LIFE Project Number

LIFE18 IPE/EE/000007

Interim Report

Covering the project activities from 01/07/2022[1] to 31/12/2024 corresponding to Phase II

Reporting Date[2]

31/03/2025

LIFE PROJECT NAME or Acronym

LIFE IP ForEst&FarmLand

Project Data

Project location:	Republic of Estonia
Project start date:	01/01/2020
Project end date:	31/12/2029
Total budget:	19 561 784 €
EU contribution:	11 611 434 €
(%) of eligible costs:	59,36%

Data Beneficiary

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[1] For the first Interim report and Final report: Project start date; for the second and subsequent Interim reports: Start date of the Phase reported

[2] Include the reporting date as foreseen in part C2 of Annex II of the Grant Agreement

Package completeness and correctness check

Obligatory elements	**✓ or N/A**
Technical report	
The correct latest template for the type of project (i.e. integrated project) has been followed and all sections have been filled in, in English.	✓
Index of deliverables with short description annexed, in English.	✓
Interim report: Covers the phase concluded; Deliverables due in the phase being reported on (or due in previous phase(s) and not yet submitted) annexed. Final report: Covers the entire project duration (see instructions on exceptions to this in next page); Deliverables not already submitted with the Interim reports annexed including the Layman's report and after-LIFE plan. Deliverables in language(s) other than English include a summary in English.	✓
Financial report	
The reporting period in the financial and technical reports is the same; the period corresponds to the duration of the phase being reported on. For the Final report, an additional consolidated financial statement covering the entire project duration is included. In the case of corrections / changes to costs submitted in a previous period: • An updated financial statement for the previous period is provided with the changes highlighted in a different colour; • The difference (+ or -) per cost category is included in the financial statement of the new period in the related cost category at the bottom in one single line 'changes to financial statement XX/XX/XX – XX/XX/XX'; • The auditor has validated the changes (if needed); • Explanations on the changes are provided in section 9 of the technical report.	✓
Consolidated Financial Statement with all 5 forms duly filled in and signed and dated. *Preferred: electronic version signed with a Qualified Electronic Signature + full Excel file* *Alternatively, a pdf of the blue-ink signed* consolidated financial statement + full Excel files (the originally signed document should be kept by beneficiary in case of future audit).*	✓
Financial Statement(s) of the Coordinating Beneficiary, of each Associated Beneficiary and of each affiliate (if involved), with all forms duly filled in. The Financial Statement(s) of Beneficiaries with affiliate(s) include the total cost of each affiliate in 1 line per cost category. *Preferred: electronic version signed **by each beneficiary** with a Qualified Electronic Signature + full Excel files. Alternatively, a pdf of the blue-ink signed* financial statement(s) + full Excel files (the originally signed documents should be kept by beneficiary in case of future audit).*	✓
Names and other data (e.g. bank account) are correct and consistent with the Grant Agreement / across the different forms, and amounts are consistent across the different forms (e.g. figures from the individual statements are the same as those reported in the consolidated statement).	✓
Beneficiary's certificate(s) included for beneficiaries claiming 100% cost for durable goods. *Preferred: electronic version signed with a Qualified Electronic Signature* *Alternatively, a pdf of the blue-ink signed* beneficiary certificate(s) (the originally signed documents should be kept by beneficiary in case of future audit).*	**N/A**
Certificate(s) on financial statement (if required, i.e. for beneficiaries with EU contribution ≥750,000 €) once the cumulative amount of payment requests reaches 325,000 €). *Preferred: electronic version signed with a Qualified Electronic Signature Alternatively, a pdf of the blue-ink signed* certificate(s) on financial statement (the originally signed documents should be kept by beneficiary in case of future audit).*	✓
Other checks	
Clarifications and supporting documents requested in previous letters from the Agency.	✓
This table, page 2 of the Interim / Final report, is completed - each tick box is filled in.	✓

**original signature by a legal or statutory representative of the beneficiary / affiliate concerned*

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List of Annexes

List of Deliverables (inserted into BUTLER)

Wet Forests Action Plan	(Action A.1 Task 1)
Guideline for Stakeholders (explanatory note)	(Action A.3 Task 1)
Guideline for Consultants	(Action A.3 Task 1)
Report on Updated Natura2000 Private Forest Support	(Action A.5 Task 1)
Peterna-Laashoone Restoration Project	(Action A.6 Task 1)
Restoration Plans for Coastal Meadows	(Action A.6 Task 4)
Restoration Plans for Coastal Meadows	(Action A.6 Task 4)
Training System	(Action A.8 Task1)
Media Plan 2024	(Action A.9)
Project Communication and Participation Strategy	(Action A.9)
Stakeholders Engagement Report	(Action C.3 Task 1)
Monitoring Scheme on Wet Forests	(Action D.1 related to C.1)
Monitoring Scheme on Coastal Meadows and Semi-Natural Grasslands	(Action D.1 related to C.2)
Monitoring Scheme on Small Waterbodies	(Action D.1 related to C.3)
LIFE-IP project website www.loodusrikaseesti.ee	(Action E.1 Task 1)
Project rollups ee_en 1000x2000	(Action E.1 Task 2)
The website of protected areas www.kaitsealad.ee	(Action E.3 Task 4)
Certificates on financial statements	(Action F.4)

Abbreviations

MoC	Ministry of Climate of Republic of Estonia (coordinating beneficiary)
EB	Environmental Board (associated beneficiary)
KEMIT	Information Technology Centre of the Ministry of Climate (associated beneficiary)
RMK	State Forest Management Centre (associated beneficiary)
MoRA	Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture (associated beneficiary)
EOÜ	Eesti Ornitoloogiaühing / Birdlife Estonia (associated beneficiary)
UT	University of Tartu (associated beneficiary)
TLU	Tallinn University (associated beneficiary)
EIC	Environmental Investment Centre (associated beneficiary)
EEML	Estonian Private Forest Union (associated beneficiary)
SIUTS	MTÜ Siuts (associated beneficiary)
CB	Coordinated beneficiary
AB	Associated beneficiaries
EMT	External Monitoring Team
SC	Steering Committee
Agency	CINEA
ELF	Estonian Fund for Nature
PFC	Private Forest Centre
ARIB	Agricultural Registers and Information Board
PAF	Prioritized Action Framework for NATURA 2000 in Estonia for the Multiannual Financial Framework period 2021-2027
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy

1. Project Summary

The main objective of the LIFE-IP project *"Comprehensive management of forest and farming landscapes to improve the conservation status of Natura 2000 habitats and species"* is to implement the parts of the "Prioritized Action Framework for NATURA 2000 in Estonia for the Multiannual Financial Framework period 2021-2027" (PAF) connected to forest and agricultural land.

Project activities take place all over Estonia, the exact project sites are selected during the implementation of project actions. The duration of the project is ten years (2020-2029), which is divided into four phases of two and half years. This report covers the second phase of the project.

Progress summary

When implementing plans, projects and various activities sustainable financing is needed and necessary budget secured. The budget of the LIFE-IP project is guaranteed (both EU and own contribution) and, being in the middle of the project implementation, it can be confirmed that all project activities can be carried out within the scope and budget agreed in the Grant Agreement.

The same can be confirmed about the complementary actions. As illustrated in the table "Estonia PAF implementation - funding status" (Annex 3), majority of the complementary actions related to the project have the status of "funding secured". The budget for the remaining actions is partly secured. However, it is important to note that these are mainly measures related to communication, involvement and awareness raising. These are the activities that could always be done more and following this logic, the budget status is also partly.

PILLAR OF THE PLAN: E.1. Horizontal measures and administrative costs related to Natura 2000. SUB-THEMES E.1.1. Site designation and management planning; E.1.2. Site administration and communication with stakeholders; E.1.3. Monitoring and reporting; E.1.5. Natura 2000-related communication and awareness raising measures, education and visitor access

There are no quantitative objectives in this PAF pillar and the main focus of the project is on results that contribute to the achievement of PAF objectives. In the 2nd phase of the project, the action plan for wet forest was completed (but not adopted yet) and the action plan for dry forest is almost completed (but delayed).

The project website is frequently visited and the renewal of the protected areas website was completed. The development of information system (EELIS) is on schedule and bird app "Siuts" development is ahead of schedule. In terms of general awareness raising and engagement, the results of the project are better than was expected. The popularity of the mentioned project website, three study trips and 28 info-days were organised in the second phase (overall project target 4 and 25), implementation of the training system started, in the 2nd phase 18 LIFE and other project events were attended (overall target 20), six working camps were organised, etc.

PILLAR OF THE PLAN: E.2 Site-related maintenance and restoration measures, within and beyond Natura 2000. SUB-THEME OF THE PLAN: E.2.4. Grasslands

Renewal and improvement of semi-natural grasslands support schemes are generally proceeding as planned. The consultation system was created in the 1st phase and it is working so well that it is planned to continue with the system at least until the end of the project (it was originally plan to test it until 2026). The PAF aims to restore 10 000 ha (of which project 1000ha) and increase the area under management to 50 000 ha. The project has restored 346 ha (on schedule), of which 51 ha in the 2nd phase. Ca 6000 ha have been restored with complementary action. The total managed area is ca 42 000 ha. The goal of 50 000 ha may not be realistic, however, as some areas will also fall out of management (farmers quitting due to age, difficulty in selling cattle, low price of cattle). Unfortunately, these are problems that the project cannot directly address. What the project can do, is to find new managers (the task of consultation system) and sometimes it works.

The biggest change in the 2nd phase was the transition from subsidies to procurements, because the Agency considered subsidies ineligible costs. The transition to a procurement-based implementation scheme has revealed several challenges. The procurement process is significantly more time-consuming and costly compared to the national subsidy scheme. Many potential restoration partners have been reluctant to participate in the procurement process, perceiving it as overly complex and bureaucratic. However, the restoration of 1000 ha by the project is still realistic.

SUB-THEME OF THE PLAN: *additional measures beyond Natura 2000 (wider green infrastructure measures)

Developing biodiversity friendly support schemes in agricultural land and interventions (grassland stripes, rocky islands, planted hedgerows) started in the 2nd phase and the actions proceeding as planned.

SUB-THEME OF THE PLAN: E.2.6. Woodlands and forests

Restoration of wet forest starts with delay in 2025, but most of the restoration will be completed by the deadline. PAF target is 6 000 ha, of which project restores 3 500 ha. The PAF target is already achieved and ca 7 500 ha have been restored as a complementary activity.

Restoration of dry forests is about two years behind schedule and is the project action that is the most behind schedule. The same applies to the complementary action. PAF target is 2 000 ha, of which project will restore 500 ha. No restoration made to date, it starts in 2026. This delay will not affect negatively other project actions (including monitoring).

The project aim is to develop new methodology for compensating Natura 2000 restrictions to the forest owners and active forest measures. In 2024, the focus at was on compensations (was the priority of the government) and a new methodology was developed before the deadline. As a first step the state increased compensations based on new methodology. Development of active forest measures is therefore a little behind schedule.

One of the PAF target is to purchase strictly protected private land for the state. The target is 1 500 ha, of which 500 ha will be purchased by the project. Project has purchased 382 ha (in the 2nd phase 230) and in total 1 235 ha have been purchased (project plus complementary).

PILLAR OF THE PLAN: E.3. Additional species-specific measures not related to specific ecosystems or habitats. SUB-THEME OF THE PLAN: E.3.1. Species-specific measures and programmes not covered elsewhere

The pollinator action plan is behind the schedule. From the project`s goal of restoring 100 small waterbodies, 69 are restored but the goal of the PAF, 60 waterbodies to be restored, is achieved. PAF target for the eradication of invasive alien species is 3 000 ha and eradication was carried out on 2 500 ha in 2024. Project aim is to test novel eradication methods on 4 species and testing began in the 2nd phase.

The work arrangements of the project is in place and functional. The project management teams (Lead Team, Monitoring Team, Management Team, Steering Committee) and the cooperation between beneficiaries are functioning well. Various NGOs and stakeholders are actively involved in the project (ELF, a key organisation in the field of nature conservation; Union of Semi-Natural Grassland Managers; Estonian Private Forest Union; Centre of Estonian Rural Research).

