tourism“
3. Priority 4 “Strengthen trust to shape collaboratively cross-border development“

Specific goals and eligible measures types were assigned to these priorities, e.g.

- development of solutions for the preservation and development of biological diversity,
- projects to increase awareness of sustainable development and the value of biodiversity,
- development of cross-border cultural and sustainable tourism offers and products,
- investments into cross-border links of tourist route infrastructures,
- improving institutional capacity, in particular of the authorities responsible for the management of a given area, as well as of stakeholders,
- development of joint strategies and analyses for cross-border development.

These proposed measures types are almost identical to the EHK recommendations, thus the implementation chances of future actions can be assessed as realistic.

For formal reasons, however, it will probably not be possible to apply for Interreg VI A projects before August 2022 (Fig. 1)

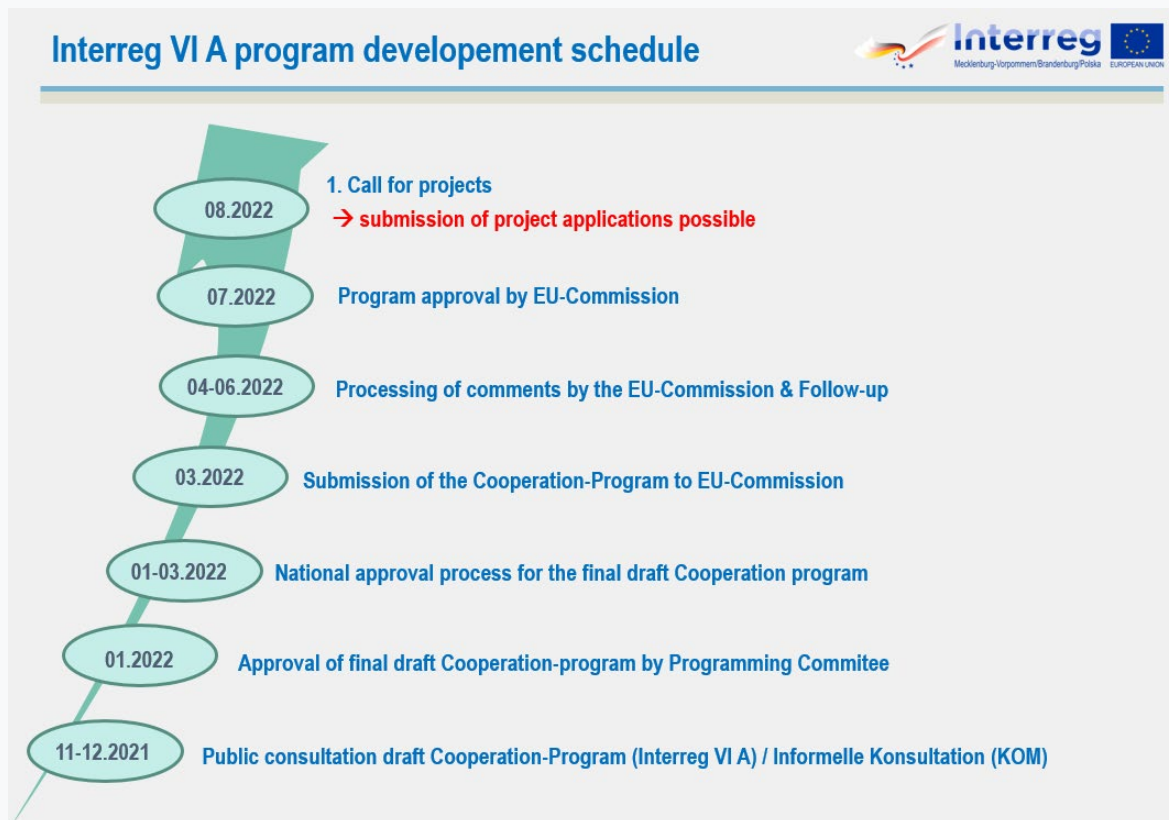


Fig. 1 Interreg Mecklenburg - Vorpommern / Brandenburg / Polen VI A program development schedule – 1. Call for projects foreseen for August 2022

The Regional Action Plan develops actions towards a strategy for the development of a wildlife tourism in the Oder Delta region. These actions will improve the **nature-based and wildlife watching infrastructure** in the area (**bike paths** and **wildlife observation hides**) and the development of a **Landscape Business Plan**, a strategic document which analyses the economic context of an area and explores the existing and new opportunities for the development of sustainable businesses and a nature-based economy.

