



THE UNNECESSARY LA BREÑA II DAM WILL DESTROY THE ALREADY ENDANGERED IBERIAN LYNX POPULATION

The Spanish government has started with the extension of the La Breña dam, which will result in a reservoir four times the current size (called La Breña II). This dam is situated in the middle of a Natura 2000 area (the Guadiato River), which is not only relevant for the animals that live here, but also for the connection between the two last Iberian lynx populations in Spain.

The dam will cost over 120 million Euros and Spain has applied for European funds. The European Commission has decided to co-finance the project with 80 million Euros. This means that every European will financially support a project with enormous environmental impacts and without very clear objectives.

The La Breña II dam is not the only dam that forms an obstacle for the Iberian lynx. A number of infrastructure works, i.e. roads, irrigation plans, dams, etc. will have severe impacts on the connection of the lynx populations. The Spanish National Hydrological Plan foresees the construction of 12 dams with negative impacts on the lynx. **WWF asks the Spanish government and the European Commission to stop these projects and to save the Iberian lynx.**



Characteristics of the dam project

The La Breña II dam is a dam construction on the Guadiato River (a sub basin of the Guadalquivir) in the municipality of Almodóvar del Río (Córdoba province), and its storage volume is 850 hm³. The new dam will be constructed 120 m downstream from the existing dam.

The water is planned for use in downstream irrigation agriculture, and to date no other

alternatives have been found, as no other dam emplacements are possible in the Middle Guadalquivir River. The project aims to increase the available water, even though an actual water shortage does not exist. The first objective of the dam will be to increase the water supply for the irrigation of EU funded agriculture; agriculture which is only economically viable because of the EU subsidies. A side objective of the project is to increase the water recreation possibilities of the reservoir.

The Guadiato river is classified as a Natura2000 site

The European Union Natura2000 network will include a representative sample of all key habitats of interest across Europe. The Guadiato river is classified as a Natura2000 site. In this particular area the black stork, the Iberian lynx and the Spanish Imperial Eagle, among others, can be found.



Past and future evolution of the Iberian lynx population

The population of the Iberian lynx has decreased seriously and it is now considered an endangered species. The distribution of viable lynx populations in 2002 (less than 200 animals) accounts for only 20% of the population's distribution in 1989 (1136 animals). The two most important nucleuses of lynxes can be found in the Sierra Morena and the Doñana natural park.

The decline of the lynx is caused by:

- Decline in rabbit population: the basic prey;
- Mortality caused directly by man in the form of traps, poison, shooting and dogs.
- Loss and fragmentation of habitat.
- Fragmentation of populations.

The connection between the two populations is necessary to ensure the genetic exchange between the existing populations and is one of the main criteria to define a "favorable conservation status" of the Iberian lynx.



Illustration 1. Lynx population in 1980



Illustration 2. Lynx population in 2002 (in black the breeding areas and question marks indicate possible lynx areas)

The death-blow for the Iberian lynx

The heightened dam and expanded reservoir will have a severe impact on the already endangered Iberian lynx. The dam construction will destroy 2.020 hectares of natural habitat with a good conservation status. The sub-population of lynx in Guadiato will disappear completely and the population of the Eastern Sierra Morena will be affected by the reduction of its distribution area. Overall fragmentation of the lynx habitat will be increased, meaning that breeding will become difficult and the species will be put under further pressure.

The Guadiato area constitutes the main corridor to connect the sub-populations of lynx in the Central and the Eastern Sierra Morena; and the expansion of the dam will also isolate the most reproductive population in the Southeast from other nucleus regions, which need corridor connections in order to restore the lynx populations.

Compensation measures of the dam project for the lynx

Over one year was spent in defining the compensation measures of the dam project.

WWF sees these measures as a good step forward to conserve the Iberian lynx population in Spain. However, these measures will not take away the negative impacts of an extra obstruction between the last two viable lynx populations. Secondly, these measures were already planned without the new dam and, in this sense, cannot be seen as compensation measures for the La Breña reservoir. Finally, our experience in Spain tells us that it will be difficult to control the execution of these measures.

The compensation measures being considered for the lynx population involve an area of 2.719 hectares, divided into 15 parcels between 38 and 273 hectares, and 15 point-actions of 3 hectares. It can be questioned if these areas can be seen as habitats with a good conservation status, like the original zone. Measures are also planned to strengthen the rabbit populations. Finally, it includes a 20-year follow-up plan that will be developed by the Doñana Biological Station and the University of Córdoba.

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More information on the Spanish National Hydrological Plan: www.panda.org/dams
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