During the second phase of the project, two amendment requests were prepared and submitted to the Agency. First Amendment Request was submitted on 23/08/2022 and the Amendment no 1 to Grant Agreement was signed in January 2023. In accordance with the agreement with the Agency, the 1st Interim Report was submitted after that. Second Amendment Request was submitted on 22/04/2024 and Amendment no 2 to Grant Agreement was signed in March 2025. This is also one of the reasons why the submission of the 2nd Interim Report delayed. A more detailed overview of the changes is provided in the Chapters 3. Administrative part (administrative changes) and in Chapter 9.1 Summary of Cost incurred (financial changes). Both Annex 1 “Deliverable and Milestones Schedule” and Annex 2 “Timetable” have been updated according to the latest approved changes considering the deadlines that can be met.

Project contribution and relationship to policy

The implementation of project actions further contribute to the objectives of several policies and plans (“Estonian Environmental Strategy 2030”, “Climate Change Adaptation Development Plan until 2030”, EU Birds Directive and Habitats Directive, EU Restoration Directive.

The project also plays an important role in the design of nature conservation policies and the preparation of different plans. The project staff and officials associated with the project participating in the drafting of several policies, laws and plans, for example Nature Conservation Law, Estonian Forestry Law, Nature Restoration Regulation, etc.

However, it should be mentioned that the project is taking place in quite turbulent times. While the start of the project was affected by Covid-19, then now we are influenced by the full-scale war in Ukraine. The focus of the Estonian state has been on improving its defence capabilities, and several other societal aspects, incl. nature protection, have been left behind.

In addition, what's mentioned above, the government has been extremely unstable. Six environment ministers have changed during the five years of the project. The Ministry of the Environment has been merged with the Ministry of Economic Affairs and is now called the Ministry of Climate. Priorities within the ministry have changed. All these changes have led to a situation where there is no certainty in nature conservation policy.

The 30/70 rule is now a new approach to nature conservation. It means that 30% of Estonia is under protection and 70% is managed. The key questions are what protection means and what rules apply to the managed area. For example, to what extent management is allowed in the limited management zones (protected area where economic activities are permitted, taking account of the restrictions provided by Nature Conservation Act). The project actively participates in these discussions and debates at different levels (officials, researches and practitioners, all of whom are represented in the project teams).

2. Project relation to the Plan

The project is implemented to fulfil part of the *"Prioritized Action Framework for NATURA 2000 in Estonia for the Multiannual Financial Framework period 2021-2027"* (PAF). While the PAF has 25 sub-themes and 119 measures, the LIFE IP project covers eight sub-themes and 26 measures, which are located under three pillars. 26 measures of the PAF related to the project can be divided into three groups:

- First, these where the PAF measure and project action completely overlap (for example compiling an action plan for pollinators, PAF E.3.1. measure 5 and project Action A.2).
- Secondly, these where the project action covers part of the PAF goal (for example restoration of wet forests, PAF E.2.6 measure 3 goal is 6000 ha and the project Action C.1 Task 1 goal is 3500 ha). In this case, the project helps to fulfil the objectives of the PAF both directly (Action A.1 Task 1, action plan for wet forest habitat types and Action C.1 Task 1, restoration of wet forest ecosystems) and through complementary actions.
- The third are PAF measures, which do not directly overlap with the project's actions, but project contributes to their implementation (for example the management of semi-natural grasslands, PAF E.2.4 measure 2). The project does not maintain semi-natural habitats, but it restores them (Action C.2 Task 1), which is a precondition for the maintenance of areas. Preparation of the new PAF 2028+ is also task of the project (Action F.3).

The Pillar approach was not used during the project application preparation. According to the Agency's recommendation, grouping of the project actions according to the PAF structure was made. The Pillar structure was prepared in cooperation with EMT and sent to the Agency in 2021.

Relationship between Plan (PAF) and LIFE IP objectives

Pillar/Theme/Measure of the Plan	**LIFE IP objective***	**Supporting actions within the LIFE IP**	**Supporting complementary action**
PILLAR OF THE PLAN: E.1. Horizontal measures and administrative costs related to Natura 2000			
E.1.1. Site designation and management planning			
6. Compiling and updating action plans for protected habitats	1	A.1 (Task 1,2,3)	CA01
E.1.2. Site administration and communication with the stakeholders			
1. Better involvement of local communities in nature conservation	3	E.3 (Task 2,3)	CA02
2. Development of information systems	2	C.6	CA03
8. Increasing capacity (cooperation and performance) of administration	3	A.7 (Task 1,2,3), A.8 (Task 1)	CA02
E.1.3. Monitoring and reporting			
4. Assessment of conservation measures' effectiveness	1	D.1, D.2 (Task 1,2), D3	CA04
E.1.5. Natura 2000 related communication and awareness raising measures, education and visitor access			
7. Development of IT solutions, smart applications, websites	2	E.1 (Task 1), E.3 (Task 4), E.4 (Task 3)	CA02
8. Compilation of information materials	3	E.1 (Task 2,3,4,5,6), E.4 (Task 1,2), E.6	CA02
9. Training and involvement of volunteers, incl. conservation camps	3	E.3 (Task 1)	CA02
10. General awareness raising and behavioural change	3	A.9, E.2 (Task 1,2), E.5 (Task 1,2), F.2	CA02

PILLAR OF THE PLAN: E.2. Site-related maintenance and restoration measures, within and beyond Natura 2000			
E.2.4. Grasslands			
1. Improving the support scheme for the management of semi-natural grasslands	1	A.3 (Task 2)	CA05
2. Management of semi-natural grasslands	1	-	CA05
3. Restoration of semi-natural grasslands (average restoration cost 2500 euros)	1	A.6 (Task 4), C.2 (Task 1,2)	CA05
4. Making the restoration and management schemes of semi-natural grasslands more applicant-friendly	1	A.3 (Task 2)	CA05
5. Developing a recognition scheme for managers of semi-natural grasslands	1	A.3 (Task 2)	CA05
11. Creating a counselling system for management of semi-natural grasslands	1	A.3 (Task 1)	CA05
*additional measures beyond Natura 2000 (wider green infrastructure measures)			
2. Developing biodiversity friendly support schemes in agricultural land	1	A.4, C.3 (Task 1)	CA06
3. Implementing biodiversity friendly support schemes	1	A.4, C.3 (Task 1)	CA06
4. Diversification of agricultural landscape	1	C.3 (Task 1)	CA06
E.2.6. Woodlands and forests			
1. Restoring the structure of forest habitat types (2180, *9010, *9020, 9050, 9060, *9180)	1	A.6 (Task 3), C.1 (Task 2)	CA07
3. Restoring wet forest water regime (*9080, *91D0, *91E0, 91F0, protected drained peatland forest)	1	A.6 Task (1,2), C.1 (Task 1)	CA07
4. Compensations of income loss for private forest owners	1	-	CA07
5. Developing and implementing active forest conservation support scheme	1	A.5 (Task 1,2)	CA07
7. Purchasing land with strict conservation restrictions for the state	1	C.5	CA07
PILLAR OF THE PLAN: E.3. Additional species-specific measures not related to specific ecosystems or habitats			
E.3.1. Species-specific measures and programmes not covered elsewhere			
1. Eradication of invasive alien species	1	C.4	CA08
5. Compiling an action plan for pollinators	1	A.2	CA09
6. Restoration of habitats suitable for small water body species	1	C.3 (Task 2)	CA10

*LIFE IP objectives:

(1) Improving the conservation status of forest and farmland habitats and species to achieve results benefiting the whole ecosystems such as:

* forest habitats *9010, *9020, 9050, 9060, *9080, *91D0, *91E0, 91F0;
* grassland habitats *1630, (*)6210, *6270, *6280, 6450, *6530, 9070, 7230;
* forest species such as woodpeckers, black stork, eagles, dragonflies, amphibians, etc;
* birds and other species related to grasslands and arable land;
* pollinators;
* lessening the impacts of invasive alien species by controlling the following species Fallopia sp (Fallopia japonica, F. sachalinensis, Fallopia x bohemica), Solidago sp (Solidago canadensis, S. gigantea), Symphoricarpos albus and Sorbaria sorbifolia.

(2) Improving conservation practices and collaboration between administrative authorities:

* cross-sectoral harmonization of data management;
* harmonized practices and innovative tools for authorities.

(3) Raising awareness and capacity of main stakeholders and general public including using innovative tools and solutions

3. Administrative part

The project's coordinating beneficiary is Estonian Ministry of Climate (MoC). Associated beneficiaries are state institutions (MoRA, EB, KEMIT), a state foundation (EIC), a profit-making state agency (RMK), universities (UT and TLU) and NGOs (EOÜ, EEML, SIUTS). This composition of beneficiaries includes the formulation and implementation of nature conservation policy, a research-based approach and the participation of the nature conservation practitioners, private sector and stakeholders, which provides a good basis for achieving the objectives of the project and implementing its activities.

Partnership agreements were prepared by the project managers together with MoC lawyers at the beginning of 2020 and agreements were signed in April-May 2020. A partnership agreement was signed with MTÜ SIUTS in March 2023, after the Agency had approved the inclusion of a new beneficiary. All beneficiaries are guided in their work by the Grant Agreement, partnership agreements, state laws, internal rules of beneficiaries and guidance by project managers.

There are three general project managers working in the MoC. Project manager Voldemar Rannap and deputy manager/communication specialist Kaidi Tingas have led the project from the beginning. Financial manager, who was hired in 2021 quit her job in August 2022. In June 2023 new deputy manager Kaidi Silm was hired. After that the work was reorganised and tasks divided between managers again. Voldemar Rannap is responsible for project overall management, financial topics and forest issues. Kaidi Silm is responsible for semi-natural grasslands and agricultural actions. In addition, she is organising project events and deals with international cooperation. Kaidi Tingas is responsible for communication and participation. Project managers are involved in the implementation of all actions (key meetings, fieldwork, reporting, etc.). In January 2022, a website administrator Jürg Samel was hired and he continues his work.

Beneficiaries have their respective project managers who coordinate the work of beneficiary working groups and experts, prepare contracts and progress reports, deal with financial matters and documents, act as liaisons in inter-beneficiary communication.

Project Lead Team in MoC consists of the project managers (Voldemar Rannap, Kaidi Tingas, Kaidi Silm). The extended Lead Team includes employees of the MoC biodiversity conservation department. Each employee is responsible for one or several project topics corresponding to their specific area of expertise. The extended Lead Team was formed on 02/03/2020. Project managers consult the officials as needed in the day-to-day handling of issues. Each year, meetings are held with all Lead Team members.

The project's management body is the **Management Team**, made up of representatives of all beneficiaries. Management Team meetings have two major objectives: firstly, to discuss all management-related aspects together, and secondly, to update all beneficiaries on progress with various actions, including to find common solutions to any problems that have emerged. Management Team was formed on 14/02/2020. More information can be found in the description of action F.1 (chapter 6.3).

Steering Committee was formed in the autumn of 2020. It includes representatives and key specialists from different fields. The list of committee members is given in Annex 4. More detailed overview in the description of action is in F.1.(Chapter 6.3).

Associated beneficiaries are autonomous in their work and responsible for the implementation of their actions. They organize their work on their own but in coordination with the coordinating beneficiary, who is also constantly monitoring the progress of actions. The associated beneficiaries submit progress reports to the MoC according to the progress of the actions and as needed (meetings of the Management Team, Steering Committee and the EMT, the project reports). The MoC conducts its running checks by participating in working groups. Each beneficiary completes financial reports independently and submits them to MoC together with all documents three times a year (January, May, September). Additional financial reports with documents are also submitted as needed (for EMT meetings, preparing project reports). Finances are discussed in further detail in chapter 9: Comments on the financial report. Beneficiaries store all reports and original documents in accordance with their own internal and accounting rules. In addition, the coordinating beneficiary stores all reports and copies of documents (in pdf or photo format) in its own server. Financial records are kept in a folder with restricted access, as these contain sensitive personal data. This way, we have ensured that all project documents are preserved under all circumstances. Firstly, they are stored in several locations and secondly, the MoC (being a state agency) server is highly secured and backed up multiple times.

The project has together with sub-actions (tasks) a total of 66 actions, The beneficiaries in charge of the implementation of the respective actions and the participating beneficiaries are set out in the Grant Agreement. However, other beneficiaries are also involved if necessary. The majority of the actions are implemented using the working group method. The working group is compiled by the key personnel (officials, experts, managers) of all beneficiaries involved in the corresponding action, while external experts, stakeholders and in some cases the members of Steering Committee are also represented, depending on the specific action and need. The working group is tasked with organizing work, making decisions regarding the content and principles of the relevant topic, analysing the compiled materials and assigning duties to the experts. After that experts do the agreed work (fieldwork, analyses, preparing plans, etc.). All experts also belong to the working group. The project managers of MoC take part in working groups either together or separately and thus have a complete overview of progress in implementing actions.