Together with local stakeholders, we will develop wildlife watching tourism as key driver for economic development in this rural area through the 2 main following actions:

1. Action 1 - Place Oder Delta as key European wildlife observation destination
2. Action 2 - Develop a landscape business plan

ACTION 1 – Place Oder Delta as key European wildlife observation destination

The action is aimed at influencing the policy instrument through Type 1: implementation of new project(s)

1. Background

As already highlighted in the introduction, the Oder Delta region has in a number of ways the potential to become and be marketed as one of the TOP 10 wildlife observation destinations in Europe.

Visitor management and regulation of visitor numbers are key in order not to harm the natural landscapes and wildlife that are at the base for nature tourism. Effective visitor management requires an integrated approach, including a range of stakeholders, monitoring and other measures. Some measures like e.g. visitor centers, hike trails, observation towers are already taken in the Oder Delta. Building on past and on-going efforts, we also aim to improve the system of nature guides on the German and Polish side of the Oder Delta.

Visitor guidance through well-trained nature guides therefore is key to assure a positive nature experience and avoid possible negative disturbances.

Three groups take advantage from guided nature and wildlife observations:

1. **Nature Guides** can expand and consolidate their activity and (which is often not yet the case) make their livelihood out of it. A hitherto relatively underestimated economic sector in the region can be significantly expanded. Nature Guides contribute to a sustainable use of the natural area by respecting the current situation (breeding season, rearing of young animals...) through their route planning, group size, choice of means of transport, etc. - also with the aim of securing their own livelihoods in the long term.
2. **Tourists** interested in wildlife and nature observation can experience nature on a higher level than exploring "on your own". Guides trained in nature conservation and pedagogy are able to convey more about a region, landscape and its flora and fauna than mere animal observations or knowledge from book guides or digital information systems. In addition, the participants in the guided group possibly interact amongst themselves, share experiences and thus may also add to a positive up-scaling of recommendations and even develop actions for a sustainable behavior and also give feed-back to the guide on how to improve the tours.
3. The landscape with the animal and plant species living in it - "**wildlife**". In Natura 2000 and other protected areas, visitor management strategies attempt to protect sensitive areas and to reduce the overall impact of nature and recreation seekers.

In order to improve and expand the opportunities offered by "Nature Guides" in the region, we propose the following measures/actions:

1. setting up a professional wildlife monitoring and observation basis with so-called "**hides**" on selected, particularly suitable areas within the framework of a cross-border project including a monitoring program for economic and nature conservation outputs.

Hides offer an opportunity to observe wildlife without disturbing it not only for visiting photographers, but also for visitors and residents of the region. Getting to know and appreciate wildlife is an asset for a better acceptance of nature-related topics, and can create a basis for nature-based small entrepreneurs like nature guides, adding these hides as stop-overs in their guided tours.

2. linking and selective improvement of the cross-border infrastructure for sustainable tourism to optimize the accessibility and experienceability of the natural area, using the example of a **cycle path section** near the German-Polish border.

Wildlife Economy input and learnings

A first draft for construction of three mobile **wildlife observation hides** and draft propositions as to where to locate and manage them within the Oder Delta region has been developed together with specialists from PP Rewilding Europe over the past two years, following their manual “Wildlife Watching Hides – a practical Guide”. It was drawn in collaboration with the experience that exists within the Rewilding Europe network.

