

TFN Impact Report

Name of your Organisation:	Leeway Collective Institute for the Protection and Promotion of Aquatic Ecosystems
Name of the project TFN funded:	Balkan River Defence river conservation movement (core funding) in conjunction with our annual river conservation project, Balkan Rivers Tour.
Date Funded by TFN:	04/06/2019
Were you able to undertake your project as planned?	Yes
If no, please outline how the project has changed.	
Can you describe and/or demonstrate the specific impact that TFN funding has had against your initial objectives?	The funding we received from TFN / EFN was used to support the core costs of operating our NGO (office rent and expenses, staff wages with a small percentage going towards costs for events and projects). With TFN's financial support, we could focus fully on our on-the-ground river conservation efforts, limiting the time-consuming work of applying for small grants, thus allowing us to continue to challenge mainstream opinion about river conservation in the Balkans and Europe through public engagement and holding governments accountable. The most positive outcome of receiving this funding was result much larger than we could have anticipated. During the 6 months the Slovenian government took advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic to expose Slovenian nature to multiple controversial large-scale infrastructure projects by making changes to construction and nature conservation laws and legislation. This included disabling NGOs from being active in the process of large infrastructure projects and making un-constitutional changes to the Slovenian Nature Conservation Act, exposing the rivers of the country to projects like a chain of controversial hydro dams on the Sava River and fracking and garbage incineration. The TFN / EFN funding allowed us act quickly and dedicated our full attention to the situation in Slovenia, uniting individuals and organizations under the Narave Ne Damo campaign (We Won't Give Up Nature). This campaign recently led to the involvement of the Constitutional Court, who has halted all controversial construction projects being pushed forward, until the new laws can be reviewed. We have created a unified voice for Slovenian nature, as well as acting as a watchdog, exposing and explaining the sneaky action of the government to Slovenians via our Facebook page (20K followers) and appearing in over 300 news and radio pieces in all major Slovenian media as well as getting the story out in international media including a 5 minute long news piece in 15 languages in Deutsche Welle (https://www.dw.com/en/slovenia-civil-society-under-threat/av-53825174).

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	The past few months have seen our small NGO grow from a river conservation organization to one acting and unifying Slovenia for all of nature. Our focus remains on rivers, but our unique position as a youth-led, grassroots organizations has given us an opportunity to positively affect nature conservation as a whole, a clear sign that our tactics and dedication are working. Our impact has exceeded what we expected to do with this funding, and we will continue this battle into the fall once parliament resumes.
What portion of the project did TFN fund?	98%
How many direct beneficiaries did the TFN funded project reach?	5 (staff as mentioned in application) AND 10 (local river conservation organizations that we were able to support by organizing and paying for events, protests, supplies and equipment and banners)
How many indirect beneficiaries did the TFN funded project reach?	Indirectly the funding impacted the entire population of Slovenian (2 million) including many locals in Bulgaria and Romania.
Were you able to leverage further funding as a result of TFN support?	Yes
If yes, how much were you able to raise?	We made some connections at the TFN event which were beneficial later on and the funds gathered at the event gave us core funding with which we were able to pay our otherwise volunteers which enabled them to put more time in efforts to apply for other grants.
Did you receive any pro-bono support, volunteer offers or introductions as a result of the event?	Yes
If yes, please can you provide details of the support you received?	One of the contacts we made during the TFN event in London has made a 15.000 euro donation to support our the environmental DNA (eDNA) research of our Balkan Rivers Tour 5 project on the Sava River, (which has been postponed to 2021 due to travel restrictions of COVID-19). We will perform the first ever complete eDNA sampling of the Sava River and deliver a map of the presence of at least 25 fish species as well as a comparative study of fish biodiversity levels in reservoirs and free flowing stretches. (More info can be found here: https://balkanriverdefence.org/news/brt5-edna/).
Has the training you received from TFN better prepared you in pitching your organisation to potential funders?	Yes

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Has TFN increased your capacity to raise further funds?	Yes
How important was TFN funding in helping you achieve your objectives?	We would have found it difficult to achieve our objectives without TFN funding
Since presenting at TFN, has your organisation undergone any other significant changes?	Our NGO with its biggest project/movement Balkan River Defence became thoroughly involved in defending democracy and participatory rights of NGOs in Slovenia. Ever since new extreme right wing government came into power in the beginning of March this year we have been involved in exposing their autocratic concepts and breaching of Slovenian constitution, especially in the field of nature conservation. More info to be found in news section of our webpage (most relevant news are translated into English language): https://balkanriverdefence.org/news/ This winter we have decided to go separate ways with our platform River Intellectuals because of its focus/concept being pretty far away from direct activism and grass roots involvement in decision making. After many chats and debates we have realized we will both be more productive/effective if we make Balkan River Defence and River Intellectuals (now named River Collective) separate entities. Our decision proved right as both platforms got a solid boost in recent months and we are still keeping in touch. March 24th, due to the coronavirus crisis, we had to cancel our biggest annual Balkan River Defence, the Balkan Rivers Tour 5, where we would have kayaked the entire length of Sava River (1.000 km across 4 countries) with direct actions, research and events all along the way, connecting all the groups fighting for rivers and against dams but also all pro-nature NGOs and organizations, small and large: https://balkanriverdefence.org/brt5program/.
Do you have any other comments or feedback on the experience of the TFN process?	The funds raised in TFN process helped put solid standing under our little NGO and were a boost towards more focused and reliable work process. It also provided some useful connections with influential people that we can reach out in times of need and in the future in general. Thank you for your support and for helping us make an impact.
Can you tell us any personal stories to highlight the value of the project?	*project being core funding for Leeway Collective's Balkan River Defense movement from June 2019-June 2020 PART 1 When the Slovenian government started making changes to the country's environmental and construction legislation (spring 2020), under the cover of the COVID 19 pandemic, there was no time for formal project planning or fundraising. But thanks to the support of TFN, Balkan River Defence was able to take immediate, effective

