



After-LIFE Communication Plan

Improved communication, co-operation and
capacity building for preserving biodiversity in
Natura 2000 forests in Hungary
LIFE13 INF/HU/001163

Life in Forests

The objective of the project was to improve the conservation status of Natura 2000 forest sites in Hungary, primarily by fostering co-operation among forest owners and managers, forest authorities, governmental and non-governmental organisations, and local citizens, and by strengthening active communication among these stakeholders. The main aim of the project was to initiate knowledge exchange through efficient stakeholder co-operation in order to reach the objectives of the Natura 2000 programme in a more efficient way.

The project has been implemented under the co-ordination of WWF Hungary in partnership with the Bükk National Park Directorate, the Duna-Ipoly National Park Directorate, the Kiskunság National Park Directorate, the Association of Hungarian Private Forest Owners and Forest Managers, the Hungarian Forestry Association, the Pilisi Parkerdő Zrt, and the Europa Media Non-Profit Ltd.

The Life in Forests project contributed to promoting sustainable forest management practices, halting the loss of biodiversity and to strengthening the conservation status and multifunctionality of European forests.

Project goals

1. **Improving and deepening our existing knowledge** regarding forest habitats and species in the Pannonian ecoregion, and **sharing the acquired knowledge** with the stakeholders working in conservation and forest management in Natura 2000 areas.
2. **Introducing European good practices** that efficiently involve stakeholders and facilitate successful forest management and conservation in Natura 2000 forests in Hungary.
3. **Facilitating co-operation and active communication among stakeholders** in forest management (forest owners, forest managers, conservation professionals etc.) in order to realise sustainable forest management and conservation goals in harmony with the Natura 2000 guidelines.
4. **Integrating conservation considerations in forest planning** and silvicultural practices. Increasing Natura 2000 forest areas where suitable forest management practices are applied.
5. **Promoting the ecological, social, and economic benefits of conscious forest management that follow conservation objectives** among Natura 2000 forest managers.
6. **Facilitating more efficient use of the European Union funds** for conservation and Natura 2000 forest management.



Project data

Title:	Improved communication, co-operation and capacity building for preserving biodiversity in Natura 2000 forests
Reference:	LIFE13 INF/HU/001163
Duration:	01.07.2014-31.03.2019
Total budget:	1,190,753 EUR
EU contribution:	588,78 EUR
Co-financier:	Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture

Target groups

The project originally focused on four target groups:

- forest and conservation professionals;
- forest owners;
- national park professionals;
- forest and conservation authority officials.

Later university students in forest and conservation engineering, and vocational forestry school students were also included in the target groups.

Project results and effects

The project partners provided numerous opportunities for stakeholders to meet. The objectives of these meetings included thinking together to find solutions to challenges, sharing experiences, and learning about best practices from Hungary and abroad. Furthermore, a knowledge repository, different publications, and a Forest Planning Toolkit were prepared. These outputs contribute to the dissemination of information about close-to-nature forest management practices among the broader public.

The events, meetings and series of publications during the Life in Forests Project have all contributed to two fundamental objectives: to improve the views on, and the acceptance of the Natura 2000 network in Hungary; and to raise awareness about, and promote close-to-nature forest management. The success of the project was measured through an impact assessment, where interviews were conducted with representatives of the consortium partners, experts involved in the project, and with participants of the various project events – many of whom also belong to the immediate target groups. The major findings were the followings:

