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PRESS RELEASE

Big Jump - The first European River Swim Day on 17 July 2005

Big Jump, a follow up project of the international “Elbebadetag”, is underway and already making a splash ! More the 200 actions in over 10 countries and 30 rivers.

On Sunday, 17 July, at 2 p.m., tens of thousands of people at selected points throughout Europe will simultaneously jump into their local rivers for a swim, or will hold debates along their banks. They are following the call of a broad coalition of partners who have gathered for the “Big Jump” campaign. This first Big Jump is set to include 200 drives at 30 rivers in over 10 countries.

The event celebrates the first promising victories in the battle for clean water and living rivers, and a bold new European law that will lead the way to a brighter future. The European Water Framework Directive calls for all Member States of the European Union to clean up their rivers, lakes, and groundwater, so that they are ecologically good status by the year 2015.

Big Jump is a call to citizens to help in this gargantuan task and with this big plunge to take accountability for the quality of our water and for the governments’ water policy - for without their help the goal can never be achieved. The Big Jump campaign will publicise the implementation of the Directive, keeping the public informed of its progress every step of the way.

Time is running out. Except for the river headwaters and a few lakes at the foothills of the Alps, most of Europe’s surface water bodies, and thus much of its groundwater, are in pitiful condition. Even now we know that 50% of the water bodies in Europe, will probably never be able to become ecologically fit by 2015, and that they will need an extension.

But there are exceptions: most notably the Rhine and the Elbe. The sustained improvements that have been observed in the rivers’ chemical and bacterial purity are spectacular, and are showing others the way. But here, too, it is still a long way from almost-clean rivers to viable rivers teeming with life. Showcasing such positive examples is one of the tasks of this campaign.

The protection of our rivers and lakes is a community obligation, which requires a show of solidarity and cooperation between “upstream” and “downstream”. Water, the source of all life, must be

commonly managed, justly and without regard to borders. This is precisely what the European Water Framework Directive calls for as well.

The Big Jump campaign and its concerns have been paving the way. As part of a project co-financed by the EU, the non-governmental organisation, "Friends of the Earth Middle East" have appealed for peaceful cooperation to save the Jordan River. Mayors of Palestine, Israel and Jordan have been heeding the call and together have been taking a Big Jump into the Jordan River on 10 July!

Big Jump is an initiative of the European Rivers Network (ERN) in cooperation with its European partners EEB (European Environmental Bureau) and WWF along with hundreds of regional partners. The idea for a European Swim Day originally developed out of the "Living Elbe" project. The first Elbe Swim Day in 2002 drew over a hundred thousand people to the banks of what was once known as the dirtiest river in Europe. The "Living Elbe" project, which was sponsored jointly by the organisation *Deutsche Umwelthilfe* (German Environmental Aid) and Europe's biggest publishing house, Gruner + Jahr, was the progenitor of this world's first River Swim Day.

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