

Joint press release by Lake Constance Foundation and Global Nature Fund (GNF)

Reduce and avoid microplastic pollution in lakes and waters! Plastic Origins Expedition of the Surfrider Foundation Europe stops at Lake Constance

What can cities and municipalities or civil society do to fight littering and plastic pollution? How threatened are lakes and rivers in Germany and Europe? Surfrider Foundation Europe, Lake Constance Foundation and Global Nature Fund are fighting against microplastics and waste pollution.



Together for clean waterbodies and on the trail of microplastics: The team of the Surfrider Foundation Europe meets the project team of the Blue Lakes Project of the Lake Constance Foundation and the Global Nature Fund in Constance. Photo © Carolina Wackerhagen / Bodensee-Stiftung

Radolfzell, 27.08.2021: 80 per cent of the waste found in the Oceans comes from inland and is largely transported directly via rivers! Every day, public waste bins overflow with packaging waste. Plastic-coated paper cups, packaging material of all kinds or incorrectly disposed plastic bottles pile up to form mountains of rubbish in parks and public places. This rubbish often ends up in lakes and rivers, first floating on the surface and later sinking to the bottom. Particularly dangerous for the environment is plastic waste, which decompose over time. The fragments become smaller and are later so-called microplastics. According to a study by the University of Bayreuth, microplastics have already been detected in southern German lakes and rivers in 2018. The level of contamination varies. Due to the lack of EU standards and limit values, comparability is difficult.

Don't ignore the problem - municipalities can do something!

The lack of uniform specifications or standards on how microplastics can be detected makes it difficult to deal with the often invisible pollution. The data basis on current pollution in lakes, such as Lake Constance, is still incomplete. Research has detected microplastics in these waters, but what the actual contamination looks like is unknown.

The EU LIFE project "Blue Lakes", which the Lake Constance Foundation is working on together with the Global Nature Fund, both from Radolfzell on Lake Constance, and other partners from Italy, describes causes of microplastic pollution in lakes. The project demonstrates and shows ways what municipalities can do to reduce pollution. "Municipalities can organize and be role models in the fight against microplastics and littering," says Dimitri Vedel, project manager of the Blue Lakes Project at the Lake Constance Foundation. "Simple options such as deposit systems, weatherproof bins or continuous educational work already help," Vedel continues. Udo Gattenlöhner, Managing Director of the Global Nature Fund, points out: "Experiences that help in the fight against microplastics need to be known and incorporated into daily municipal work. The Blue Lakes project and the Living Lakes network start here and support lake regions and municipalities worldwide in the long term." The international network Living Lakes is coordinated by the Global Nature Fund and is active with 130 members at 112 water bodies in over 40 countries.

Citizens can do something!

The sources of microplastics are manifold. Tyre wear, additives in cosmetics or leaching from plastic sports fields are just a few examples. Diffuse plastic waste, which continues to decompose, is still a major cause. Many NGOs are working on the issue. Among them is the Surfrider Foundation Europe, which has been working to protect the Oceans for more than 30 years. The European NGO has developed many projects, such as the "Oceans Initiative", a litter collection programme to raise awareness and to analyze sources marine litter. In order to find a solution to shed light on the problem of plastic and microplastic transported through the river in a scientific way, they created the "Plastic Origins" project. With the help of artificial intelligence and an app, an overview can be created of how high the current litter load is in rivers and lakes. With the recorded litter volume, conclusions can be drawn about microplastic pollution and targeted litter can be collected. The special feature of the procedure: The data can be collected and mapped by anyone with a smartphone. The "Plastic Origins" app can be downloaded from any app store. Litter that cannot be collected immediately in the water during a walk, for example, is recorded and can be collected later with canoes or kayaks. Antoine Bruge, co-developer of the app and project manager at the Surfrider Foundation Europe in Biarritz, says: "The app has the advantage of providing a continuous overview of the amount of litter in lakes and bodies of water and of being able to proceed in a coordinated and efficient manner when disposing of it. The data and results are openly available and users can actively participate in the fight against litter."

Expedition along the Rhine

The process is presented by the Surfrider Foundation Europe in a 14-day expedition with ten stages. The start was on 21 August 2021 at the source of the Rhine. From 25 to 28 August 2021, the ten-member Surfrider Europe team will be on Lake Constance. The Lake Constance Foundation and the Global Nature Fund are supporting the expedition. Local members of the Surfrider chapters will also accompany them on each leg. On Lake Constance, Chris Schorpp from the Lake Constance Chapter will be part of the team.

In addition to collecting data, the Surfrider team will continue to examine the collected fragments after the expedition and research their exact origin. The expedition will end on 5 September 2021 at the mouth of the Rhine in the Netherlands.

Background information

Surfrider Foundation Europe

Founded in 1990, the NGO Surfrider Foundation Europe works to protect the oceans, coastal areas, waves and their users. For 30 years, the association has been working with stakeholders (citizens, private and public sector) on several important issues, with a team of experts and 49 volunteer branches in 12 European countries: Water waste, coastal development, climate change, water quality and users' health.

Discover the association at <https://surfrider.eu/en>

Lake Constance Foundation

The Lake Constance Foundation is a private environmental and nature conservation organisation based in Radolfzell on Lake Constance. It was founded in 1994 by six environmental and nature conservation organisations around Lake Constance. The Foundation works on a project-oriented basis for more sustainability and nature conservation in the international Lake Constance region and beyond. The Foundation is a founding member of the international lake network Living Lakes. The Lake Constance Foundation works on topics from the areas of agriculture & climate, economy & biodiversity, energy transition, nature and lake protection.

Further information can be found at: www.bodensee-stiftung.org

Global Nature Fund

The Global Nature Fund (GNF) was founded in 1998 as an international foundation for the environment and nature. The foundation is independent of the state and pursues exclusively and directly charitable purposes. The head office is in Radolfzell on Lake Constance; further offices are located in Bonn and Berlin. The work areas of the Global Nature Fund are Business & Biodiversity, Nature Conservation, Water & Living Lakes, Sustainable Development & Development Cooperation. In 1998, the Global Nature Fund founded the Living Lakes network for the protection of lakes and wetlands, their habitats and drinking water resources. Today, GNF plans and realises sustainable nature and environmental protection projects together with over 130 partner organisations worldwide.

You can also find more information on the GNF website: www.globalnature.org

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