1. The project partners strongly valued that the different representatives of the forestry and conservation sector managed to come together and take the first steps towards closer co-operation. During these discussions, a group of specialists with different professional backgrounds (private forest owners, private- and state forest managers, forestry authorities and conservation specialists) emerged with whom it is possible to work together in the future.
2. External experts contributing to the project also considered the results of this long overdue co-operation as positive. They recommend introducing the project publications to universities and professional fora as a baseline for further discussions after the project. However, they pointed out that it would be important to also develop solutions for the identified key problems (black locust, game damage, and invasive species). Due to limited time and resources, this was not possible during the project.
3. Private forest managers participating in the events said that they also considered the co-operation to be a success. Many of them stayed in touch with the colleagues they had gotten to know during the project. They especially valued that nearly all active private forest managers were present at one of the events. Their feedback on the programmes was positive: they could acquire new knowledge e.g. about natural dynamics-based forest management or about conservation forest management. They were also able to strengthen their existing knowledge.
4. National park experts stated that a new approach was born during the project: one that takes conservation aspects more into account during the preparation of forest management plans (e.g. conservation authorities have the right to evaluate these plans). However, the legislative framework slows down and hampers the positive trends.
5. The project allowed for creating a knowledge repository that forest managers and conservation professionals can use to learn more about the 13 Natura 2000 forest habitats of Community importance and the 10 species groups connected to forests, and about close-to-nature forest management. We shared good practices from the European Union regarding Natura 2000 forest management and methods of involving affected stakeholders with the most important decision makers and key experts in Hungarian forest management. Thanks to the project, the forest managers working in Natura 2000 forests showed an increased commitment towards the desirable silvicultural practices and an increased knowledge about close-to-nature forest management.
6. Several actions helped sharing information about the available European Union funds and their use. Forest managers and other professionals working in Natura 2000 areas could get acquainted with the available opportunities, and they could get help with drawing the funds as well. More than 800 people participated on the Natura 2000 information days, and an e-learning course with 4 modules and 12 lessons about funding opportunities was also available.
7. Since almost all participants and organisers would like to continue this work in some form, the success of the project can also be measured by the willingness for future co-operation.

After-LIFE Communications Plan

The goal of the After-LIFE Communication Plan is to show how we are planning to continue with the communication during the years after the project's end. Our aim is to continue the professional discourse with the target groups, and remind them to use the tools and publications prepared during the project. We pay specific attention to support the professional education of vocational forestry school students with the help of these publications, and to inform the public through specific publications and an animated film series "Once in a forest... - Mi fán terem az erdő?" prepared for non-professionals.

Our communication emphasizes where we can still improve our outreach. We would like to highlight the promotion of the "Deadwood – Living Forests" booklet, the Forest Planning Toolkit and the e-learning modules, which are of key importance in the near future. We plan to widely promote the animated film series among the professional and non-professional audiences as well.

1. Short evaluation of the communication strategy's main target groups

- We faced difficulties with the limited online reachability of our target groups, so we did not create a Facebook site for the project. Instead, we decided to use personal connections and good examples. We cooperated with the Association of Hungarian Private Forest Owners and Forest Managers to reach the widest possible potential candidates for the Living Forest Award.
- We needed to reach out to the target groups several times, because they reacted more slowly and with more difficulties than we expected. These groups are very critical towards communication materials, and high professional quality is very important for them.
- Professional media plays a key role in the outreach. As the Hungarian Forestry Association is part of the project partnership, we could use their journal, the "Erdészeti Lapok" as our main communication channel.
- Online presence stays important, as the publications and other materials created during the project are only online fully available. The project website is important because the forestry university and vocational school students can be best reached online. Lastly, the animated film series prepared by the Bükk National Park Directorate is also online disseminated. The series are published on the websites of the project, project partners and the WWF Hungary, as well as on social media and other digital channels (YouTube and Facebook).



Project website

During the entire duration of the project, we registered more than 50 000 visits; most visitors were searching for the conferences and downloadable materials. This is an excellent result considering that most of our target groups spend limited time online, and their media consumption habits also show less preference for online materials.

