

Towards forest management in line with the protection and conservation of biodiversity  
LIFE GoProFor – Final European Conference – 16 to 18 February 2022

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Closing speech – 18 February 2022 – The potential of the LIFE programme for the implementation of training, indicators and tools for forest management within the Natura 2000 network

Thank you Chair,

Good morning ladies and gentlemen,

I'm honoured to be given the opportunity to conclude this very rich final European conference of the LIFE GoProFor project.

This projects comes to a close, so the question now is: "What next?"

This is what has been discussed in the breakout sessions this morning, and we just heard there are lots of ideas for innovation, perspectives for implementation when it comes to developing a forest management that is in line with the protection and conservation of biodiversity. That's very promising and perfectly in line with the huge environmental challenges we are faced with.

Your presentations in the conference also opened up perspectives, and proved once again that the LIFE programme is key for the implementation of nature policies.

That's actually not really news to us, as LIFE has a long history of successes already: the programme turns 30 this year, on 21 May 2022, together with the Habitats Directive and the Natura 2000 network. We will by the way be meeting in Strasbourg next week under the FR Pdcy of the EU to start celebrating with Member States, stakeholder groups and Europeans as a whole. The discussions on 25 February should be streamed and if you're interested in lending an ear, this will be announced on the social media.

But I'm coming back to LIFE and its potential to improve the management of forests in Natura 2000, and more than that, to scale up Close to Nature Forestry practices also outside protected areas.

What stands out clearly is also that developing a system to train and increase the knowledge of Natura 2000 site managers is key for implementation. And what is also perfectly clear is that the LIFE programme has the potential for such development. The GoProFor project proved it, and not only it but also others, whether focusing on forestry or on other training needs. I'd like to mention here the past LIFE EDU project and the current LIFE ENABLE

project, both led by Europarcs. Both aim mainly at developing tailor made courses for Natura 2000 and PA managers. There are seeds for European training networks there too and these projects feature among the LIFE projects that can be inspirational about ways to develop knowledge and skills. The European Commission is also working to support such exchanges between practitioners, stakeholders and authorities: we have a networking programme developed under the Natura 2000 biogeographical process and LIFE GoProFor contributed to it as was mentioned earlier in the Conference.

My colleagues Frank Vassen and Marco Onida presented the very ambitious targets embedded in the EU BDS and the EU Forests Strategy. They touched upon the upcoming EU Nature Restoration Law, which will also match these ambitions, and the needs we have identified to respond to the day's challenges. It goes without saying that implementing them requires that we scale up action. Here again, training and monitoring are in a way the beginning and the end of the virtuous cycles we need to work in.

For them to develop, we still need to raise awareness that they are keys to success. You highlighted it as a priority in the breakout session group on training.

Workforce and capacity must increase not only at the level of landowners, the actors in the forest sector and protected areas management bodies, but also at that of the competent authorities. We need decision bodies to take objectives relating to close to nature forestry on board their own strategies.

For example, we need them to take the identified needs on board, to further define them where they are still missing and to prioritise them. Member States have already designed their Prioritized Action Frameworks for the upcoming multiannual financing period. These are documents that indicate their priorities for actions and financing needs for habitats and species during the next MFF, and they might need revision in view of the EU strategies targets. LIFE is fully part of such identified needs.

In this respect, where LIFE traditional nature projects have proved instrumental to develop and implement operational solutions, LIFE Integrated Projects and the upcoming Strategic Nature Projects will help scaling these up. In addition, a core objective of these large-scale projects is to leverage other funding sources. Which means they can help achieve the objective to increase the share of EU funds dedicated to biodiversity action to 7,5% in 2024 and then 10% yearly.

So LIFE has potential to help mainstreaming biodiversity into EU funds, and this includes integrating a forest management that is in line with the protection and conservation of biodiversity. The biggest EU funding framework concerned is no doubt the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) are also relevant.

These sources can help implement management and conservation action and develop Close to Nature Forestry.

What you also highlighted in the sessions is that we need to bridge the gap between the highly technical scientific levels and the more operational management levels. There,

Horizon Europe can help make a difference. It has fully taken the targets of the EU biodiversity strategy on board the upcoming calls.

To conclude, we are in the conference marking the end of the LIFE GoProFor project, but I take the conference also as the starting point for the further exchanges and upcoming projects GoProFor no doubt fostered.

Thank you.