

## The Elbe – a very important river

### River characteristics and cross-border catchment area

The Elbe River, with a catchment area of 148,268 km<sup>2</sup>, is the fourth-largest river in Central Europe. It originates in the Czech Krkonose Mountains and flows out into the North Sea at Cuxhafen, 1,094 km later. A total of about 24.5 million people live in the Elbe catchment area that includes the four countries: Germany, the Czech Republic, Austria and Poland. Its most important tributaries are the Vltava, the Saale, the Havel, the Mulde, the Black Elster and the Eger. Unlike the Rhine, the Elbe has sections that are close to nature. More than 400 kilometers of river have been designated by the UNESCO as the "Elbe River Landscape", a specially protected biosphere.

### The catchment area of the Elbe



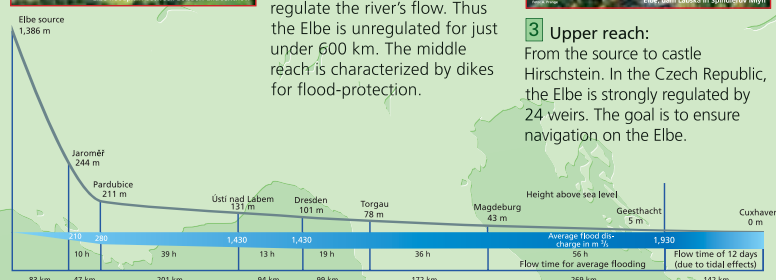
**1 Lower reach:**  
Geesthacht dam to the North Sea estuary. The dikes along the lower reach protect against storm flooding and heavy landward weather from the North Sea, which can have effects much further upstream in the Elbe.



**2 Middle reach:**  
Castle Hirschstein to the Geesthacht dam. With the exception of the dam at Geesthacht, the German course of the river does not have any other structures to regulate the river's flow. Thus the Elbe is unregulated for just under 600 km. The middle reach is characterized by dikes for flood-protection.



**3 Upper reach:**  
From the source to castle Hirschstein. In the Czech Republic, the Elbe is strongly regulated by 24 weirs. The goal is to ensure navigation on the Elbe.



**Sources:**

- IKSE (2005): Die Elbe und ihr Einzugsgebiet, Magdeburg
- IKSE (1998): Hydrologische Daten, Magdeburg

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