Meetings necessary for implementing project actions are held as needed. All working group members may suggest holding meetings. Meetings are convened by the beneficiary responsible for the respective action (head of the working group). Any issues regarding project management are dealt with by e-mail, phone or virtual meetings (mainly Teams). Each year, the managers of the coordinating beneficiary meet with each beneficiary separately on a regular basis (2-3 times a year). Project management related topics are also discussed at Management team meetings.

Organizing and ensuring the implementation of complementary actions takes place on multiple levels. As MoC shapes and directs nature conservation policy in Estonia, the project managers are working closely with the officials of biodiversity conservation department of MoC to secure the implementation of the complementary actions. Implementing complementary actions is also among the tasks of the Management Team, which means that all beneficiaries are involved. The third level

is the Steering Committee, which ensures the contribution of various stakeholders in implementing complementary actions. All three levels are connected by people who are involved with the various levels. MoC officials take part in the Management Team and Steering Committee, while Management Team members participate in Steering Committee meetings, and some members from all three levels participate in implementing various project actions. The project managers participate on all three levels.

Communication with the Agency and External Monitoring Team has been smooth. Two EMT visits took place during the second phase of the project (19-20/12/2022, 04-06/09/2024). The visits were followed by letters from the Agency, and the questions raised were addressed at subsequent meetings with the EMT and are addressed in this report (Annex to the letter).

We wish to emphasize that cooperation with the EMT and Agency has been exceptionally good, and their assistance in solving various issues has been invaluable. Their contribution has been particularly important in preparing the project's Amendment Requests and solving the problem with the action C.2 task 1 (restoration of semi-natural grasslands).

During the second phase of the project, two amendment requests were prepared and submitted to the Agency.

First Amendment Request was submitted to the Agency on 23/08/2022. In addition to technical and financial amendments, the request included two additional significant amendments requested by the project: request to include a new beneficiary in connection with the creation of the bird app and the wish to request an amendment to merge the phases in the budget and proceed with a single budget for the whole project duration. As we submitted the Amendment Request to the Agency only after the end of phase one (30/06/2022), we also informed the Agency and EMT of our wish to submit first Interim Report in January 2023, so that the report could already consider the amendments approved by the Agency. Amendment no 1 to Grant Agreement was signed in January 2023.

Second Amendment Request was submitted to the Agency on 22/04/2024. In addition to technical and financial amendments, the request included also administrative (partnership) amendments. Due to the reform of state institutions in Estonia the Ministry of Environment was reorganised into the Ministry of Climate, Ministry of Rural Affairs into Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture and Private Forest Centre was merged with the Environmental Investment Centre (who became a project beneficiary). The Agency accepted all our requests (letter no 1325469, dated 19/02/2025) and Amendment no 2 to Grant Agreement was signed in March 2025.

4. Project impact and analysis of contribution to implementation of the Plan

The project is implemented to fulfil part (26 measures out of 119) of the *"Prioritized Action Framework for NATURA 2000 in Estonia for the Multiannual Financial Framework period 2021-2027"* (PAF). Thus, the project affects about 1/5 of the PAF, however, the impact on this part is very important and, in many ways, decisive.

4.1. Environmental benefits

4.1.1. Direct/quantitative environmental benefits

The implementation of the PAF is not divided into phases like a project and the direct quantitative environmental benefits of the project are presented for the first two phases (2020-2024) as a whole. This is necessary to be able to compare the project results with the PAF targets.

- 1 076 66 ha of semi-natural grasslands were restored (action C.2 Task 1 and 2) in the first phase of the project. Although the Agency decided to consider their restoration as ineligible expenses, the areas were restored and their management began. During the second phase 51 ha were restored by the project (in chapter 6.3, action C.2 Task 1, it is reported that 346 ha have been restored in the second phase. This is because the non-eligible expenses paid for restoration of 295 ha are now reported as support to the third parties). The area is small because of the transition to procurement and this took time. The area will increase significantly in the coming years. The overall goal of the project is to restore 1000 ha within 2020-2029, and the Plan's goal is 10 000 ha. To date ca 5000 ha have been restored and the achieving the goal is realistic.
- The target for restoring wet forest habitats in PAF is 6000 ha, of which the project will restore 3500 ha. The wet forest action plan prepared by the project, sets a target of restoring 10 500 ha. In frame of the project the restoration will start in 2025. Approximately 4000 ha have been restored to date outside the project as a complementary activity. The achievements of the project and PAF objectives are feasible.
- Within the project 152 ha of forest land was purchased in the first phase and 230 ha in the second phase of the project for nature conservation purposes (in total 382 ha). The goal of the project is to purchase 500 ha (Action C.5) and the target in the PAF is 1500 ha (including the project 500 ha). A total of 1235 ha of forest land have been purchased to date. The activity is progressing even better than planned (both project and PAF).
- 69 small waterbodies in the agricultural landscape have been restored to improve the living conditions of amphibians and aquatic macro-invertebrates (Action C.3, Task2). The target of the project is to restore 100 small waterbodies. PAF`s target is 60, which has already been fulfilled.
- One of the measures of the Plan is to improve the support scheme for the management of semi-natural grasslands. One part of this is also the result-based support, which the project began testing on 500 ha in the second phase (A.3 Task 2). This has not been done before in Estonia.

- The objective of the PAF in agricultural sector is to develop biodiversity support schemes for agricultural lands. For this, the project started with appropriate interventions on 358 ha to study the impact of different elements on intensively managed fields (C.3 Task 1).
- 11 nature conservation camps were organized in 2020-2024 by the project, Ca 150 people took part of them (E.3 Task1). In these camps semi-natural habitats were restored mainly on small islands and islets, where the use of heavy equipment is not possible. The goal of the project is to organize 20 nature conservation camps.

4.1.2. Qualitative environmental benefits

The aim of the project is to ensure the improvement of the condition of habitats and species in forest and agricultural landscapes and to stop the negative trends to ensure the favourable conservation status of these habitats and species in a long term. The main threat is the intensification of the economy (forestry, agriculture) in the areas where habitats have decreased, the condition of existing habitats has deteriorated, and the number of many species has drastically decreased. In addition, semi-natural habitats have fallen out of management because the economic model has changed. Finally, people's awareness of nature is becoming poorer due to the urbanization and we aim to contribute to solving these problems through our diverse activities.

The project has lasted for five years, and for such short period it has not yet been possible to improve the condition of habitats and species and reverse the negative trends. In fact, the project has the power to create conditions, develop and test new solutions and to draw up plans and guidelines for this. The project time is simply too short compared to the time it takes for nature to change. However, there are also several topics where project activities have a quick and direct impact.

This subchapter focuses on actions (achievements) that were completed or whose significant results were revealed in the second phase of the project. Everything described below is important to achieve both the project and PAF objectives.

- An action plan for wet forests (Action A.1 Task1) has been completed and the plan stipulates protection goals, methods and specific activities in Natura 2000 areas. Within the framework of the plan, a methodology for selecting restoration areas was developed and restoration areas were selected to meet the goals of the project and the PAF. The protection principles, implementation mechanisms and site selection methodology can also be used outside of Natura 2000 areas, i.e. throughout Estonia and in other EU member states.
- The consultation system for semi-natural grasslands (A.3 Task 1) was launched (in the 1st phase of the project) with the purpose to involve more landowners and land managers for the restoration and maintenance of semi-natural grasslands. A map layer of potential and priority areas suitable for restoration is part of the system. This system is not only intended to fulfil the goals of the project but also of the PAF. It is applicable everywhere, inside and outside protected areas. The system has been very positively received by the landowners and managers and the plan is to continue with it until the end of the project and beyond.
- Bird researches in the agricultural landscape has provided completely new knowledge (even at the world level) about the movements and activity periods of *Crex crex* and *Perdix perdix* (A.4).

The results of this action will be the basis for updating existing agri-environmental support schemes and adding new ones.

- Completely new methodology for calculating the loss of income for landowners due to restrictions on Natura 2000 forest areas was developed (A.5 Task 1). New methodology allows for estimating the loss of income due to conservation restrictions in each protected forest compartment and to calculate lost timber volume in case of different levels of restrictions. As a first step, the state increased compensation for the strictly protected zone on this basis. As a next step, the state will prepare a new compensation system based on the methodology. The principles of such a methodology can be implemented everywhere.
- First restoration project has been drawn up for wet forests (A.6 Task 1) and restoration works will begin 2025 (C.1 Task 1). Other restoration projects will be completed mostly in 2025. The basic principles of the project and principle technical solutions are applicable to other forests with similar problems. The novelty lies in the fact that previously the restoration of wet forests was based on the experience of restoring bogs, but now these projects are being prepared from the perspective of forests (for example, this means less dams than in the case of bogs).
- A three-year pilot project (2022-2024) was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of hunting small predators in improving the hatching success of ground-breeding birds (waders) in coastal meadows (C.2 Task 2, A.7 Task 2). The project demonstrated that predator hunting can be an effective tool to enhance wader nest survival but also highlighted the need for improved strategies to enhance its impact in the future. The project also got international attention. On 25 September 2024, the umbrella organisation of European hunters, FACE, presented the Estonian Hunters' Society with an award for its significant contribution to nature and fauna. The award was given for this pilot project of hunting small predators.
  Now, hunting small predators has also been taken up as an issue at the national level and it is intended to be used to protect other species (for example, *Tetrao urogallus*).
- During 2nd phase of the project a training system for officials dealing with nature conservation issues was created (A.8 Task 1). The main goal of the system is to develop the knowledge and skills of nature conservation staff on public communication, environmental negotiation, and stakeholder engagement. The implementation of the training system starts in 2025. This system can be used widely (every institution can use it) and repeatedly.
- Last but not least, raising public awareness is objective of both the project and PAF. As this topic is very broad and covers many project actions, a more detailed overview of the benefits can be found in different chapters.

Different plans, guidelines, methodologies and systems created and developed by the project are prepared in a way that they can be used as widely as possible. They are designed to achieve the goals of the project as well as to fulfil the goals of the PAF, both in and outside of Natura areas, i.e. they are universal. This ensures the protection of the habitats and species and their favourable nature conservation status.

4.2. Economic and social benefits

The project continues to generate economic and social value, and during the 2nd phase the activities related to measure the projects' effects on social change, socio-economy and provision of ecosystem services have started.

Three studies will be delivered by the end of the project: (1) interim report on social change of agriculture landowners/users, conservation officers, public; (2) interim report on social change of forest owners; and (3) final report of social, socio-economic and ecosystem services change. By now the initial talks and one joint seminar are initiated to start the discussion about the role of the project activities in wider agricultural context and project participation in agricultural policy making regarding a new CAP period.

Although the restoration of all semi-natural grasslands in the first phase was not eligible for financially, grazing and sustainable management have continued. This has had a substantial economic impact as maintaining these areas requires livestock and active management, which in turn creates employment opportunities and contributes to the vitality of local communities. In the second phase, the restoration of coastal meadows began actively, providing work for people with restoration machinery and skills. A good example is from Hiiumaa, where community engagement has been a key success factor in the coastal meadow restoration activities. As the results of restoration and open landscapes became visible, public attitudes have shifted positively and local initiatives expressed interest in expanding restoration areas. The project has also created additional employment opportunities for hunters, particularly in controlling small predator populations on coastal meadows.

The counselling system for semi-natural grassland managers and owners has also played a role in attracting new stakeholders who can contribute to rural development. The network of semi-natural heritage meadows has been significantly strengthened. The barriers between government officials and land managers have been reduced, improving mutual trust and communication. Land managers have expressed appreciation for the support provided by the state and acknowledge the value of the system. There is a growing sense of shared purpose and cooperation. To promote results-based subsidy schemes and raise awareness of ecological values on their land, an additional support scheme was implemented in CAP. The methodology for a standard survey for the semi-natural meadow managers was prepared by UT and thorough social-economical review will start in 2025.

In the second phase, the compensation system for private landowners was analysed, and the proposal to increase the annual compensation for Natura 2000 private forest owners in strictly protected zones was supported. This change will be implemented in January 2025.

The restoration of wet forests has also gained considerable media attention. Collaboration with local communities has been essential for raising public awareness and supporting the implementation of wet forest restoration projects.

The project contributes to achieve agricultural and environmental goals, promoting collaboration through new initiatives, particularly in the field of regenerative agriculture. Various biodiversity-related interventions have been piloted with promising results for sustainable land use practices. Also a measurement of social change among agricultural landowners was started in 2024 by UT (Action D.3). The questionnaire was prepared to analyse the economic situation of land users and farmers, to learn about the main characteristics of their business environment (socio-economic context), about their willingness to test different agro-ecological techniques and methods in their fields as well as to find out what factors encourage them to use agroecological techniques further.

