

# Naturathlon 2009

Nature without borders  
Natur grenzenlos



## Press release

umweltbundesamt<sup>U</sup>

Naturschutz/ Sport/ Vermischtes/ Naturathlon

### **NATURATHLON 2009 – 1,600 Kilometer for nature conservation in Europe**

- **Nature and sports event to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain**
- **European Green Belt at the heart of transboundary action**
- **Looking for cycling enthusiasts, international amateur athletes**

**Bonn/Vienna, 31 March 2009:** In August 2009, the Bundesamt für Naturschutz (BfN; Federal Agency for Nature Conservation in Germany) and the Austrian Umweltbundesamt (Austrian Environment Agency) are organising the biggest nature and sports event over several days in Europe: the NATURATHLON 2009. The motto of the sixth follow-up to the prestigious nature conservation project of the BfN is “nature without borders”, designed to commemorate, on the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain, a natural heritage of a particular kind: the European Green Belt, a unique inheritance of the Cold War from the perspective of nature conservation. “We are extremely glad that we succeeded, together with the Austrian Umweltbundesamt, in making this unique nature and sports event possible. I know that it will be an unforgettable event for all participants because the NATURATHLON combines nature, as experienced in the Green Belt, with active physical exercise in an unspoiled natural environment “, said the BfN president, Prof Dr Beate Jessel, on the occasion of the project’s presentation. Mag Georg Rebernick, the Managing Director of Austria’s Umweltbundesamt, adds: “The Green Belt which joins people in the East and West today is a first-class monument, reminding us of overcoming the division in Europe as well as showing us the high value of these landscapes at the heart of Europe. The Naturathlon picks up this theme and will focus public attention on the Green Belt in Europe.”

### **Starting 19 August 2009**

The “NATURATHLON 2009 - nature without borders” takes place from 19 until 30 August 2009. Each of the six bordering countries (Germany, Austria, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Hungary) along the Central European Green Belt supplies four athletes who follow the route of the European Green Belt on their bicycles. The tour starts in the Hungarian town Sopron on 19 August 2009, the day which marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first breakthrough of the Iron

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Curtain at the Austro-Hungarian border. It was here at Sopron that the first mass escapes of GDR citizens into the West took place. For twelve days the tour will carry on over 1,600 km through varied scenery and areas of the most outstanding natural beauty in Europe, and end at the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

All athletes over 18 from the relevant bordering countries who are enthusiastic about nature may apply now to the Bundesamt für Naturschutz. Closing date for applications is: 21 April 2009.

Further information is available on the Internet at: [www.naturathlon.eu](http://www.naturathlon.eu) .

### **The European Green Belt**

The European Green Belt is the backbone of a network which spans 8,500 km and connects biotopes with many ecological corridors and large expanses of unspoiled nature, strung together like a string of pearls. Because they have remained relatively undisturbed, these areas along the former east-western border have formed a network of ecological sites of unique dimensions, running from the Arctic Sea to the Mediterranean and the Black Sea or, within Germany, from the Baltic Sea in the north to the Fichtelgebirge mountains and the Vogtland.

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