



In northern Italy, there are several names given to the particular phenomena of springs and watercourses found along the so-called "spring belt". For centuries, waters from subterranean sources reaching the surface have been typical of the boundary between the High and Low Po Plain, from Piedmont in the west to Friuli in the east.

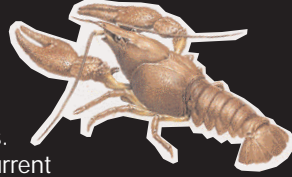
These springs once played an important economic role, supplying water for irrigation, favouring the development of rice-paddies, and providing water-mills with a source of energy.



Today, these particular environments are reduced to tiny but unique remnants which, in almost always precarious conditions, still host precious flora and fauna.

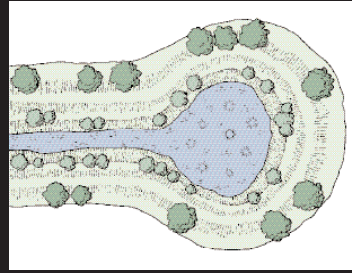
The rivers originating from spring-belt waters contain highly varied fauna, including fish – now threatened by the introduction of exotic species.

One species, protected by current legislation, which finds its ideal habitat in spring watercourses is the freshwater crayfish.



The spring-belt flora is unique, with relict forms like sundew and Alpine butterwort, or endemic species like Friuli marsh rocket (*Erucastrum palustre*) and Malinverni's quillwort (*Isoetes malinverniana*).

Proper protection of these last remaining parts of the landscape, which have now almost completely disappeared, is the only way of conserving the species which live in them.



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