One of the project's key strengths has been the consistent and effective cooperation among its partners. Thematic working groups bring together diverse perspectives and facilitate open discussion, helping to resolve differences and build consensus. Virtual meetings have increasingly replaced face-to-face interactions, allowing for more efficient collaboration and strategic coordination in partner meetings.

The project has created 16 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs. All employees are qualified and have university degree.

4.3. Innovation, demonstration, replicability, transferability, cooperation and transboundary effects

Innovative activities listed in form B4 of the project application (A.2 - Action plan for pollinators; A.4 - Effectiveness of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) support schemes for farmland biodiversity; C.1 - Restoration and management of different forest ecosystems; C.6 - Developing and introducing modern conservation tool for practical nature conservation action planning, implementing and monitoring) have all started in by the 2nd phase of the project.

- Since summer 2023 the project is **experimenting with innovative methods to combat four invasive alien species** - reynoutria, goldenrods, false spiraea, and the snowberry (Action C.4). In addition to the usual mowing and trimming, invasive species are treated with hot steam and herbicide, we cover them with durable geotextile and shred plants with a chain shredder. The combating attempts are carried out in 44 test areas in five years by the EB. The test areas are be labelled accordingly, and 16 control areas have also been selected. The aim of the trials is not to clean up large areas, but rather to test the effectiveness of different methods and, based on the results, to draw up combating guidelines that will enable landowners and local authorities to combat invasive species more effectively. The first summer's activities have resulted in five educational films, which can be viewed on the project's YouTube channel. Combating trials are introduced via webinar to the local municipalities in 2024 and in 2025 educational hands-on training days will be organised for the interested municipalities.

- The creation of a **consultation system for the restoration and maintenance of semi-natural habitats** (Action A.3 Task 1), which started in the fall of 2021, is completely new for Estonia but has received already approval and praise from our stakeholders – semi-natural landowners and managers. The advisory service is provided by three full-time EB specialists, whose task is to find new grassland managers, provide them with support, and also advise existing land managers, if necessary. For these purposes plenty of activities are set up, incl. regularly published information bulletin for more than 6000 semi-natural grassland owners who might not even know that they own such valuable land and could get a financials support of restoring and maintaining it. In addition, direct mailing with stakeholders is set up, private consulting for new potential land managers on their land and educational events for already active managers are organised. The teams' task is also to promote the value-based support scheme and help interest landowners to learn more about it. In 2024 11 800 land units (21 300 ha) was in the database of the advisory areas.

- During the 1st phase, **the value-based and result-based support systems were developed** and test sheets for **semi-natural grassland landowners** were prepared (Action A.3 Task 2). During the 2nd phase the support measures were added by the project team into the **agri-environment schemes** (RBAPS) and put into practice.

  Value-based assessment scheme is a voluntary system implemented for two years by now and it's the first of its kind RBAPS approach in Estonia. Every manager who applies for semi-natural grassland maintenance support can choose to assess the nature conservation values of his land and get paid for this assessment activity. Choosing the activity does not require managers to change their current maintenance practices but rather to learn more about the nature conditions, plans and birds of their grasslands and assess the general condition of the land. Observations need to be written down into the assessment form corresponding to the meadow type. In 2024, 287 applicants chose to assess the conservation values of their land. The goal of the project to attract all managers to participate in activity of assessing nature values and thereby learn to better understand their lands and the possibilities for better maintenance.

  In the pilot project of **result-based support scheme** we test the concept with 10 land managers of wet and coastal meadows. The aim of the initiative is to see how different maintenance methods affect the condition of the meadows and how the land manager himself can manage to assess his areas. Based on the results of the pilot project, we will find out whether such a support system is more motivating and thus ensures a better condition of the meadows.

  For the areas included into the pilot project, the land manager and meadow experts have jointly prepared an action plan that considers the specific characteristics of the area and allows to implement methods different from the current maintenance conditions. In addition, the participant must fill out an assessment form every year and the scoring system allows to evaluate the quality and condition of the meadows and to determine how valuable and biodiversity-rich their meadows are.

- In the course of the traditional agricultural landscapes, six **agricultural producers**, in cooperation with our partners from the UT have established **demonstration areas, where the impact of different agro-ecological techniques on yield and biodiversity are monitored**. Researchers help to find precise activities for each sample area that are compatible with the specific landscape and meet the preferences of producers. Techniques that increase soil carbon sequestration, enhance pollination and natural pest control, and otherwise combine food production and nature conservation are being tested. Researchers are studying the impact that the creation of grassland strips, establishment of arable islands, leaving unsown patches in cereal crops for the Eurasian skylark, and many other activities have on biodiversity and yields. Based on the data obtained during the experiments, we will **identify the most suitable agro-ecological techniques for the conditions in Estonia**, which will enable the development of more expedient agricultural support schemes in the future. Nature-friendly practices are made available at the website heapold.ee/tegevused and www.livingfarm.eu Its important to mention that one of the largest agricultural companies in Central Estonia, Sadala Agro as well as Järvamaa Vocational Education Center, Airi Külvet - Farmer of the Year 2023 and one of the major organic producer Raimond Pihlap, have joined us. All these people are opinion leaders

and key speakers of regenerative agriculture and in cooperation with them it's efficient to promote our actions. Collaboration with Estonian farmers to reconcile food production, biodiversity and healthy soils is noticed also by Bankwatch Network!

- In terms of Action C.1 **Restoration and management of different forest ecosystems** – the **selection process for finding the restoration areas** has been particularly thorough, and therefore restoration projects have not encountered much resistance during the public participation processes, although there is currently a general feeling of opposition to forest restoration in society. The UT selected restoration sites in six stages based on concrete criteria (for example, the proportion of stands in the total area, the proportion of deciduous forest over 50 years old in the total deciduous forest, the compactness of the drainage system to be closed, land ownership and protection issues, and the proportion of private land in the restricted zone and existing factors could give both positive (contribute to the success of restoration) and negative points (circumstances that reduce the success of restoration or the risk of destruction of already existing values)). From 160 potential forest areas 17 sites where eventually selected and out of these 17 seven areas will be restored in 2025-2027 to fulfil 4500 ha as indicated in the project.

- In the course of the project, **habitat use of the farmland birds** are researched (Action A.4) first time in Estonia. Although there are many suitable examples of bird-friendly environmental measures from other countries, their effectiveness under Estonian conditions must be verified. Initial data of the corn crake and grey partridge (followed by GPS-transfers) are bringing a lot of new interesting information about their habitat use and lifestyle, and the results of the studies completed in the 3rd phase will form proposals for the next CAP. In terms of corn crake a close cooperation with German ornithologists is taking place.

- **Developing and introducing modern conservation tool EELIS** for practical nature conservation action and planning (Action C.6) is developing according to the timeline but an innovative feature of the new system allows landowners to have full access to the information related to their land (protected species in their land, restrictions arising from this, etc. and therefore, EELIS can also be used to arise landowners knowledge about the nature-related values of their lands. So far, EELIS has only been for official use.

- During the **renewal of private forest measures** (Action A.5 Task 1), the project developed a new innovative methodology for calculating Natura compensations. The annual loss of income due to nature conservation is calculated for each protected forest compartment, taking into account the forest type, timber stock and the precise conservation requirements. To make those calculations, EB had to form a table where all nature protection areas had their forestry related restrictions named. That kind of database had not previously existed in Estonia. The methodology has also been discussed with Latvian and Lithuanian partners and it has found acceptance among private forest owners.

- Our pilot project in cooperation with Estonian Hunting Association to **regulate the abundance of small predators in coastal meadows** in Lääne county, Hiiumaa and Muhumaa islands, (as part of the Action C.2 Task 2) **found international recognition** by the umbrella organisation of European hunters, FACE. The pilot took place in five coastal meadows to control the

abundance of foxes, raccoon dogs and jackals and has allowed therefore waders nesting in the coastal meadows to nest more safely. The results of hunting undertaken for the conservation of birds are assessed during the spring breeding season based on the success of hatching of the young. In three years, the most gratifying results were achieved in Lääne country: as a result of hunting, hatching success in the Haeska and Põgari regions increased to the desired 40%, so it can be said that in these grasslands the project achieved its goal – because of hunting, bird populations were able to reproduce themselves. However, hunting alone is not enough – at the same time, we have also started restoring coastal meadows and removing groves there.

Demonstration actions listed in the project application form B4 (E.4, Eradication methods of invasive alien species; C.3, Designing more nature friendly farming landscapes as demonstration site) have started, as explained above, in the 2nd phase of the project but the final conclusions about the results will be made in later stages and according to the results obtained in their implementation, we will introduce them widely. Nevertheless, several other activities also contain a demonstration element and as we see that our initial actions, methodologies, techniques and approaches taken in the project already produce results and prove their applicability, they are already introduced at the Estonian and EU level whenever asked for. For this purpose, the project actions include participation in seminars, cooperation with other projects, study trips, etc.

Replicability and transferability are planned for different project activities. The outcomes of the preparatory, as well as, of the concrete activities can be used in all Natura 2000 sites in Estonia and in EU level (e.g. in Boreal region). This goes especially for the forest restoration and restoration site selection activities (C.1), nature friendly farming activities (A.4, C.3) where we follow what other contrived do but try to test also our own approaches, semi-natural grassland restorations, especially related to the modern and service-based consultation system as well as hunting activities in the coastal meadows for the nature protection purposes (C.2), and invasive species eradication (C.4) but it also concerns many other activities. A more extensive use of the results and experiences of various activities is also described in other subsections of this chapter.

4.4. Policy implications and feedback

The project implements certain parts of **PAF**, however it has a strong link to other environmental policy areas and plans as well. Together with farmers, the project analyses the existing **EU Common Agricultural Policy** support schemes related to the restoration and management of semi-natural grasslands and implementation of nature friendly agriculture (Actions A.3 Task 2, A.4, C.2 Task 1 and 2, C.3 Task 1) and makes its proposals to improve and update CAP support schemes for the funding period of 2028+. Furthermore, currently drafted pollinators action plan (Action 2) gives a direct input to the next CAP.

In addition to fulfilling the goals of various policies and plans through project activities, we have participated in the drafting of several policies, laws and plans in the 2nd phase of the project. This work has taken place with the direct participation of experts and researchers of the project's partners in the preparation of these documents. Few to be named:

- Nature Conservation Law to be submitted to the government in 2025
- Estonian Forestry Law to be submitted to the government in 2025

- Nature Restoration Regulation based on EU Restoration Directive and to be submitted to the government 2026
- Climate Resilient Economy Act based EU Climate Law and to be submitted to the government in 2025
- EU Invasive Alien Species Regulation

In addition to the activities of the project itself (for example, restoration) and participation in drafting of various policies and the preparation of laws, the latest EU guidelines are taken into account in the plans prepared or updated within the project. As an example, PAF envisages restoring 6000 ha of wet forests by 2028 (of which 3500 ha is restored by the project). However, the wet forests action plan (Action A.1 task 1) aims to restore 13 000 ha by 2030.

However, it should be mentioned that the project is taking place in quite turbulent times. While the start of the project was affected by Covid-19, then now we are influenced by the full-scale war in Ukraine. The focus of the Estonian state has been on improving its defence capabilities, and several other societal aspects, incl. nature protection, have been left behind. Likewise, several investments have been redirected to the defence industry, incl. some which were initially planned for the nature protection.

In addition, what's mentioned above, the government has been extremely unstable. Six environment ministers have changed during the five years of the project. The Ministry of the Environment has been merged with the Ministry of Economic Affairs and is now called the Ministry of Climate. Priorities within the ministry have changed, and several good initiatives are put aside to wait for better years to come. All these changes have led to a situation where there is no certainty in nature conservation policy.

4.5. Capacity building, sustainability and other comments on impacts, barriers, challenges and lessons learned

Capacity building, upskilling and training activities actively started in the second phase of the project. The analysis and mapping of training needs began at the end of 2023, based on input from project partners. As a result, the training strategy for nature conservation officials was finalized in 2024. The objective of the training strategy is to develop the knowledge and skills of people working in the field of nature conservation, with a primary focus on public communication, stakeholder engagement, and environmental negotiations. The training system is structured into three thematic modules, each consisting of several targeted trainings for state and municipal officials, as well as for key spokespersons and decision-makers.