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	action and dive headfirst into the complicated and long battle of standing up for Slovenian environment. The following is a summary of Balkan River Defence's actions in past few months, which highlights the value of our NGO and the work we do. Without exaggeration, in the last 3 months our little NGO has done more to protect and safeguard Slovenian nature and environment than any governmental organization or large NGO has done in year. 1. On March 14th a new Slovenian government was formed following the resignation of the previous Slovenian Prime Minister. They quickly put forth multiple amendments to laws and legislation calling them an "anti-corona" package, sneaking in changes concerning nature conservation and construction (completely unrelated to the pandemic). Our response was a campaign called Rek ne damo! / We won't give up rivers (https://balkanriverdefence.org/news/recent-happenings-in-slovenia-in-english-language/), and we started an email campaign called Flood of emails to National Assembly Members (MPs) and got more than 5.000 people to send emails to all 46 MPs in just 4 days (https://balkanriverdefence.org/news/call-for-action-a-flood-of-emails-to-the-members-of-slovenian-national-council/). 2. The Slovenian National Party (political party) then submitted an amendment to the country's Nature Conservation Act which would disable NGOs from being able to take part in any environmental assessment processes, but also in any other administration and court proceedings related to large infrastructure projects. Furthermore, over 90% of NGOs in Slovenia currently holding the status of "organization working in public interest", would lose the ability to act and become unable to do the thing this status enables them to do: be a watchdog and act on mistakes made by the government. We reacted with yet another direct action, which we named Hail of emails to MPs, and the response was amazing. MPs voting on the acceptance of the amendment received over 11.000 emails in just 4 days, making this action a new record for the country, as the largest similar action involved only 2.000 emails over a much longer time period, (https://balkanriverdefence.org/news/hail-of-emails-to-mps/). The day that the Slovenian MPs were voting on the amendment to Nature Conservation Act (12.05.20). We organized a protest called Narave ne damo! / We won't give up nature! in front of the Slovenian parliament. The day before the event, we made a video to invite people to the event which reached 443.000 people in Slovenia and resulted in more than 500 people standing in front of Parliament with us on a rainy day when protests were officially prohibited. Balkan River Defence's founder Rok Rozman was invited to speak at the parliamentary session that day which ended with MPs voting in an amendment to amendment, which was less destructive than the
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	previously proposed amendment, but still detrimental to NGOs and nature, (https://balkanriverdefence.org/news/summary-of-tuesday-12-5-2020/). 3. The government then announced another anti-corona package in which they wanted to extend articles that completely disable NGOs and to make construction of large-scale project possible without valid construction permit from end of May 2020 to the end of 2021. Our reaction was a petition urging Slovenian MPs to stop selling nature and our future in which we offered alternatives and solutions to the destructive projects the government proposed, (https://balkanriverdefence.org/news/petition-slovenian-mps-stop-selling-nature-and-our-future/). Since our goal was to make this the biggest petition in Slovenia yet, we organized a series of events which brought the topic to the main news section on daily basis including: - Walk around the parliament with a flower (https://balkanriverdefence.org/news/sprehod-z-rozo-okoli-drzavnega-zbora/) - A peaceful direct action in front of Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (https://balkanriverdefence.org/news/peaceful-protests-in-front-of-the-ministry-of-the-environment/). - And we co-organized a big protest (more than 10.000 people) in Ljubljana in support of Slovenian nature at the same time as MPs were voting about this third anti-corona package (https://balkanriverdefence.org/news/poslanci-zopet-za-vizjaka-beton-in-proti-naravi/). Despite the incredible 36.000 signatures on the petition in just 1 week, MPs voted the articles and the entire law in. We continued to apply pressure because we made a deal with other directly involved NGOs and Slovenian Center for NGOs, to file a complaint against the accepted articles with the Constitutional court, since they were breaching Slovenian constitution and Aarhus Convention. 4. BRD teamed up with other Slovenian NGOs, individuals and civil initiatives focused on human rights, women's rights, art and culture) and led the organization of an event called Za naravo ob Savo / For nature next to Sava on June 27th. We undertook an immensely big task with our team being just Rok, Carmen and some web and design help, but somehow in 2 weeks we managed to pull off the biggest action of this kind ever done in Slovenia. More than 700 people hiked, biked, kayaked, swam and flew next to the entire 258 kilometers of Sava river in Slovenia and by picking up garbage, censusing rare species and connecting amongst different initiatives. This action gave Slovenians a chance to prove they can do big direct actions in short time, that they can connect and work together across different
