

The Dalmatian Islands Environment Foundation (DIEF)

Part of the Conservation Collective



The Dalmatian Islands Environment Foundation (DIEF) is being set up to protect and restore nature along the coastal, terrestrial, and marine ecosystems of the Dalmatian coast, Croatia

DIEF will raise funds from people and business, locally and internationally, with strong Croatian connections, and distribute that funding towards the most effective grassroots environmental initiatives, campaigns and projects

In the pages to follow is the executive summary of the full scoping report, commissioned by Conservation Collective and written by Marko Pecarevic (April 2022)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Dalmatian Islands Environment Foundation (DIEF) is a new charitable entity in Croatia. It will aim to raise funds from individuals and corporations that have a connection with the Dalmatian islands and who wish to contribute to their protection. The areas of focus of the DIEF are to **conserve the natural environment**, take advantage of the **sustainable development opportunities**, and **regenerate the Mediterranean mosaic landscapes** of the islands.

The DIEF will operate through grants, which will be **nimble, non-bureaucratic, and strategic**. The grants will be disbursed primarily to island-based civil society initiatives whose work and approach falls within the identified areas of focus of the DIEF. Where possible, economic, and social revival will be closely tied to environmental renewal. The founders are the Conservation Collective, the MAVA Foundation, and a group of individuals with a strong connection to the Dalmatian Islands.

The **Conservation Collective** is a global network of local foundations rooted in their communities working to:

- Preserve, protect and regenerate biodiverse ecosystems on land and below water.
- Slow down and adapt to climate change.

The model is built on the central belief that people care deeply about protecting and restoring places they know and love. Currently there are eight other Mediterranean members in the Conservation Collective network. The Conservation Collective believes in the power of communities to identify local solutions to globally shared challenges. Member foundations work with community champions to identify and overcome the most important obstacles to change, provide a vehicle for collective action, and bring new funding for local environmental causes.

The global Conservation Collective movement supports foundations in several ways, from knowledge sharing and financial support, to promoting best practice.