The first training module for conservation officials "Engagement and negotiations" will be implemented at the beginning of 2025. After that "Psychology of communication" and "Public speaking and media" modules will be carried out. These modules include practical trainings and exercises on how to communicate effectively with people from different backgrounds, how to develop and maintain persuasive arguments, and how to build and sustain positive long-term relationships.

The trainings are designed for specialists and experts who are in a position to deal with landowners or are in the negotiation process for restoration projects (coastal meadows, small water bodies for amphibians, etc.) taking place on private lands. In addition, the counselling team and specialists of EB, who play a role in convincing landowners to participate in nature protection efforts, require mentioned specific trainings.

One important lesson learned is that trainings must be tailored to specific stakeholder groups and themes. Also training needs are not static. The needs may evolve during the project implementation, as the focus of training may shift from general communication and awareness to more specific topics. Several meetings were held with trainers, providing valuable insights into potential trainers who are well-suited to support partners in developing communication skills.

Study trips have significantly contributed to capacity building by raising awareness among project team members and nature conservation staff about best practices in other countries. These trips have facilitated knowledge exchange and mutual learning. For example, a study trip to Czech Republic focused on communication strategies, engaging landowners in nature conservation activities, and training advisors to improve our project's actions regarding landowner consultation system (Action A.3 Task 1).

It is also important to highlight that the implementation of the project itself represents a major capacity-building achievement, considering its complexity, wide scope, involvement of numerous partners and stakeholders, and ambitious objectives. Any capacity building support/mentoring, etc. helps to keep people in the field of nature conservation motivated, reduces burnouts and/or leaving the job.

5. Implementation of the complementary actions

The project is based on the "Prioritized Action Framework for NATURA 2000 in Estonia for the Multiannual Financial Framework period 2021-2027" (PAF). But the project does not contribute to the implementation of the entire PAF, there are a total of 119 measures in PAF, the LIFE IP project covers 26 measures (described in chapter 2). The project contribution can be divided into two, the project`s actions and complementary actions, which in total must ensure the implementation of the corresponding PAF measure.

The PAF structure is based on pillars but this approach was not used when the project application was prepared. According to the Agency's recommendation, we switched to the Pillar approach in 2021. As a result of the new approach, a clear link between PAF, LIFE IP actions and complementary actions has now emerged. Relationship between PAF, LIFE IP actions and complementary actions is presented in the chapter 2. “Project relation to the Plan”.

5.1. Coordination mechanism established with other funds

The project is in a unique position as the project beneficiaries are responsible for the budget for the implementation of the complementary actions and the use of the corresponding funds, MoC for the Cohesion Fund and the MoRA for the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. These are the most important funds in the implementation of complementary actions. In addition, MoC and MoRA are responsible for the preparation and use of the state budget,

The use of funds and state budget resources in practice, i.e. the organization of the corresponding complementary works, is mainly the responsibility of the project beneficiaries. EB and RMK deal with restoration of different habitats, etc. KEMIT deals with IT solutions and EIC coordinates private forest subsidies. UT participate in the preparation of support schemes. In the second phase of the project, the University of LIFE Sciences was also involved (compilation of forests action plans, development of methodology for Natura 2000 private forest support). Outside of the circle of project beneficiaries, there is also close cooperation with the Agricultural Registers and Information Board (ARIB) that deals with the payment of subsidies for the management of semi-natural grasslands and the distribution of private forest subsidies. Together with the NGO ELF, working camps and other awareness-raising activities are organized.

The most important link in the chain in the context of complementary actions is PAF Monitoring Team (Action D.2 Task 1). The team is responsible for securing the PAF budget (from the project`s point of view, this is financing complementary actions). Regarding the PAF measures related to the project, this will be done in tight cooperation with the LIFE project team. The result of this work is very clearly illustrated in Annex 3 “Estonia PAF implementation - funding status”. Most of the complementary actions related to the project have the status “funding secured”. The budget for the remaining actions is partly secured. However, it is important to note that these are mainly measures related to communication, involvement and awareness. These are the activities that could always

implemented in bigger volumes and therefore there should be also more budget allocations for these purposes.

The Steering Committee (SC) also plays an important role in implementing complementary actions as well as the project actions. The SC is led by the Deputy Chancellor of the MoC, members are the representatives of institutions involved in the management of various funds (the list is given in Annex 4). Thus, SC consolidates the information of different funds, helps to plan the course of financing and the implementation of activities.

5.2. Summary status of the complementary actions

The Pillar approach was not used during the project application preparation. According to the Agency's recommendation, grouping of the project actions according to the PAF structure was made. Now each project action was linked to the PAF measure and as a result new complementary actions were added compared to the project application. Consequently, it is not possible to compare the financial table of the complementary actions in the project application with the new one, which is based on the structure of the Pillars.

The table showing the budgetary implementation of complementary actions is presented in Annex 5 (Funding status of complementary actions).

5.3. Discussion on the contribution of complementary actions to the implementation of the targeted Plan

The measures of the PAF related to the project are divided into three groups. First, those in which PAF measure and project action completely overlap. Secondly, those where the project action covers part of the PAF goal. In this case, the project helps to fulfil the objectives of the PAF both directly and through complementary actions. Third, the PAF measures, which do not overlap with project actions, but to which the project contributes. More detailed overview and the link between PAF, complementary actions and project actions is given in chapter 2. “Project relation to the Plan”.

PAF measures in many cases do not have quantitative targets. Therefore, it is not easy to assess the fulfilment of the Plan's goals and especially its connection with complementary and project actions. Nevertheless, the implementation of the Plan is done by the project and complementary actions. In many cases, the project creates a prerequisite for the implementation of both its own and complementary actions. For example, plans for wet and dry forests are prepared (action A.1 Task 1 and 2), which are the basis for their protection and restoration in Estonia; a consultation system for the restoration and management of semi-natural grasslands is created, which supports landowners (A.3 Task 1), etc.

The financial implementation of the Plan is described in the previous subsections and as it shows, the necessary financial resources have been secured and in use.

The quantitative implementation of the Plan is characterized by the following table. It presents Plan measures with quantitative values and corresponding project targets and implementation results in the first and second phases.

Implementation of the Plan (quantitative indicators)

			Achieved during Phase 1 and 2		
Pillar/Theme/Measure of the Plan	**PAF target**	**LIFE IP target**	**LIFE IP result** (1st + 2nd phase = total)	**CA result** (1st + 2nd phase = total)	**CA and LIFE IP total**
PILLAR OF THE PLAN: E.2. Site-related maintenance and restoration measures, within and beyond Natura 2000					
E.2.4. Grasslands					
2. Management of semi-natural grasslands*	50 000 ha	Not foreseen	Not foreseen	36 050 ha 1st phase; 41 753 ha 2nd phase	41 753 ha
3. Restoration of semi-natural grasslands (average restoration cost 2500 eur)	10 000 ha	1 000 ha	295 ha +51 ha =346 ha	5 230 ha + 1 154 ha = 6 384 ha	6 730 ha
E.2.6. Woodlands and forests					
1. Restoring the structure of forest habitat types (2180, *9010, *9020, 9050, 9060, *9180)	2 000 ha	500 ha	0 ha	0 ha	0 ha
3. Restoring wet forest water regime (*9080, *91D0, *91E0, 91F0, protected drained peatland forest)	6 000 ha	3 500 ha	0 ha	1 000+6 565 = 7 565 ha	7 565 ha
4. Compensations of income loss for private forest owners*	90 000 ha	Not foreseen	Not foreseen	66 000 ha 1st phase; 68 614 ha 2nd phase	68 614 ha
7. Purchasing land with strict conservation restrictions for the state	1 500 ha	5 00 ha	152 ha + 230 ha = 382 ha	364 ha + 489 ha = 853 ha	1 235 ha
PILLAR OF THE PLAN: E.3. Additional species-specific measures not related to specific ecosystems or habitats					
E.3.1. Species-specific measures and programmes not covered elsewhere					
1. Eradication of invasive alien species*	3 000 ha	44 test plots	0+44 plots = 44 plots	2 500 ha 1st phase; 2 500 ha 2nd phase	2 500 ha + 44 plots
6. Restoration of habitats suitable for small water body species	60 ponds	100 ponds	17 + 52 = 69 ponds	78 + 55 = 133 ponds	202 ponds

** Management of semi-natural grasslands - in the second phase the area increased by 5 703 ha.*

** Compensation of income loss for private forest owners – in the second phase the area increased by 2 614 ha.*

** Eradication of invasive alien species continues for years in the same areas. Invasive alien species were eradicated in both the 1st and 2nd phases on the same 2500ha.*

The area of land eligible for Natura 2000 private forest compensations will decrease by the amount of land purchased by the state.

6. Evaluation of Project Implementation

6.1. Methodology applied

The methodology used to carry out the actions and achieve the project objectives worked well in the first phase of the project and we continued with it in the second phase.

Several teams are formed to manage and monitor the project: Lead Team, Management Team, Monitoring Team and Steering Committee (described in chapter 3. “Administrative part” and in subchapter 6.3 “Technical Implementation” in actions D.2 Task 1 and F.1). These teams operate at different levels but are connected through the people who are members of several teams. This ensures the optimal distribution, coordination and supervision of the management tasks.

The activities are coordinated by project partners and by the working groups they have created. Working groups include officials, experts, representatives of various interest groups, and non-profit organizations. The working groups are open and interested ones can always join them. The project partners themselves also invite new members to the working groups if necessary, additionally we carried out a major revision of the working groups in December 2023.

Thematic working groups meet regularly and are convened by a working group leader, who also sets the working group's schedule and milestones for completing the tasks, manages the overall process, and mediates the input and contribution of different working group members to the topic. Some working groups meet to prepare documents (e.g., the Wet Forests Action Plan, Measure 1, Task 1), while others meet to provide regular overview of the progress of ongoing activities and to collect suggestions and contributions from working group members for future work (e.g., the eradication of alien species, Action C 4). Meetings are often held virtually. However, face-to-face meetings are certainly taking place when we negotiate with landowners and users. Ideally, we meet them on their own lands.

Representatives of landowners and managers and farmers also participate in the working groups. We also try to involve their representatives as early as possible in the preparation of guidelines, worksheets, support schemes, etc. importance of them. We hope that by doing so, the implementation of the results will be significantly easier and will also meet the expectations of this very important target group of the project.

Optimal use of the budget is ensured by taking price offers from different providers and organising procurements. In this process beneficiaries are guided by national laws, LIFE programme rules and internal regulations. If possible, the internet is used for marketing research.

Composition of project beneficiaries ensures the balance of the results and includes all relevant parties: ministries (MoC, MoRA) are policy makers, universities (UT, TLU) ensure a science-based approach, nature conservation implementers (EB, RMK; EIC) give a practical aspect, representative of the private sector (EEML) brings their interests into consideration, KEMIT and SIUTS ensure IT solutions. EOÜ represents the interests of the NGO`s and we also cooperate very closely with ELF, the largest NGO in Estonia.

6.2. Dissemination

Project dissemination is based on **Communication and Participation Strategy** (2020-2029, inserted to BUTLER) and **media plans** we structure around the topics, themes and actions.

The project has **five strategical fields** to cover - semi-natural grassland management, forest measures and restoration, biodiversity based solutions for agricultural lands, species protection and everybody's nature conservation – and **66 different actions** based on them. Majority of these actions need to be supported by the communication outreach, stakeholders involvement and wider dissemination for raising general awareness about the nature conservation and people's role in it.

Topic-based media plans are updated prior to any major information campaign, field actions or results of the project we would like to communicate widely with the public. While the strategy is a set document, which gives strategic objectives of communication and instructions on how to address our stakeholders, interest groups and media, then the media plan (example of the plan inserted into BUTLER) is a living document which follows the dynamics of the project and therefore updated accordingly.

The preparatory work for the communication processes is led by the Communication Manager but the majority of the project partners contribute to the media plan according to their topic area actions, skills and knowledge. In addition, larger information campaigns (for example, a campaign inviting people to map alien species, introducing the best semi-natural meadow managers, or involving interest groups provide their comments to the draft wet forests action plan) are additionally coordinated with the spokespersons of the MoC and the EB in order to agree on joint messages and amplify our topics through the channels of other public authorities.

