Press

Deutsche
Bundesstiftung Umwelt
German Federal
Environmental Foundation

October 2026

DBU Milestones

History

- 24 October 1989: Acting on a proposal by the Federal Minister of Finance, Dr Theo Waigel, the German Federal Cabinet drafts a basic resolution to use the proceeds from the sale of the federally-owned Salzgitter AG to found an environmental foundation. The sum of DM 2.5 billion (converted: EUR 1.28 billion) is to be used as endowment capital, of which the annual returns are to be used to fund projects that achieve the foundation's objectives (currently annually around EUR 50–60 million)

- 18 July 1990: The Act to Establish the Federal Foundation "German Federal Environmental Foundation" is announced. The Foundation is established as a civil law foundation with legal personality. The name, tasks and objectives of the Foundation are defined in this Act.

- 09 August 1990: The Articles of Association (included in the Funding Guidelines) are adopted. Osnabrück is to become the foundation's headquarters. Furthermore, the Articles of Association define the structure of the Foundation, the responsibilities of its various divisions, its internal procedures, and the management of its assets.

- 17 December 1990: The German Federal Environmental Foundation (*Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt, DBU*) takes up its work with the inaugural meeting of the Board of Trustees. The Foundation's statutory mandate is to fund projects and initiatives to protect the environment, particularly those involving small- and medium-sized enterprises (SME). As a rule, the Foundation aims to work outside the scope of other governmental funding programs, but may complement them. In line with the German Federal Government's suggestion, the Board of Trustees elects Prof. Dr Hans Tietmeyer as its first chairman.

- 1 March 1991: The DBU takes up its work as a civil law foundation with legal personality. The first "Guidelines for Funding from German Federal Environmental Foundation" are developed. These guidelines are revised in 1998, 2004, 2015, 2024 and 2026.

- German Federal Environmental Foundation has been headed by DBU Secretary General Alexander Bonde since February 1st, 2018. His predecessors were Dr Heinrich Bottermann from 2013 to 2017, and before that Honorary Doctor of Engineering Fritz Brickwedde from 1991 to 2013.

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- Since its establishment, the German Federal Environmental Foundation has funded more than 11,500 projects with around EUR 2.18 billion in funds. The endowment capital currently totals EUR 3 billion.

- 1995: Conversion of the heritage-protected villa and construction of the DBU's administrative building in accordance with the criteria of ecological building.

- Founding (1999) and construction (2001) of the DBU Centre for Environmental Communication (DBU Zentrum für Umweltkommunikation GmbH) as a subsidiary of the Foundation.

- Founding (2007) of DBU Naturerbe GmbH, a non-profit subsidiary of the DBU for the preservation of the country's natural heritage. It is responsible for the environmentally sound development and management of 66 DBU natural heritage sites (70,000 hectares). Construction of the DBU Naturerbe building in accordance with the Passive House Standard (2015).

- Since 2019, the green startup funding programme has been part of the DBU portfolio to support company foundings and startups that develop innovative and economically viable solutions for the environment, ecology and sustainability.

- In November 2024, the DBU Board of Trustees decided to set up a new funding area for marine nature conservation, primarily for the North and Baltic Seas. Projects are to be funded with around ten million euros annually (2025: five million euros). The basis for this is an endowment from the Federal Environment Ministry to the DBU at the end of 2024. The funds come from compensation payments for the expansion of offshore wind energy in accordance with the Offshore Wind Energy Act (*Windenergie-auf-See-Gesetz*).

Tasks:

- Funding of innovative, exemplary, solution-oriented projects and initiatives with the goal of protecting the environment through sustainable development, particularly those projects involving small- and medium-sized enterprises.

- Funded projects must be practical, create momentum, and generate a multiplier effect.

- The DBU considers fighting climate change, maintaining biodiversity, sustainable use of resources, and protection against harmful emissions to be the main challenges it aims to address.

- The projects funded by the DBU draw on the latest scientific findings on the limits of the planet as well as the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) set out by the United Nations.

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- The funding topics are equally distributed across the research, development and utilisation of new technologies and products to help relieve the burden on the environment consistent with the principles of preventive, integrated environmental protection; the preservation and restoration of the country's natural heritage; and increasing awareness of environmental consciousness and environmentally conscious behaviour amongst the general public through information and environmental education measures.

- With its fellowship programmes, the DBU supports the qualification of educated young talent in the fields of environmental and natural conservation.

- The DBU has awarded the German Environmental Prize – which, with EUR 500,000 in prize money, is one of Europe's most prestigious and richest environmental awards – since 1993.

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