Further key lessons learnt were made during the WLE study visit in October 2021 to the Danube Delta, together with specialists from PP Rewilding Europe Janine Caalders and Joao Salgueiro and German and Polish stakeholders. We visited the Ultima Frontiera reserve near Periprava in the Danube Delta, which has similar characteristics than the Oder Delta region. We achieved main insights in building and managing experience from Mr Max Biasioli, Managing Director and Founder of SKUA Nature Group. As one outcome of this study visit we aim to create a concept for building and managing wildlife watching hides in the Oder Delta region. First discussions with the Polish stakeholder OTOP (bird association and owner of nature area in the Oder Delta) showed that the construction of a bird-watching hide on the peninsular of Karsibor, south of Świnoujście, is feasible and welcomed by the landowner.

The outcome was then presented to and discussed with all WLE project partners during the partner meeting in Wolgast, Germany on 30 September 2021.

Regarding the meaning of well constructed cycle paths in the Oder Delta we got valuable information from the managing directors of the nature parks “Am Stettiner” Haff”, Jochen Elberskirch (2021-07-15) and Insel Usedom”, Ulf Wigger (2021-08-19) in bilateral stakeholder meetings as well as from our WLE-partner RKLM (Regional Landscape Kempen en Maasland (NL, BL)) at the online partner meeting on 2020-06-09:

- From May to October more than 6 million tourists visit the Island of Usedom and the Oder-Delta region and spend nearly 100€ per day each. Cycle- and other nature-tourists make up an ever increasing proportion of them and ensure a significant extension of the season. An improvement in the conditions for these tourists generates high additional income.
- The effects of improving cycle paths and promoting cycle tourism on the income of a region and its impact on biodiversity were very well investigated by the research project of RKLM / University Antwerp. With a mix of different monitoring tools the effects and impacts could be “translated” into the “language of policy makers”: money. The results were impressive. With an average spending of about 28€ per day and cyclist (without overnight stay), cycle tourism generates more than 57 million € per year. It is a very good example for the economic and ecologic benefits of the development of a nature based economy which can be adapted successful in similar regions.

2. Activities

Id	Description	Indicators to monitor (exact figures have yet to be determined)	
		Planned	Achieved
1a	Prepare a technical plan to build hides on Karsibor island (Poland) and a further area in Germany (prospectively Peenemünder Haken, Ueckermünder Heide or Anklamer Stadtbruch) to be submitted as new project in Interreg VI A	Number of visitors in comparison to situation before; overnight stays in the “hide”-areas	
1b	Check opportunity and prepare proposal for Interreg VI A financing for i) technical plan and ii) construction of hides	First draft proposal	
1c	Prepare to connect two existing cycle paths in Germany and Poland (“Oder-Neiße-Radweg” and “Stettiner Haff-Rundweg”) near the village of Rieth to make cycle tourism more attractive in the “Naturpark	Number of bike tourists using the path in comparison to situation before the construction (currently: estimates,	

	am Stettiner Haff" by driving forward the construction of a bike path section of nearly 500m	later: e.g. by Eco-Bike-Counts (see "costs")	
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3. Timeframe

Activity	Timing	Partners / stakeholders involved
1a	Start possible at any time; if co-financed by (e.g.) EU – not before 08/2022 (current funds have been exhausted); duration of concept phase: about 6 months, construction work: 3 months	Possible project-partners: OTOP Bird watching (Poland); Rewilding Oder-Delta, SKUA nature group, District of Vorpommern-Greifswald
1b	July – September 2022	Possible project-partners: OTOP Bird watching (Poland); Rewilding Oder-Delta, SKUA nature group, District of Vorpommern-Greifswald
1c	Starting not before 08/2022; duration of the construction work: about 3-4 weeks	Possible project-partners: District of Vorpommern-Greifswald, voidwodship Western Pomerania (Poland), Naturpark "Am Stettiner Haff" – monitoring of proper execution

ACTION 2 – Development of a landscape business plan (LBP)

The action is aimed at influencing the policy instrument through Type 1: implementation of new project(s)

The planned LBP will deliver a valuable document towards realizing Priority 2: „Coping the consequences of the climate change and preserving nature“ of the Interreg VI A Mecklenburg-Vorpommern/ Brandenburg/Poland 2021 – 2027 program, especially towards a greener and CO2 free regional economy. In consequence, the LBP will encourage the included sectors (tourism, forestry, agriculture, fishery, science) in the region to develop further interdisciplinary, transboundary (German-Polish) projects.