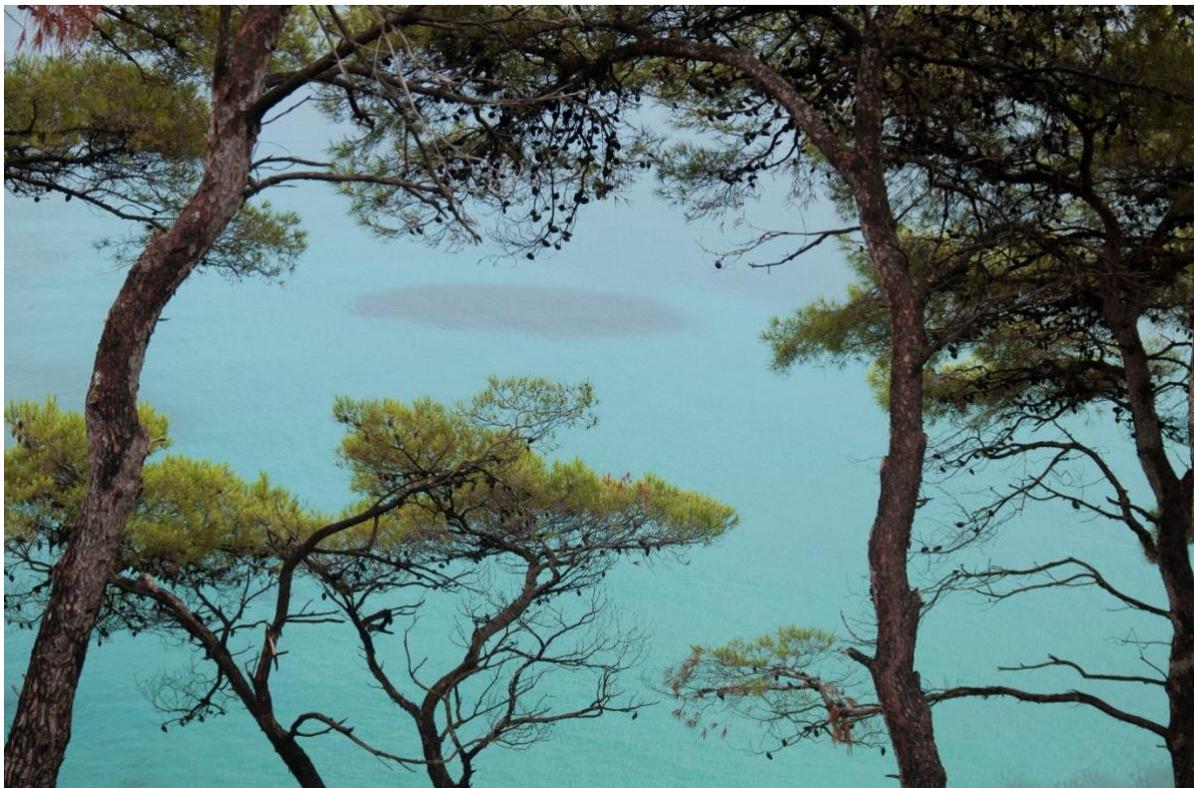


The Dalmatian Islands Region and Ecosystem

The Dalmatian islands consist of **40 inhabited islands** beginning with Silba in the North (part of the Zadar region) and running South until Koločep (in the Dubrovnik region). They form a distinctive unit within the Croatian archipelago.

Most Dalmatian islands have a similar history of human occupation, similar agricultural practices and similar timing of introduction of most exotic species. They have been inhabited for millennia. A variety of land uses coexist in a small area, and it is very difficult to separate **nature and culture**. Natural ecosystems with varying degrees of “naturalness” - forests, shrublands, mountains, freshwater and coastal habitats are found in adjacent to pastures and open landscapes, wetlands, agriculture land and urbanised areas. All these patches are tied together to form complex fabric where the health and viability of each patch is closely related to the evolution and state of the others

Common **terrestrial habitats** on Dalmatian islands include various types of beaches, salt marshes, cliffs, dry grasslands, deciduous thickets, maquis, garrigue and various types of forests. Low-intensity agriculture allows particularly high agro-biodiversity with many unique varieties of grape and olives. The area is a habitat to **165 endemic flora species** and at least **70 threatened animal species**. Dalmatian islands host more than 2,700 species.



Karst landscape in combination with the Mediterranean type climate is fragile and does not have a high resilience to repeated disturbance. Bad environmental practices and forest fires are more detrimental than they would be elsewhere.

The Dalmatian islands host many **small freshwater bodies** which have been used continuously since the Neolithic. These habitats are typically hubs of island terrestrial biodiversity, as well as important stopover sites for migratory birds. There is also a diversity of **marine habitats**, many of which are endangered in the Mediterranean. Submarine meadows of **Posidonia seagrass** are important habitats because of their primary production, and because many organisms (including those economically important) feed, reproduce or find shelter in it

Key Challenges

The islands face **negative consequences of human activities** (e.g., excessive construction, environmental pollution by irresponsible waste disposal, inadequate disposal of wastewater, marine litter as a result of nautical tourism, overexploitation of natural resources), as well as **'natural' threats** (e.g., droughts, fires, heat waves, rising sea levels, storms). Although different in origin, these two sets of threats are mutually reinforcing, and there is a danger of a downward spiral ultimately leading to ecological collapse on some of the islands.

The effects of **climate change** will strongly affect the islands through loss of terrestrial, marine and coastal biodiversity and ecosystem services; economic decline and failure of fisheries, agriculture, and tourism; biodiversity loss from traditional agroecosystems; and risk to water security.

Waste management is significantly costlier and more difficult than on the mainland. Infrastructure, equipment, and space of sorting waste on the island is limited, and there are significant oscillations in the amount of waste created/collected in winter and summer. In addition, most individual housing facilities outside large settlements have inadequate management of **wastewater**, which allows it to seep into the underground, eventually making its way to the sea.

Public institutions mandated with nature conservation **do not have adequate capacity** to undertake effective management on the islands as they are all based on the mainland. Moreover, **mass tourism** combined with extremely high seasonality during the summer months, exacerbates many existing threats, and contributes to **unsustainable use of environmental resources**. A result of mass tourism

is also the overdevelopment of the coast all along the Dalmatia, which is being destroyed by **cementing and by creation of artificial beaches**.

