

The LIFE NatConnect2030 project

The *kick off meeting*, which took place on 14 March 2024 in Milan (Italy), officially started the European Project **Natural connections for Natura2000 in Northern Italy to 2030**, whose acronym is **LIFE NatConnect2030**.

The project was approved under the Call *LIFE-2022-STRAT-two-stage - Strategic Nature and Integrated Projects (SNAP)* and is **one of the 12 projects in which the European Commission has invested EUR 233 million**. This is a LIFE *Strategic Nature Projects* that aims to achieve **biodiversity conservation objectives**, through the development of actions defined by the **Prioritised Action Frameworks 2021-2027 (PAF)** for the Natura 2000 network and at the same time, implement other environment and development plans or strategies adopted at international, national, multi-regional or regional level.

The project, lasting **9 years** (2024-2032), involves **16 partners**:

Leader: Regione Lombardia – DG Territorio e Sistemi Verdi

Partners: Regione Piemonte, Regione Emilia-Romagna, Regione Veneto, Provincia Autonoma di Trento, Autorità di Bacino del fiume Po, Agenzia Interregionale per il fiume Po, WWF Italia, LIPU – Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli, Legambiente Lombardia Onlus, Ente regionale per i servizi all'agricoltura e alle foreste (ERSAF), Fondazione Lombardia per l'ambiente, Ente Parco Regionale Veneto Delta del Po, Ente di Gestione per i Parchi e la Biodiversità - Delta del Po Emilia Romagna, Comunità Ambiente e Consiglio di Bacino Brenta (affiliated)

Objectives and actions

The objective of the project is to consolidate an integrated Natura 2000 network management system to ensure the achievement of the conservation objectives of the EU Habitats and Birds Directives. The project will be pursued through the implementation of a set of actions deemed to be strategic among those identified as priorities in the **5 PAFs** concerned.

Prioritized Action framework 2021-2027 – implementation target				
Lombardia	Emilia-Romagna	Piemonte	Veneto	Trento
60%	52%	75%	53%	70%

The project area, corresponding to 100,000 square kilometers, is home to a rich wildlife and more than 840 Natura 2000 sites and is characterized by the presence of the Alps and the Po River and over 24 million inhabitants (it is one of the most densely populated areas of Europe).

LIFE NatConnect2030 also includes several multi-target and multi-level communication activities, and capacity building actions.

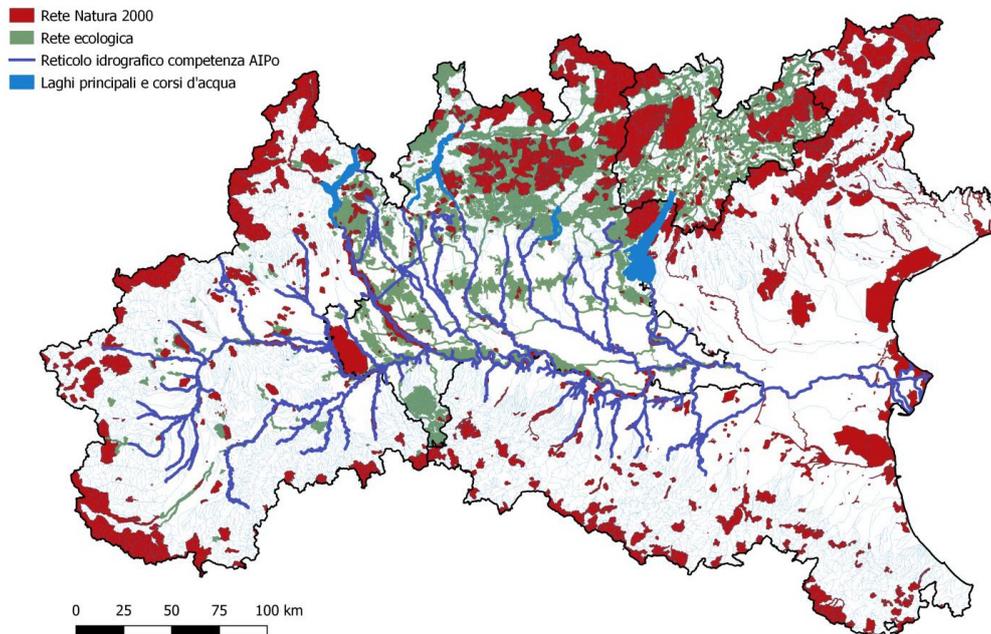
The **5 strategic lines** at the base of the project are:

1. Ecological restoration of habitats and species of conservation interest
2. Strengthening the connection elements of the ecological network
3. Mitigation and adaptation to climate change

4. Reduction of the impact of invasive alien species

5. Strengthening the governance of the Natura 2000 network and of the connection areas

Project area: territory of the Regions involved in the project, with 843 Natura2000 sites, in the Alpine, Continental, Mediterranean and Mediterranean marine biogeographical regions.