1. Background

We aim to raise and anchor local and regional knowledge and acceptance about **the value of natural landscapes, wildlife and ecosystem services** and **the opportunities they offer to strengthen local economies and enterprises in a sustainable way**.

We need to acknowledge more widely the importance and value of natural processes (e.g. the role of wetlands in climate adaptation, the positive effects of nature on recreation and leisure activities, ...) and ecosystem services (e.g. clean water, clean air,...) for our society and economy. By 'valuing' these processes and services, we want to turn the challenges facing our landscapes (population decrease, climate change, water management, increasing demand for recreational use, more sustainable agriculture, etc.) into opportunities.

The WLE project constitutes an opportunity to advance towards a landscape business plan for a pilot area within the Pomerania Euroregion, the Oder Delta region. A **Landscape Business Plan (LBP)** is a strategic document which analyses the economic context of an area and explores the existing and new opportunities for the development of sustainable businesses and a nature-based economy in an area. The LBP can be used to identify priority areas, sectors and businesses to develop or collaborate with, as well as identify market opportunities and define next steps for enterprise-focused actions in an area. The LBP underpins the **development of a nature-based economy**, where economic and conservation interests are aligned.

In the Oder Delta, first steps to merge entrepreneurs through a combined regional effort towards valuing natural landscapes and its services do exist, but we want to take this further ahead. Time has come to realise that a change in the economic approach is necessary, that things can be done differently and that we can change the usual paths. We want to showcase examples of existing enterprises in both Poland and Germany, that already value nature and show the potential the area offers for creating a network of sustainable businesses and services.

Nature-based enterprises generate direct or indirect finance, incentives or engagement for nature, and the comeback of wildlife. It is a viable business that operates in an environmentally and socially sustainable manner. The main goals of a LBP are to provide a strategic approach for the development of a nature-based economy in the Oder Delta which supports the natural landscape; and to illustrate that the approach of generating revenue in harmony with nature rather than exploiting it, is possible.

The activities that will lead to the new project of developing a LBP in 2022 are outlined in the table below and follow a multi-stakeholder approach with regional stakeholders and experts from i.e. the Rewilding Europe Enterprise Team and University Eberswalde, Dept. of Sustainable Tourism Management.

Lessons learnt from the project that provided relevant input for the development of a future Landscape Business Plan:

- During the partner meeting in June 2020 and an exchange on 3/9/2021 with Erwin Christis, PP Regionaal Landschap Kempen en Maasland, we discussed together with the project partners methods to **quantify visitor numbers and the generated income** (e.g. number of hikers and cyclists in the Border Park Kempen~Broek and the River Park Maasvallei and their estimated daily spendings), and how these findings are important when discussing with policy stakeholders. We were also introduced to **regional products** from the Regionaal Landschap Kempen en Maasland region and their **marketing**.
- We learnt from our excursion to the Alavan mountains about their pilot projects to **generate sustainable growth through the rehabilitation of the old Basque-Navarre Railway** and the development of **ecosystem activities related to former mines** as touristic attractions,
- We discussed with the partners from Sweden (CAB) about the return to and **increase of spawning salmon to rivers** in Northern Sweden, and how their return makes the region more attractive as **destination for sportfishermen**.
- Activities listed in the **Alava and RKLm business models**, and in the presentation of the **Greater Coa Valley LBP given by Rewilding Europe specialist Joao Salgueiro** at the partner meeting on 30/09/2021 will be taken into close consideration when preparing the LBP for the Oder Delta.
- All these previously mentioned points relate to aspects of nature and nature-based sport tourism (hiking, biking, angling), but we also discussed other means of possible economy drivers such as **carbon markets** (through carbon sequestration in e.g. wetlands and forests). All these points will be taken into consideration in the Oder Delta LBP.