Daily communication, incl. updates of the project website www.loodusrikaseesti.ee (see more Action E.1 Task 1) and Facebook posts www.facebook.com/Loodusrikaseesti as well as any other regular discussions with the public or journalists is an everyday job of the Communication Manager and does not require extensive planning. Nevertheless, we always follow some basic rules set up in the Strategy at the beginning of the project. By now its most important for us to tell the story of nature conservation through the people, recognizing those who help preserve our natural landscapes with their daily work and actions. In this regard, we have developed an excellent cooperation with the semi-natural grassland managers who are always ready to advocate for nature-based lifestyle and well-being of Estonian nature as well as to support us in complicated discussions appearing time to time in media and politics.

We also have an exceptionally good connections with the traditional farmers (seven of them are running the pilot project with us, including one of the biggest farmhouse in Central Estonia and the Farmer of the Year 2023) who are ready to test innovative nature-based solutions on their fields and enthusiastically share their experiences with other farmers. In this way we have generated some new role models in nature conservation and nature friendly farming and indeed, have also fulfilled one of the strategical goals of the Strategy.

So far we have been able to cooperate less with private forest owners, but the topics to be explored with them will mostly begin in the 3rd phase of the project.

There has been **127 media articles/radio or TV broadcasts** (list available in Annex 6) about the project activities so far. In the 2nd phase of the project, the restoration plans for the wet forests habitats were clearly the hottest and rather polarized topic, also heavily politicised (which triggered a series of articles in "Maaleht" and in the web portal of public broadcasting ERR).

The recognition of best semi-natural meadow managers and their stories have received perhaps a biggest interest among our social media followers. Some of the video stories have been watched tens of thousands of times and shared ahead hundreds of times.

Continuously big amount of media attention goes to eradication of invasive species.

By now all our main topics have received also television airtime - restoration of coastal meadows (evening news in “Aktuaalne kaamera”, several times in nature broadcast “Osoon”), restoration of small water bodies (“Osoon”), regenerative/nature-friendly agriculture (several times in “Osoon”), the lifecycle of pollinators in Estonia (“Osoon”), studies of migratory birds (“Osoon”), eradication of invasive species (“Osoon”). All these stories have been based on the project activities and explained by our key experts. The average audience of “Osoon” is 80 000 watchers, “Aktuaalne kaamera” – 300 000 watchers.

In addition to informing journalists and contacting media outlets, direct communication with landowners and managers takes up most of the project time. Private consultations, info-days, educational events, etc. are organised to help our stakeholders - landowners and managers - to make informed decision about the restoration works (restoration of coastal meadows, small water bodies for amphibians, etc) on their land and cooperate with us for the best results. In connection to the semi-natural grassland manager we also publish an information bulletin which arrives in every 3-4 months to more than 6000 people. (More precisely described under E activities.)

Overall, the dissemination of the project goals, activities and impact is very extensive, involving many partners, channels, co-projects, relationships, and constant work with texts and visuals.

6.3. Technical implementation

PILLAR E.1 OF THE PLAN: Horizontal measures and administrative costs related to Natura 2000

Pillar E.1 covers the topics related to the planning, communication/awareness raising, and monitoring.

Following sub-themes and LIFE-IP project actions belong under the Pillar E.1:

Sub-theme of the plan E.1.1. Site designation and management planning (Action A.1 Task 1-3).
Sub-theme of the Plan E.1.2 Site administration and communication with stakeholders (Action E.3 Task 2-3; Action C.6; Action A.7 Task 1-3; Action A.8 Task 1-2).
Sub-theme of the Plan E.1.3. Monitoring and Reporting (Action D.1; Action D.2 Task 1-2; Action D.3).
Sub-theme of the Plan E.1.5. Natura 2000 – related communication and awareness raising measures, education and visitors access (Action E.1 Task 1-6; Action E.2 Task 1-2; Action E.3 Task 1&4; Action E.4 Task 1-3; Action E.5 Task 1-2; Action E.6; Action A.9; Action F.2.

Action E.1 Task 4 is not discussed in this report, as the task was completed during the 1st phase. Actions E.1 Task 6 and E.6 are not discussed, as they will begin in the 4th phase.

Main achievements of the 2nd reporting period:

- The project has established strong national and international cooperation with other LIFE projects and experts have actively participated in various international events.
- Three study trips were organized.
- Three seminars were co-organized focused on environmental education, regenerative farming and biodiversity in agriculture, and ecological restoration.
- Training system for nature conservation officials was created.
- Website of protected areas was updated.
- The final version of the wet forests action plan has been prepared.
- Hunting small predators in coastal meadows has increased the breeding success of birds.
- Monitoring result schemes for restoration actions (except dry forest) developed and monitoring is ongoing.
- 15 videos were produced.
- 6 nature conservation camps were organized.
- 37 information days (included also 17 site visits) were organized covering broad range of project topics.

Main drawbacks of the 2nd reporting period:

- The draft of the dry forests action plan is ready, but the final version is not yet completed, and the public participation procedure is not yet done.

SUB-THEME E.1.1 Site designation and management planning

ACTION A.1: Developing action plans for Natura 2000 habitat types

Task 1. Action plan for wet forest habitat types – *completed, to be adopted 2025*

- Foreseen start date: 2nd quarter 2020 Actual start date: 2nd quarter 2020
- Foreseen end date: 4th quarter 2023 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 4th quarter 2025

The aim of the action is to compile nationwide action plan for wet forest habitats (*9080, *91D0, *91E0, 91F0, protected drained peatland forest) and to select wet forest sites for the restoration (Action C1, task 1). The preparation of the action plan is coordinated by the EB together with the working group consisting officials, scientists and CSO representatives; the selection of restoration areas is made by the UT and agreed by the working group.

The wet forest habitats action plan analyses the reasons for the poor condition of wet forests and plans further actions. The plan proposes various conservation management activities, incl. the re-zoning of protected areas, new habitat inventories, the restoration of the natural water regime, the development of cutting rules, etc. It also sets the short-term goals by 2030 (all wet forest habitats to be mapped, their deterioration stopped, and various forest habitats restored on an area of 10,500 hectares of which 3,500 ha to be restored during the LIFE IP project) and the long-term goals by 2050 (the areas required by habitat types to ensure their favourable conservation status).

The draft action plan was completed by the working group in June 2022. Then, the coordination of the plan between the MoC and EB began. The main topic of discussion was about setting the long-term goals for the different habitat types. To solve the problem, the Environment Agency was engaged to conduct additional analysis of the potential area of each habitat type in protected areas. After agreeing of long-term goals, the action plan was sent for public review to a large number of stakeholders.

The draft was available for comments from October till December 2023, a virtual public meeting was held on November 7th, attended by more than 100 people. During the disclosure, seven interest groups (institutions) sent their proposals, a total of 106 proposals and comments were submitted. The working group analysed all proposals and comments and agreed with 37 proposals. Additional explanations were provided for 69 proposals. Based largely on the proposals made by the University of Life Sciences, 49 amendments were made to the action plan.

In June 20, 2024, EB sent the action plan to the MoC for the final approval. It was decided to adopt the action plan in the 4th quarter 2025. Late approval is related to the adoption of EU Nature Restoration Regulation and commands to take it into account, if necessary.

The wet forest habitats sites to be restored during the project were selected in the first phase of the project (the selection of sites is described in the 1st Interim Report). In 2023, inventories of the habitat types of the restoration sites were carried out.

Major problems/drawbacks: The completion of the action plan has been delayed due to time-consuming discussions with universities, experts and especially with policymakers. The delay will not cause any negative impact on the implementation of other project actions, which are directly related to this plan. All the sites for the restauration are selected and under different preparatory

stages for the restoration (Action A6 Task 1 and C1 Task 1). But the delay has a negative impact on the preparation of the dry forest action plan (Action A1 Task 2) and to the restoration of dry forests (Action A6 Task 3 and C1 Task 2), which are also delayed.

Milestones:

- Draft of wet forest action plan was compiled 2nd quarter 2022 – deadline according to the project 4th quarter 2022.
- Draft of wet forest action plan was introduced to all main stakeholder's 4th quarter 2023 - deadline according to the project 3rd quarter 2023.

Deliverables:

- Action plan for wet forest habitat types will be adopted in 4th quarter 2025 – deadline according to the project 4th quarter 2023.
- Action plan for wet forest habitat types is inserted into BUTLER.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: Wet forest action plan will be adopted in 2025.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
A.1 Task 1	**Objectives:** Improving the conservation status of forest and farmland habitats and species to achieve results benefiting the whole ecosystems such as: *forest habitats *9010, *9020, 9050, 9060, *9080, *91D0, *91E0, 91F0; *forest species such as woodpeckers, black stork, eagles, dragonflies, amphibians, etc. **Expected results:** Action plan for the wet forest habitat types is ready and implemented.	Action plan is compiled. Project sites to be restored are selected.	Forest issues are extremely polarized in Estonia, and therefore it is difficult to find good compromise solutions between different parties. The experience of the project shows that eventually it is possible as a result of discussions and skilful coordination, but it takes a lot of time and compromises.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 1121 person-days, 98,59% (here and later, data is for the years 2020-2024, i.e. for the 1st and 2nd phases together)

Dissemination actions: Beside the public participation procedure described above, the action plan and its aim was vividly discussed in the media, foremost in the weekly newspaper "Maaleht". The project team also published an article to explain the essence of the wetland habitats and the need for the restoration (English language translation available here).

The action plan can be viewed also on the project website.

ACTION A.1: Developing action plans for Natura 2000 habitat types

Task 2. Action plan for dry forest habitat types – *draft completed, to be adopted 2026*

- Foreseen start date: 3rd quarter 2020 Actual start date: 3rd quarter 2022
- Foreseen end date: 4th quarter 2023 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 1st quarter 2026

The aim of the task is to compile nationwide action plan for dry forest habitats (2180, *9010, *9020, 9050, 9060, *9180) and to select dry forest sites for the restoration (Action C1 Task 2). EB is responsible for compiling the action plan by involving the working group, UT is responsible of selecting the restoration sites.

The action plan will provide an overview of the current situation and impact factors, set objectives and present measures to achieve the objectives. The dry forest habitats action plan will analyse the reasons for the poor condition of dry forests and plans further actions. The plan will propose various conservation management activities, including for example the re-zoning of protected zones, new habitat inventories, restoration of naturalness, the development of cutting rules. By 2030, the condition of dry forest must improve in 13,670 ha (up to 500 ha to be restored by the project).

In 2020, it was decided to start with a more complicated wet forest action plan (Action A1 Task 1). Once it structures and compiling principles have been agreed, the preparation of dry forest action plan will start (a more detailed description in the 1st Interim Report).

Based on the experience gained in preparing wet forest action plan, the preparation of the dry forest action plan began in the last quarter of 2022. First, a work plan was drawn up and the general parts were written (forest types, distribution, condition, previous studies, etc.). Only when the general parts were ready, the working group meet for the first time (27/04/2023). This was important so as not to start from scratch (experience in preparing a wet forest plan). The compilation continued chapter by chapter and the plan was generally completed by autumn 2024. The working group meetings were held every few months according to the need. In autumn 2024, selection of sites to be restored by the project began. The sites were finally selected and approved by the working group on 20/12/2024. The sites were divided into two groups, first priority (8 sites with a total area of 552 ha) and second priority (5 sites with total area of 360 ha.

Major problems/drawbacks: The preparation of the wet forest action plan has been delayed due to time-consuming discussions with universities, experts and especially with policy makers in the field. Because of this, the preparation of the dry forest action plan began later, as it was necessary to wait for a solution to the fundamental problems common for both plans.

The delay in drafting the action plan has affected related actions on restorations (Action A6 Task 3 and C1 Task 2). In 2023, when we submitted 1st Interim Report, we expected that 200 ha of dry forest would be restored in 2024. Now we have to admit that the restoration will be delayed up to two years (see also Action C1 Task 2). The delay will not cause a negative impact on the implementation of other project actions, including also post-restoration monitoring (Action D1).

Milestones:

- Draft of dry forest action plan was compiled 3rd quarter 2024 – deadline according to the project 1st quarter 2023.
- Draft of dry forest action plan will be introduced to main stakeholder's 3rd quarter 2025 – deadline according to the project 3rd quarter 2023.

Deliverables: The Action plan for dry forest habitat types will be adopted in the 1st quarter 2026 – deadline according to the project 4th quarter 2023.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: Action plan will be introduced to all main stakeholders' during the 3rd quarter 2025. Action plan for dry forest habitat types will be adopted in 2025 or in the 1st quarter 2026.