Duration: 2024-2032 (9 years, divided in three phases) - start: 1 January 2024

Project budget: over 46 M€

- 60% EU co-financing: about 28 M€
- 40% co-financing from partners: over 17 M€
- Co-funding of Fondazione Cariplo: 1.300.000 €

In addition, the project intends to move about 540 M€ of complementary funds that contribute to the implementation of the PAF of the 5 Regions. These include EAFRD funds (49%), ERDF (15%), Interreg Programme VI-A Italy-Switzerland 2021-2027, the Lombardy National Forestry Strategy, MASE (Ministry for the Environment) for the containment of IAS of Union Interest in Lombardy, the Piano Nazionale Recupero e Resilienza (33%) dedicated to the project "Rinaturazione del Po" and other regional and private funds.

Project organization

The project is organized in **9 Work Packages (WP)** and **61 tasks**

WP 1: Project coordination and management activities

WP 2: Habitat and species restoration

WP 3: Strengthening the ecological connection elements of the Ecological Network

WP 4: Climate change impact reduction

WP 5: IAS impact reduction

WP 6: Strengthening the governance of the Natura 2000 network and of the connection areas

WP 7: Communication and Stakeholder Engagement

WP 8: Sustainability, replicability and exploitation of project results

WP 9: Monitoring, coordination and movement of complementary funds and integration with other policies.

Expected impact

The ambition of LIFE NatConnect2030 is to have an impact at the national and european level by demonstrating the feasibility of implementing 5 PAFs and contributing substantially to the objectives of the *Green Deal*:

- **Expected impact 1:** mobilisation of the funds necessary for the full implementation of the PAF, after the end of the project
- **Expected impact 2:** encouraging, in the long term, an improvement of the conservation status of species and habitats of EU interest and the ecosystem services they provide
- **Expected impact 3:** improvement of the ecological conditions and the connectivity function of the river Po
- **Expected impact 4:** Long-term improvement and strengthening of the role of Regional Biodiversity Observatories in the collection, systemization, analysis and sharing of data on habitats and species of EU importance (Articles 11 and 17 of the Habitats Directive) both inside and outside the Natura 2000 network.

LIFE NatConnect2030, in addition to contributing to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, will contribute to the achievement of several **European policy objectives**, including

- EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030
- European forestry strategy for 2030
- Water Framework Directive 2000/60/EC
- EU Regulation on Invasive Alien Species
- EU climate change adaptation strategy
- EU Nature Restoration Law
- EU Strategy on sustainable tourism
- EU directive on the sustainable use of plant protection products

Activities of the Veneto Region

In Veneto there are **130 Natura 2000 sites**, divided between two biogeographical regions (Alpine and Continental), covering about **412 thousand hectares**, i.e. **22.3% of the region**. Concerning the implementation of the PAF 2021-2027, with CSR funds mainly governance activities are underway, with revisions and updates of conservation areas, habitat cartographies and related standard forms. Thanks to INTERREG funds, measures for the restoration and analysis of ecological connectivity are being implemented, also outside the Natura 2000 Network, as well as actions to mitigate the effects of climate change through the pilot application of payment systems for eco-systemic services (LIFE Brenta 2030, in the river area).

The specific activities envisaged by the Veneto Region PAF will be carried out by the Tourism Department - U.O. Regional Biodiversity and Parks Strategy, and will consist in:

- Activities for the conservation of amphibians and reptiles, with particular reference to *Bombina variegata*,

- Intervention to restore habitat 6210 Semi-natural dry grassland formations and facies covered with bushes on calcareous substrate (*Festuco brometalia*) with considerable orchid flowering (action that will be carried out in the typical vegri of the Regional Park of the Euganean Hills),
- Silvicultural interventions in favour of *Tetrao urogallus* habitats, in collaboration with the Parco delle Dolomiti d'Ampezzo,
- Revision of some Standard Forms of Natura 2000 Sites in the Veneto Region,
- Identification and monitoring of small dolomitic and pre-alpine sites affected by the presence of *Austropotamobius pallipes* and subsequent interventions to protect the species and habitat,
- Organisation of specific training days on SAC conservation objectives and measures for technicians and stakeholders.

Finally, considering that the general objective of "NatConnect2030" is to strengthen the integrated management system of the Natura 2000 Network in order to guarantee the achievement of the conservation objectives of the Habitats and Birds Directives, by improving the coherence of the Natura 2000 Network in a trans-regional context and pursuing the implementation of a set of actions considered strategic among those identified in the PAF, the **Veneto Region** will work in close relation with the **Veneto Regional Natural Park of the Po Delta** (project partner and instrumental body of the Region) and with the **Brenta Basin Council** (affiliated body) for the implementation of ecological upgrading and restoration of ecological connectivity, in the Natura 2000 sites of the Veneto Region.