2. Activities

Id	Description	Indicators to monitor	
		Planned	Achieved
2a	LBP will analyse the regional macroeconomic market situation including tourism, agriculture, forestry, fishery, carbon market sectors and their	Workshop beginning of 2022	Workshop / Working group

	spatial distribution in Oder Delta. A first workshop with representatives of some of these sectors and wildlife economy specialists will set up a time plan and generate a working group to lead the LBP development process. The opportunity to submit the LBP as an Interreg VI A project will be highlighted and discussed in the workshop.		
2b	Phase 1 of WLE project has analysed German and Polish enterprises and initiatives related to wildlife economy in Oder Delta region. A 2 nd workshop will assemble these stakeholders to present situation and future potential for wildlife economy in the Oder Delta. The workshop will also serve to explore potential partners and/or stakeholders for a potential Interreg VI A project.	Workshop first half 2022	Exchange with external specialist and stakeholders
2c	Regular meetings by wildlife economy working group (as set up in 2a) to initiate the LBP and to discuss steps to be taken towards a potential Interreg VI A project.	Quarterly or half-year meetings	Regular exchange
2d	A draft structure of LBP will be developed. Based on the draft and steps 2a, 2b, 2c, a decision will be made on submitting the LBP as a new project within the Interreg VI A programme. If the decision for Interreg VI A as funding tool is positive, a project proposal for application in Interreg VI A will be prepared, which is expected to be submitted in 09/2022.	Possible Interreg VI A project proposal in 09/2022, draft LBP outline	draft structure LBP, new Interreg VI A project application call expected in 09/2022; after approval project start possibly in 01/2023

3. Timeframe

Activity	Timing	Partners / stakeholders involved
2a	02/2022	DUH/Pomerania/ROD/
2b	05-06/2022	ROD / RE
2c	03/2022 – 01/2023	DUH/Pomerania/ROD
2d	03/2022 – 01/2023	ROD/RE/working group

Pictures:

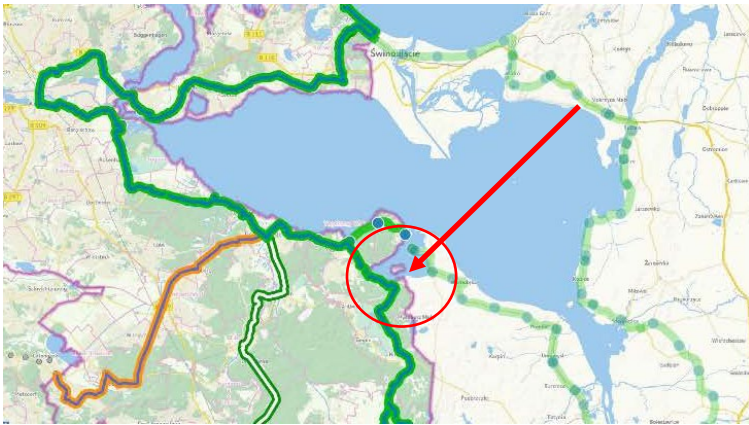
Activity 1a – Hide details



Details of wildlife watching hides in the Ultima Frontiera reserve in the Danube Delta, Romania, where a variety of different types of hides has been carefully constructed and positioned to observe specific species and species groups, e.g. golden jackal, beaver, owls, white-tailed eagle, waterbirds, bee eater.



Activity 1c – Cycle path details



-  Stettiner Haff-Rundweg
-  Ostseeküsten-Radweg
-  Mecklenburgische Seen-Radweg
-  Berlin-Usedom-Radweg
-  Oder-Neiße-Radweg

Project-Area:

Place to connect „Stettiner Haff“ Rundweg and „Oder-Neiße-Radweg“, bike path existing, but on a section of 500m near Rieth in very bad condition



Details:

left: condition bike path in Poland until border

right: condition bike path in Germany between border and the village of Rieth – 500m; biking impossible