Action	**Foreseen in the Grant Agreement**	**Achieved**	**Main factors of success and lessons learned**
A.1 Task 2	**Objectives:** Improving the conservation status of forest and farmland habitats and species to achieve results benefiting the whole ecosystems such as: * forest habitats *9010, *9020, 9050, 9060, *9080, *91D0, *91E0, 91F0.	The action plan is generally completed and project sites to be restored selected.	Initial plan to draft two action plans (wet and dry forests) in parallel was too ambitious and it was justified to start with the wet forest management plan as its more complicated and time consuming. Experiences gained in preparing wet forest action plan helped to organise work better and made work much more effective.
	Expected results: Action plan for dry forest habitat types.		

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 340 person-days, 60,71%

Dissemination actions: Public display of the draft dry forest action plan is foreseen for 2025, the media will be engaged in parallel.

ACTION A.1: Developing action plans for Natura 2000 habitat types

Task 3. Update of the action plan for semi-natural grasslands – *postponed by one year*

- Foreseen start date: 1st quarter 2024 Actual start date: 1st quarter 2024
- Foreseen end date: 4th quarter 2026 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 4th quarter 2027

The aim of this action is to update the Semi-Natural Habitat Action Plan 2021-2027 (habitat types: 1630*, 6210*, 6270*, 6280*, 6410, 6430, 6450, 6510, 6530*, 9070), which was approved by EB in 2021.

The first meeting, where main partners discussed the timeline and overall process of updating the current semi-natural grassland action plan, was held in the 1st quarter of 2024. In the next phase, working group will be appointed to support the renewal of the action plan, and topic-based meetings will be organized.

The updated action plan will integrate the experiences and knowledge gained during the implementation of the existing plan, as well as insights from the various project activities (Action A2; A3 Task 1; A.3 Task 2; C.2 Task 1; C.2 Task 2; D1). EB conducts annual monitoring of the implementation of the current action plan and its outcomes, ensuring that lessons learned are incorporated into the updated plan.

Major problems/drawbacks: n/a

Milestones: First meetings for action plan of semi-natural grassland working group held by 1st quarter 2024 - accordingly to the project timeline the first meeting was held on time.

Deliverables: No deliverables were foreseen in the 2nd phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: Establish a working group to update the action plan and ensure the involvement of key stakeholders. Continue analysing the implementation of the current action plan and to provide valuable input for the updated plan. Conduct additional analyses or surveys, if necessary, to gather data and insights for the new plan. According to the timeline, the updated action plan should be approved by the end of 2026. However, given that the current plan is valid until the end of 2027, the new action plan will be adopted in the 4th quarter 2027.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
A.1 Task 3	**Objectives**: Improving the conservation status of forest and farmland habitats and species to achieve results benefiting the whole ecosystems such as: * grassland habitats *1630, (*)6210, *6270, *6280, 6450, *6530, 9070, 7230; * birds and other species related to grasslands and arable land; * pollinators. **Expected results:** Action plan for semi-natural grasslands has been updated and approved.	The first meeting to plan the next steps for renewing the grassland action plan was held.	Regular overviews of the existing action plan provide valuable insights and input for the updated plan. One of the success stories of the current action plan is the counselling service, which was initiated and launched in LIFE-IP project. Counselling for land managers has proven to be a crucial component in achieving the plan's objectives and is one of its four primary goals. This initiative has significantly contributed to improved communication practices.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 person-days, 0%

SUB-THEME OF THE PLAN: E.1.2. Site administration and communication with stakeholders

ACTION E.3: Spreading conservation ideas: everyman's nature conservation, community based management, volunteer involvement, site based cooperation networks

Task 2. Organization of nature Conservation Month – *according to the plan*

- Foreseen start date: 2nd quarter 2020 Actual start date: 2nd quarter 2022
- Foreseen end date: 2nd quarter 2029 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 2nd quarter 2029

The purpose of the Nature Conservation Month is to focus on the issues that are currently important in nature and biodiversity. Nature Conservation Month takes place in Estonia every year in May, having its own specific theme and containing different events (hikes, study tours, etc.). Nature Conservation Month opens with the opening event, where a life's work prize on nature conservation (Kumari Award) is given. In addition, best nature conservationists are awarded with nature conservation pins and youth pins are given to the best young nature conservationists. The task of the project is to organise together with its partners the opening event.

During the first phase of the project, we managed to organise the opening event only in 2022. The events in 2020 and 2021 were cancelled due to Covid-19.

In the second phase of the project two Nature Conservation Months were organised. The theme in 2023 was "Nature in the City" and in 2024 "Bring the Nature Back". In 2023, the opening event of Nature Conservation Month took place on May 15th in Tallinn, Kadriorg Park, where the residence of the President of Estonia is also located. The event was opened, and awards were presented by the President. In 2024, the opening event took place on May 13th in Botanical Garden in Tallinn. The event was opened, and awards were presented by the Minister of Climate.

In both years, hundreds of events took place (hikes, study trips, etc.) organized by our project beneficiaries and other organisations, including for example Estonian Society for Nature Conservation, Estonian Fund for Nature, Estonian Nature Tourism Association. Thousands of people took part in the events.

Nature Conservation Month focuses on Estonian nature, but a lot of attention is also paid to global problems, including the celebration of international anniversaries (May 11th is World Migratory Bird Day, May 22nd is World Biodiversity Day, May 24th is European Day of Protected Areas).

Main problems/drawbacks: The action is progressing as planned and there have been no problems in the second phase of the project.

Milestones: Nature Conservation Month organised yearly in May 2021 to 2029, altogether 5 Months were organised during the first and second phase of the project. The opening events took place in 2022, 2023 and 2024. The events in 2020 and 2021 were cancelled due to Covid-19.

Deliverables: No deliverables were foreseen in the second phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: Three Nature Conservation Months and opening events will be organized (2025, 2026 and 2027). the organisation of the 2025 Nature Conservation Month has already begun.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
E.3 Task 2	**Objectives:** Raising awareness and capacity of main stakeholders and general public including using innovative tools and solutions.	Nature Conservation Month draws attention to nature and related issues and contributes to the raise of public awareness.	Cooperation with many different organizations has ensured the organisation of hundreds of events. The high level of the opening event has helped draw attention to nature even among the people who have been passive in this field.
	Expected results: 10 Nature Conservation Months and opening events will be organized.	5 Nature Conservation Months and 3 opening events have been organised.	

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 (a total of 0 person days are planned)

Dissemination actions: The Nature Conservation Month always have a wide response in the media. Events covered by radio and TV, different activities (including dissemination) are organised by beneficiaries and other organisations.

ACTION E.3: Spreading conservation ideas: everyman's nature conservation, community-based management, volunteer involvement, site-based cooperation networks

Task 3: Better informing and involving landowners of conservation values on their lands – *the final system to be set up two years later than expected*

- Foreseen start date: 3rd quarter 2022 — Actual start date: 1st quarter 2023
- Foreseen end date: 4th quarter 2025 — Actual (or anticipated) end date: 4th quarter 2027

The objective of this action is to establish a comprehensive system for informing and involving landowners of conservation values. The initial preparations for this system began in the 1st phase with the development of the consultation system (Action A.3 Task 1) for grassland managers.

In the 2nd phase, the development of this action has progressed further, with the first priority of informing the landowners of semi-natural grasslands about the values of their land. In March 2023 the EB has sent out the first informational newsletter to 6000 landowners who have over one hectare of valuable semi-natural grassland on their land (since the end of the 2nd phase – 5 information newsletters have been sent out). Additionally, EB organized training sessions for landowners and managers of semi-natural grasslands to introduce them species and conservation values on their land (Action A.3 Task 2).

From the beginning of 2024 EB started informing landowners about newly inventoried species and habitats through an automated notification system. At the beginning of each month, landowners receive a personalized notification if a new II or III category protected plant and animal species were found on their land and marked in the Estonian Nature Information System (EELIS database). In the 3rd quarter 2024, an updated website for protected areas was launched (Action E.3 Task 4), featuring a section for landowners. This section provides guidance on conservation requirements within protected areas and instructions on how to access information specific to their land.

As landowners have different types of natural values (for ex grassland and forest habitats, protected species), they receive relevant information through various channels, including updates through project's activities and from partner organizations. Information about the conservation values of their land can be also accessed via the Estonian Land Board's map application Nature Conservation and Natura 2000 and forest landowners can retrieve data related to their forests from the Forest Portal.

During the preparatory process, questions arose regarding the definition of conservation values and the most effective methods to inform landowners. To address these aspects, a think-tank format discussion (Action A.7 Task 2) is planned in next phase. These considerations will be discussed also during the development of EELIS system (Action C.6), which anticipated end date is 4th quarter 2027. This enables the development of a more integrated system for landowners and will not affect other actions of the project.

Major problems/drawbacks: The action started later than expected as the preparatory work proved to be more complex than expected, also collecting and processing data for thousands of seminatural grassland landowners was a demanding task. Additionally, discussions arose regarding

the definition of conservation values and the most effective ways to communicate with landowners, requiring further analysis and parallel planning with the development of EELIS system.

Milestones and Deliverables: no milestones and deliverables were foreseen in the 2nd phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: organize a think-tank thematic session (Action A.7 Task 2) about conservation values and mapping the best methods to inform and involve landowners and land users. Continue to develop the EELIS (Action C.6) system.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
E.3 **Task 3**	**Objectives:** Raising awareness and capacity of main stakeholders and general public including using innovative tools and solutions. **Expected results:** System of informing and involving landowners on conservation values created.	Five information letters about semi-natural grasslands have sent out to over 6000 semi-natural landowners and managers. Every year value assessment training sessions were organized. Website for protected areas was launched and EB began notifying landowners about new protected species found on their land.	The large-scale dissemination of information, such as the newsletter sent to 6000 semi-natural grassland landowners on regular bases and the trainings for managers, proved to be efficient ways to raise awareness about conservation values. Providing multiple channels for information access like the Estonian Land Board's map application, the Forest Portal and updated webpage for protected areas, ensured a broader reach. EB letters about new species provide faster and more personalized updates for landowners.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 (a total of 0 person days are planned)

ACTION C.6: Developing and introducing modern conservation tool for practical nature conservation action planning implementing and monitoring – *according to the schedule*

- Foreseen start date: 3rd quarter 2022 Actual start date: 3rd quarter 2022
- Foreseen end date: 4th quarter 2027 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 4th quarter 2027

The aim of the action is to develop an electronic information system EELIS that allows store, analyse and use data for practical nature conservation.

The action is led by MoC, where a project manager works. KEMIT is responsible for the procurements and development. MoC, EB, KEMIT and Environment Agency are testing EELIS.

The EELIS system consists of different parts. LIFE-IP funding will be used to develop parts that cover activities in planning-implementing-monitoring-evaluation cycle of practical nature conservation. First, the basic parts of the system were developed. Other parts will be built on that, including those foreseen in the LIFE-IP project.

During the 1st phase of the project, a public procurement process was conducted, resulting in the conclusion of a framework contract and the initiation of the EELIS software development. A solid foundation was established for future advancements, including thorough research and decision-making regarding the technology stack for EELIS, as well as the creation of its software architecture. Following this groundwork, the actual development commenced, structured in three-month cycles. Each cycle's scope of work was commissioned separately, based on the progress and evolving requirements.

In the 2nd phase of the project, a new procurement process was undertaken due to the expiration of the initial framework contract. A new developer was selected, bringing substantial expertise and instilling strong confidence in KEMIT regarding the timely completion of the EELIS software by 2027. Development continues to follow a cyclical approach, with KEMIT rigorously testing the deliverables after each cycle. These deliverables are subsequently provided to the business side for end-user acceptance testing.

In 2020-2024, LIFE-IP funding was not used because parts of EELIS were being developed, the financing of which was planned to come from other sources.

Major problems/drawbacks: The business-side requirements for the software turned out to be more complex than initially anticipated prior to the start of development. Therefore, when writing the First Interim Report, we assumed that the EELIS development would not be completed on time. However, in 2023, a new project manager was hired and the work was reorganised. As a result, the development is progressing well and we expect that EELIS is ready for use at the end of 2027 as planned.

We would like to point out that, like any other IT solution, EELIS also requires continuous updating. This means that we can never say that EELIS is completed or finished, but that EELIS is ready for use.

Milestones: Test version available by 3rd quarter 2025 - testing began in 2023.

Deliverables: No deliverables were foreseen in the second phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: The development and testing of the EELIS software are ongoing, with completion expected by 2027. This includes also parts which are funded by the LIFE-IP project. The primary objectives outlined in the initial EELIS development plan will be fully achieved. Additionally, the process of introducing the new EELIS system to end users has already commenced.