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	causes, that they do care about nature and that there are lots of people who will keep on standing up for it, no matter how the government tries to block or limit NGOs and people. The main goals of this action was to highlight these positive impacts and kickstart many small actions across the country that are now led by local individuals. By getting everyone together for a common cause, organizations focused on garbage collection are now working with ornithologists. Those determined to protect their local watershed met with human rights activists. A web or nature conservationists has been formed! We are now planning another similar big action this September. Short Video of our latest action Za Narave ob Savo (For nature on the Sava): https://vimeo.com/439794881 Link to the gallery and summary of Za Naravo ob Savo: https://balkanriverdefence.org/ob-savo-porocilo/ 5. On June 15th this good news made the headlines in all biggest Slovenian media; the Constitutional court halted the implementation of controversial articles, meaning that construction is not yet able to commence on any of the new construction projects (including dams) until the Constitutional Court has reviewed the changes to laws that are possibly classified as unconstitutional. ((https://balkanriverdefence.org/news/the-constitutional-court-has-halted-the-implementation-of-articles/)). 6. Stats + Links - 300 articles published in the biggest Slovenian media, including live TV and radio shows on Slovenian national television and radio. - Our fight was also exposed and reported about with a 5 minute long news piece in 15 languages in Deutsche Welle (https://www.dw.com/en/slovenia-civil-society-under-threat/av-53825174), in the news portal Euro news (https://de.euronews.com/2020/06/29/aktivisten-kampfen-in-slovenien-fur-den-schutz-der-save). - Our top Facebook posts on Balkan River Defence received more than 13.000 likes, 4.500 shares and 1.300 comments; our best viewed videos had 265.000 views and reached more than 443.000 people - Our website experiences over 25.000 visitors on some days. PART 2 In 2019 we also completed three weeks of Balkan Rivers Tour 4 in 3 different countries - Romania, Slovenia and Bulgaria. The following is a brief summary of our actions and impact there. ROMANIA April 15-20, 2019 Short video - https://vimeo.com/showcase/5945454/video/332978234
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	The illegal construction of a dam on the Basca Mare River was already underway when we arrived, but a dedicated pair of Romanian grassroots river conservationist had been asking us to come and help for years and we were hopeful we could give them a boost. We: - Organized a garbage clean up and outdoor experience days with two local schools - Secured a meeting with two local mayors, something locals had been trying to do for years and got the story of the dams into major news - Received a response from the Romanian government and EU commission to an Open letter we sent them about the Basca Mare dam construction, and the issue reached the Senate of Romania as well, leading one of the senators getting involved and officially requesting information and explanations from the Ministry of Waters and Forests about this project - Assisted with fundraising and crowdfunding to support the hiring of a lawyer and the start of a lawsuit against the illegal dam construction site on Basca Mare River - Increased awareness about hydro projects in the country SLOVENIA July 7-13, 2019 Short Video - https://vimeo.com/358592747 The second week of BRT4 in Slovenia was also the official launch of our River Intellectuals initiative and the Student for Rivers Camp which brought university students from all over Europe to dive into the existing research related to free-flowing and dammed rivers, as well as solutions to the problem. It was a creative concept that brings students and experts to the classroom and on the water together. - We also celebrated and learned about a group of local students who stopped the construction of two dams (HPP Trnovo and HPP Kobarid) on the SoĀa River in the 70s. - We had an environmental film festival, ate local food, went kayaking, organized lectures and presentations, fostered networking and connections. We then organized an on-water protest with over 150 river defenders/kayakers from 23 countries, with a loud message of celebration, recognizing all that the free-flowing SoĀa gives to local economy, to the tourism industry, and to the fishes. And with this, we also put forth another message: the idea of removing a barrier on the SoĀa. BULGARIA September 24-29, 2019 Short video - https://vimeo.com/showcase/5945454/video/367594757
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	In Bulgaria we formed some strong bonds with the grassroots civil initiatives Balkanka, Friends of the Earth Bulgaria, Nature School Vlahi and Balkani Wildlife Society who together are fighting for the Struma River and surrounding ecosystems. Our goal for the week to do whatever we could to support the efforts of these groups and get their messages heard nationally and internationally, which we did with extensive media coverage and roadside banners. The final day of BRT4 Bulgaria saw over 50 people take to the water in celebration of the Struma with news cameras following, resulting in the president of Balkanka giving interviews to two national TV stations about three main threats that the river faces; small hpp, industrial pollution and the highway project.
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