Conferences, presentations, workshops, and field programmes



- The **“Presentation series for natural forests”** was organised for students of the University of Sopron, with 60-80 students/presentation. The success shows that professional students are interested in further information about Natura 2000, and about forest management practices for conservation.
- **15 field trips (8 in Hungary and 7 abroad)** were organised to visit forest managers applying good practices. Each excursion had 30-50 participants on average.
- **Information days for vocational forestry school students** organised by the Association of Hungarian Private Forest Owners and Forest Managers and WWF Hungary to introduce the Natura 2000 network and close-to-nature forest management for about 200 students in four vocational forestry schools in Hungary.
- **4 regional workshops for managers of protected areas:** during these workshops we discussed professional opinions regarding close-to-nature forest management in Natura 2000 forests, e.g. acceptable economic activities and necessary limitations. More than 120 people participated in the workshops: conservation and forestry professionals, scientists, representatives of authorities and the ministry.
- **Natura 2000 information days** organised with the coordination of the Association of Hungarian Private Forest Owners and Forest Managers for Natura 2000 forest owners, forest managers and licenced foresters in 15 different places in Hungary between September 2015 and April 2016, with more than 800 participants. The presentations can be found on the project website.
- **6 courses on close-to-nature forest management and selective marking in practice** in October-November 2017. The field practices aimed to teach forest professionals how to evaluate and mark trees for logging selectively. The practice was aided by a marteloscope educational site where the nearly 300 participants could learn about selective marking and harvesting that takes conservation aspects into account.



- **10 roundtable discussions** with more than 180 participants: the aim of the discussions organised by the Hungarian Forestry Association was to understand the problems experienced by licenced foresters and forest managers, and to facilitate exchange of experiences. Conservation managers, officials from forest authorities and state forestries were participating on these events. Topics included the general aim of Natura 2000 forests and the different views regarding forest management in Natura 2000 forests.
- **Living Forest international conference** with more than 200 participants: the focus of the conference was the discussion and evaluation of forest management experiences in Natura 2000 forests. The high quality of presentations by Hungarian and foreign speakers made the conference a forum where different stakeholders could have a meaningful discussion regarding forest management. The host of the event was the Faculty of Forestry of the University of Sopron, the Alma Mater of the Hungarian forest engineer training, which added to the success of the conference.
- **Project ending conference:** participants could get acquainted with the project's professional background, its achieved results and effects, and its perspectives. The animated discourse after the presentations further confirmed that although the viewpoints of different stakeholders are often conflicting, they all agree that reaching the Natura 2000 goals is a common task that can only be achieved through co-operation and continuous discourse. The conference was organised on 16 November 2018 with 70 participants.



Online materials

- A **4-module e-learning course**, available on the project website.
- **Natura 2000 Forest Planning Toolkit**, available on the project website. The toolkit explains the guidelines prepared with the help of affected stakeholders, and it helps realising them in practice.
- **“Once in a forest... - Mi fán terem az erdő?”** – 6-episode animated film series for non-professionals that explains the principles of forest management in Natura 2000 forests.
- **Online Information Hub**: we improved the **natura.2000.hu** website where one can find all the materials published during the project. There is also a “Natura 2000 Finder”, which makes it possible to search for Natura 2000 sites by map, by settlement name, or by species or habitats of community interest.
- **Two media excursions** for representatives of green and professional media. Five and four media participated on these events respectively, e.g. MTVA (Hungarian Media Services and Support Trust Fund), Greenfo, Turista Magazin.

All materials and presentations are uploaded on the regularly updated project website, and from there one can access the e-learning course, the Forest Planning Toolkit and the “Once in a forest... - Mi fán terem az erdő?” animated film series as well.

The online materials were less popular than the printed ones (still with 800 visitors on the e-learning page), so we plan to promote them even after closing the project.

Living Forest Award

The Living Forest Award was announced for private forest managers working in Natura 2000 areas. The exemplary achievements of the five winners were presented in the short movie “Our living forest”.

Media communication

The project appeared 130 times in the professional and non-professional media, through which we reached approximately 1.6 million people, including forestry professionals.



3. Short overview of the on-going dissemination activities (products and results)

In November 2018 we talked about the Living Forest Award in a national TV channel during a 25-minute studio talk, through which we reached about 500 000 people.

The “Once in a forest...- Mi fán terem az erdő?” animated film series was published via the Bükk National Park Directorate’s own and the WWF Hungary’s social media channels (YouTube and Facebook) as well. The series will be further promoted in the next couple of months of 2019 for the general public, and we will sent its links for the 3000 professionals who participated in the project.