Forest fires are facilitated by burning of tillage, climate change (reduced and irregular rainfall and high temperatures), irresponsible tourism, and abandonment of agriculture.

Invasive species cause a considerable amount of damage to island biodiversity and ecosystem services. There is a lack of precise data on distribution of invasive species on the Dalmatian islands, which is a prerequisite for their removal. Meanwhile, over the last few decades all targeted marine species (i.e., those that are most economically valuable) have been **overfished**.



Governance of the Dalmatian Islands Conservation Fund

The main goal of DIEF is the strategic and flexible support for local and locally led civil society initiatives for improving the environment of the Dalmatian islands.

Most DIEF support will go to island-based organizations, to ensure empowerment and inclusive participation of people to expand their ownership over policies and development initiatives that affect their lives. Where capacity doesn't exist, DIEF will look to develop and facilitate new initiatives that bring long-term net benefits to environment and biodiversity on Dalmatian Islands.

Drawing on the passion for the Dalmatian islands from both the national and international communities, the aim is to raise a minimum of €100,000 from a group of founding donors, giving €5-25k each. DIEF will look to build upon this annually, bringing in local businesses and corporate partners, as well as larger trusts and foundations to scale and replicate successful projects, and increase its impact.

A local executive director will lead the organization on a full-time basis. Projects will be screened by way of an independent advisory board.

Areas of Work

Viewed at a regional scale, the Dalmatian islands form a coherent unit. However, the closer one gets to the islands and island groups, the more their **individual differences** become evident. This is reflected in the strategy of the DDCF, which is broad enough to consider island-level peculiarities, while guaranteeing that there is **coherence in the regional approach**.

DIEF will actively seek projects and initiatives in three partially overlapping areas of focus: **habitat and biodiversity conservation**, **regenerative land use**, and **sustainable development & resource management**. Examples include:

Habitat and Biodiversity Conservation

- Gathering information about the species and habitats present on the islands, as well as their role in providing ecosystem services
- Systematically monitoring and recording new threats to the environment.
- Supporting citizen science initiatives as a way to motivate people, raise awareness, as well as to gather important environmental data.
- Raising awareness on how to reduce the risks of forest fires.



- Actions to revitalize neglected freshwater bodies, to reforest barren areas with adequate species, or to reduce the numbers and prevalence of invasive species on islands

Regenerative Land Use

- Identifying, mapping, and valuating High Nature Value (HNV) agricultural activities and areas, as a basis for preservation of the Mediterranean mosaic landscape
- Establishing nurseries of local varieties and cultivars, as well as of native species used for reforestation
- Identifying, mapping and restoring important dry-stone architecture, as a way to reconnect people with the landscape
- Connecting livestock farming with tourism through traditional products in order to contribute to preservation of native breeds and the development of the island's economy.
- Partnership among producers and restaurants in creating “local menus”, that rely on local and seasonal produce

Sustainable development & resource management

- Awareness raising about benefits of transition to renewable sources of energy (biogas, wind, solar), and demonstration projects
- Facilitating energy cooperatives, where the cost of investment, as well as the benefits can be shared among a larger group of people
- Creating mobile applications for interpretation of island’s points of interest (small producers, natural values, examples of good and bad practice).
- Raising awareness and education of tourists on how to make informed choices to reduce their impact on the island environment
- Advocating for severely limiting single use plastic products on the islands (e.g. by tourism operators)
- Reducing waste by supporting repair-cafe type initiatives, aiming at promoting and facilitating refurbishing and repairing
- Demonstration / education projects on how to reduce the waste that reaches landfills by composting



Join us!

We're looking for donors, projects, and Dalmatia-lovers to devote all our efforts to conserve, protect and restore the region's unique environment.

You can help us achieve this by contributing to and supporting DIEF with an annual donation and/or making introductions to those in a position to do so.

For more information contact: [Jade Brudenell](#) (Executive Director, Conservation Collective)

Visit the Conservation Collective website <https://conservation-collective.org/>

