

From legislation to implementation: the Hamburg strategy for improving the conservation status of habitat types and species under the EU Habitats Directive in the Elbe estuary

Christian Michalczyk¹ and Heike Markus-Michalczyk²

¹ Hamburg Ministry of Environment and Energy, Neuenfelder Strasse 19, 21109 Hamburg, Germany
E-mail: christian.michalczyk@bue.hamburg.de

² University of Hamburg

The EU Habitats Directive forms a cornerstone of Europe's nature conservation policy and aims to conserve natural habitats, and animal and plant species. Together with the Birds Directive, both target on the EU wide Natura 2000 ecological network of protected areas. However, in the third National Report to the EU Habitats Directive (2013), many of the habitat types and species in Germany are assessed as being in an unfavorable conservation status. To improve the status, the Hamburg Ministry of Environment and Energy developed a comprehensive Fauna-Flora-Habitats-Strategy (FFH-Strategy); for habitat types available since 2014 (<http://www.hamburg.de/ffh-strategie/>).

In the Metropolregion Hamburg, the Elbe estuary extends along an approx. 150 km tidal stretch to the North Sea. Except the Hamburg port and some other industrial sites, the entire area is protected under the Natura 2000 network. Here, the conservation objectives include 13 habitat types (annex I HD), 11 species (annex II HD), 26 species of naturally occurring wild birds (annex I BD), and 2 endemic species. The present FFH-Strategy details profiles of habitat types in Hamburg, including data on the situation and specifies conservation measures to reach a favorable status. One example for protected habitats along the Elbe estuary are residual alluvial forests (habitat type 91E0). Today, tidal softwood floodplain forests are fragmented due to urbanization since the last centuries and, more recently, tidal forests are exposed to an increasing tidal amplitude and diverse effects of changes in estuarine hydromorphology. Implementing the FFH-Strategy, measures to restore estuarine tidal floodplain forest is required, planned and currently implemented. The FFH-Strategy and some restoration measures of willow softwood forests in tidal wetlands along the Elbe estuary will be presented and discussed.