Promoting the “Once in a forest...- Mi fán terem az erdő?” animated film series:

- Bükk National Park Directorate newsletter – Responsible: Bükk National Park, timing: March 2019
- WWF Hungary newsletter – responsible: WWF Hungary, timing: March 2019
- Sharing the YouTube links with the green and professional media, short press release – Responsible: WWF Hungary, timing: March 2019
- Linking the series and publishing a short communication on the project partners’ websites – Responsible: WWF Hungary and partners, timing: March 2019

The preparation of the handbook “Forest Management and Silviculture in Natura 2000 areas” is done. The printed copies and the links of the online versions will be sent to the 3000 professionals who participated in the project, the University of Sopron, and the vocational forestry schools.

The link to the Life in Forests project’s online summary will be sent to the 3000 professionals who participated in the project, and the European Union decision makers will receive printed copies in English as well.

The links to the Forest Planning Toolkit will be sent to the 3000 professionals who participated in the project, the University of Sopron, and the vocational forestry schools.

The e-learning materials will be repeatedly promoted among the 3000 professionals who participated in the project, and the university and vocational school students in direct emails.



4. Overview of the planned dissemination activities and products

After closing the project, we will maintain the project website with all the information, publications and e-learning materials for 5 years. The professional content of the website will not be changed or amended.

Further **articles** will be published in the professional journals:

- An evaluating article in the “Erdészeti Lapok” after closing the project, or on its one year anniversary – Responsible: WWF Hungary, partner: Hungarian Forestry Association, timing: 2020
- Book review: „Forest Management and Silviculture in Natura 2000 areas” – Responsible: WWF Hungary, timing: June 2019
- Coverage about the Forest Planning Toolkit in the “Erdészeti Lapok” – responsible: WWF Hungary, partner: Hungarian Forestry Association, timing: 2019

Promoting the **“Once in a forest... - Mi fán terem az erdő?”** animated film series:

- Sharing the YouTube links of the series with the 3000 professionals who participated the project, the students and professors of the Faculty of Forestry, University of Sopron and with the vocational forestry schools (e-mail) – Responsible: WWF Hungary, timing: May 2019
- Ozone TV, 25-minute studio discussion – Responsible: WWF Hungary, timing: May 2019
- The series is presented out-of-competition at the International Nature Film Festival Gödöllő – Responsible: WWF Hungary, timing: May 2019
- WWF Magazine – Responsible: WWF Hungary, timing: November-December 2019

Promoting the **“Deadwood – Living Forests”** booklet:

- Online game using Google Forms, especially for forestry students. The prizes are the “Forest Management and Silviculture in Natura 2000 areas” handbook, the Life in Forests report, and the leftovers neck gaiters made during the project; the winners are to be selected randomly – Responsible: WWF Hungary, Európa Média, timing: autumn 2019
- Donating 50-50 copies of the leftover brochures to vocational forestry schools, and 100 copies to forestry schools – Responsible: WWF Hungary, Association of Hungarian Private Forest Owners and Forest Managers, timing: autumn 2019 – spring 2020



Promoting the “Life in Forests” summary report:

- Donating the leftover printed copies to the University of Sopron and to vocational forestry school students – Responsible: WWF Hungary, Association of Hungarian Private Forest Owners and Forest Managers, timing: 2019

Marteloscope site

- The Bükk National Park Directorate maintains the site and receives the groups who signed up for selection marking practice – Responsible: Bükk National Park Directorate, timing: continuous
- Coverage in the professional media – Responsible: Bükk National Park Directorate, timing: autumn 2019 or later when statistics are available about the use of the site.

Information days in vocational forestry schools

- The Association of Hungarian Private Forest Owners and Forest Managers continues organising information days in four vocational forestry schools. We managed to organise these events already during three years, out of which the ones in spring 2018 in the frame of the LIFE project. Two out of the four or five presentations concern the management requirements of Natura 2000 sites, and continuous cover forest management based on natural processes. The presentation series are part of the Association’s programme in 2019, and we plan to continue like this in the coming years as well.

“Rosalia handbooks – Natura 2000 handbook for forest managers” 1000 copies. The distribution and promotion for the target groups are planned via the project partners’ networks – Responsible: DINPI, timing: 2019

Policy summary of the project results and effects for the Hungarian and EU decision makers, responsible: WWF Hungary, timing: June 2019