According to the project proposal, the test version should be ready in the 3rd quarter of 2025. In fact, testing began in 2023. Testing takes place in parallel with development, meaning that the completion of each module is immediately followed by its testing.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
C.6	**Objectives:** Improving conservation practices and collaboration between administrative authorities: * cross-sectoral harmonization of data management; * harmonized practices and innovative tools for authorities.	The development of core components has been completed, and the first functional modules are ready. A rough estimation indicates that approximately 40% of the software development is finalized. A new software developer for the next four-year period was selected through a public procurement process conducted in 2024. The development of the EELIS software progressing as planned.	It is challenging to accurately estimate the scope of IT developments. Reaching a compromise with end users on all the intricate features, often referred to as "bells and whistles" remains a complex task.
	Expected results: EELIS is ready for use		

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 (a total of 0 person days are planned)

ACTION A.7: Solving different conservation challenges by the thematic think-tanks

Task 1. Capacity building of the conservation system – *according to the schedule*

- Foreseen start date: 3rd quarter 2020 Actual start date: 3rd quarter 2020
- Foreseen end date: 3rd quarter 2029 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 3rd quarter 2029

The aim of this action is to assess the efficiency of administrative conservation system in Estonia and to prepare the chart indicating the proposed future situation of institutional co-operation on Natura 2000 network management. The responsible for the implementation of this task is MoC.

In the first and second phase of the project, knowledge and experience of the functioning of the administrative conservation system are acquired while implementing project actions. The idea was initially to start implementing of this action with a thematic think-tank at the end of second phase of the project. However, we have decided to postpone it for a very simple reason.

In Estonia, a reform of state institutions took place in 2023 and the current government wants to continue this. This also concerns the nature conservation system and several project beneficiaries as well. During the third phase of the project, we will start analysing the current nature protection system and make proposals for changes.

Major problems/drawbacks: The reform of state institutions postpone the start of the action**.**

Milestones and Deliverables: No milestones and deliverables were foreseen in the second phase.

Proposed targets and goals for the next phase: The assessment of the efficiency of administrative conservation system in Estonia will start.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
A.7 Task 1	**Objectives:** Improving conservation practices and collaboration between administrative authorities: * cross-sectoral harmonization of data management; * harmonized practices and innovative tools for authorities.	n/a	n/a
	Expected results: Chart indicating the proposed future situation of institutional co-operation on Natura 2000 network management.		

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 person-days, 0%

ACTION A.7: Solving different conservation challenges by the thematic think-tanks

Task 2. Developing and launching different smart decision-making tools and solving conservation challenges – *according to the schedule*

- Foreseen start date: 2nd quarter 2020 Actual start date: 1st quarter 2021
- Foreseen end date: 3rd quarter 2029 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 3rd quarter 2029

This task aims at improving the quality of the environmental decision making by solving different topical issues.

In the second phase of the project, guidelines for the organising and managing of value-based forest protection were prepared. The purpose of the guidelines is to provide a description of the decision-making process and guidelines for making forest management decisions based on laws and conservation objectives, including setting restrictions and conditions and providing recommendations for the value-based management of forests containing habitats and protected species and for carrying out nature conservation work. The guide is updated every year.

Another important forest topic addressed in the second phase was the analyse of the current system of appropriate assessment (Art 6.3 of the Habitats Directive) in connection with forest management and proposing the possible alternatives. In Estonia, the appropriate assessment has been integrated into EIA and SEA.

We have analysed the current system of appropriate assessment and proposed a legislative amendment that would allow for a self-standing appropriate assessment if the planned activity does not have a wider environmental impact. In the meantime, a legislative amendment has entered into force, based on which it is possible to conduct the self-standing appropriate assessment if the planned activity is related to national defence.

The amendments of the Nature Conservation Act, based on which the self-standing appropriate assessment will be extended to all planned activities, is being processed by the Parliament, with the expected entry into force in the summer of 2025.

The issue of so-called „bird-peace“ is also related to forests. In the first Interim Report we wrote „developments are made to better harmonise the management approaches according to the Art 5 of the Birds Directive in the state and private forests (to keep bird peace during the breeding season)“. During this process, a legal dispute arose with forest companies on this issue and the opinion of the European Court of Justice was asked. Currently, the entire process is awaiting a decision of the Court. The key Word is nesting peace, whether logging can be done during the nesting season. The topic will be continued according to the decision (expected 2025).

In the second phase of the project, hunting for small predators (including *Canis aureus*) continued in coastal meadows (Action C.2 Task 2). The results of the multi-year pilot project show that the breeding success of meadow birds increases because of hunting of small predators, especially if

hunting s accompanied expansion of meadows (Action C.2 Task 2). Hunting started in the 1st phase and continued in the seasons of 2022/2023 and 2023/2024. The results were evaluated during each breeding season by UT and are described in Annex 7. A final report on the action will be prepared in 2025, presenting recommendations related to the hunting of small predators (hunting periods and methods, important coastal meadows where hunting is necessary, etc.).

In addition to the above, many different innovative practices are being tested that help solve various conservation challenges and problems. For example, testing of novel eradication methods of invasive alien species (Action C.4), designing demonstration sites for environmentally friendly farming (Action C.3 Task 1), Elaboration and implementation of training system for nature conservation staff (Action A.8 Task 1), Elaboration of active forest measure for protected areas in order to improve the conservation status of forest habitats and species (Action A.5 Task 2) and many others.

Major problems/drawbacks: Although the solutions are often not simple and depends on various factors (such us bird peace), the activities are progressing well.

Milestones and Deliverables: No milestones and deliverables were foreseen in the second phase.

Proposed targets and goals for the next phase: The development of various solutions continues according to the project implementation plan.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
A.7 Task 2	**Objectives:** Improving conservation practices and collaboration between administrative authorities: *harmonized practices and innovative tools for authorities	Important nature-conservation topics have been discussed within wide range of experts and officials and innovative solutions and ideas have been proposed and launched.	Skilful organization and implementation of think-tanks, which creates a good opportunity and atmosphere to discuss important nature conservation issues.
	Expected results: Different think-tanks will be hold to solve conservation challenges.		

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 76 person-days, 18,67%

Dissemination actions: An overview is provided in the descriptions of the respective actions. Some guidelines produced are intended for nature conservation workers and serve as the basis for making decisions, i.e. they are working documents.

ACTION A.7: Solving different conservation challenges by the thematic think-tanks

Task 3. Integrating conservation aims into sectoral development – *by the schedule*

- Foreseen start date: 3rd quarter 2020 Actual start date: 3rd quarter 2020
- Foreseen end date: 3rd quarter 2029 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 3rd quarter 2029

This task includes evidence-based recommendations for integrating conservation objectives in the agriculture, forestry and semi-natural grassland management practices, compensating the loss of income for strict forest protection supporting the biodiversity. MoC leads the implementation of this action and all other beneficiaries participate according to their knowledges and experiences.

In the first phase of the project, new approaches and methodologies were developed and launched: new methodology for selecting wet forest restoration sites (Action A.1 Task 1), consultation system for managers and restorers of semi-natural grasslands (Action A.3 Task 1).

In addition, in the first phase we started with the result-based support schemes for semi-natural grasslands (Action A.3 Task 2), design of nature friendly elements on intensive agricultural landscapes (Action C.3 Task 1) and eradication of alien species with innovative methods (Action C.4). In the second phase, testing and development of these activities continued.

In the 2nd phase, a new methodology for calculating private forest compensations on Natura 2000 sites was developed and already partly launched (Action A.5 Task 1). The active support measures for forest owners to improve the status of protected habitats and species are also under development and will be finished in the third phase (Action A.5 Task 2). Together with farmers, the analyse of different CAP support schemes (including both semi-natural grasslands and agriculture) started and it continues in the third phase (Actions A.3 Task 2, A.4, C.2 Task 1 and 2, C.3 Task 1). Based on the results, proposals will be made to improve and update CAP support schemes.

During the first two phases of the project, various new innovative nature-friendly support measures, methods and techniques are prepared or are in the preparation stage and will be tested during the implementation of numerous project actions. The main testing period is the second and third phases of the project, and based on the results, the reports will be compiled and proposals will be made for implementing the results in different sectors in the third and fourth phases of the project.

Major problems/drawbacks: The implementation of the action is proceeding according to expectations**.**

Milestones: No milestones were foreseen in the second phase.

Deliverables: Different reports, suggestions, guidelines during the whole project, 2020-2030 – In the second phase, the wet forest action plan was compiled (Action A.1 Task 1), a new methodology for calculating private forest compensations on Natura 2000 sites was developed (Action A.5 Task 1), guideline on establishing biodiverse hedges and shrub strips was compiled (Action C.3 Task 1),

guidelines for the organising and managing of value-based forest protection were prepared (Action A.7 Task 2), etc.

Proposed targets and goals for the next phase: Different reports, suggestions, guidelines will be prepared according to the progress of different actions.

Action	**Foreseen in the Grant Agreement**	**Achieved**	**Main factors of success and lessons learned**
A.7 Task 3	**Objectives:** All objectives.	Different methods and schemes are in the testing phase or are ready for implementation.	Involvement of stakeholders and practitioners on the one hand and experts and scientists on the other ensures a result that is both science-based and practical.
	Expected results: New approached to the different sectorial challenges. Different reports, suggestions, guidelines during the whole project.		

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 person-days, 0%

Dissemination actions: An overview is provided in the descriptions of the respective actions.

ACTION A.8: Capacity Building

Task 1. Elaboration and implementation of training system for nature conservation staff – *by the schedule*

- Foreseen start date: 4th quarter 2022 Actual start date: 4th quarter 2023
- Foreseen end date: 3rd quarter 2029 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 3rd quarter 2029

The aim of the action is to create a training system for officials dealing with nature conservation issues. Mapping of training needs began at the end of 2023 with input gathered from project partners. Following this, a team was formed, and a contract was signed with the Estonian Fund for Nature, who had relevant experience through the NaturallyEst LIFE project (LIFE16GIE/EE/000665). In the process of creating the system several meetings with the project team were held and input from partners was gathered. Also to involve municipality level, the Union of Cities and Townships was consulted. By April 2024, the training system was completed, along with an accompanying action plan of trainings.

The main goal of the system is to develop the knowledge and skills of nature conservation staff on public communication, environmental negotiation, and stakeholder engagement. The training system is divided into three thematic modules consisting of several trainings for state and municipal officials, also for key speakers and decision makers.

To find trainers the MoC conducted a comprehensive market survey and held interviews with potential trainers. This process helped identify qualified trainers and dates for first trainings next year were agreed.

Major problems/drawbacks: Although the action started later, this did not hinder the development of the training system. Former Ministry of Environment was restructured and the department of nature conservation reorganized. Therefore, development of the training system was started in accordance with the new structure.

Milestones: Implementing the training system from 3rd quarter 2024 - in October 2024, the MoC organized meetings with potential trainers to finalize the selection of qualified professionals and agreed on the dates for the first training module.

Deliverables: Training system elaborated by 2nd quarter 2024 - training system was successfully developed in the 2nd quarter 2024, in accordance with the project timeline. Training system is inserted into BUTLER.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: In the next phase the implement of the training system start. The first training module for conservation officials "Engagement and negotiations" will be implemented at the beginning of 2025. After that “Psychology of communication” and “Public speaking and media” modules are carried out.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
A.8 **Task 1**	**Objectives:** Raising awareness and capacity of main stakeholders and general public incl. using innovative tools and solutions. **Expected results:** Training system and individual trainings raise the capacity and skills of nature conservationists to performed better in their work, incl. with environmental communication and engagement with stakeholders.	Training system was created.	Several meetings were held with trainers, providing valuable insights into potential trainers who are well-suited to support our partners in developing communication skills. Diverse participation from organizations enables the integration of a wide range of conservation issues into the trainings.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 (a total of 0 person-days are planned)

ACTION A.8: Capacity Building

Task 2. Study trips to raise the awareness of the project team and public servants about the possibilities and best practices implemented in other countries – *according to the schedule*

- Foreseen start date: 3rd quarter 2022 Actual start date: 3rd quarter 2022
- Foreseen end date: 3rd quarter 2029 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 3rd quarter 2029

The project aimed to organize at least four study trips during the project lifetime to countries, who already have effective systems in place or who are implementing similar projects in order to find solutions to the problems Estonia is facing at the moment.

The first study trip took place in September 2022 to Lithuania and focused on exchanging experiences with the "LIFE-IP "NaturaLit" project, which implements a program similar to ours. A group of Estonia nature conservation staff visited forest and grassland habitats, and participants were introduced to new technology for recording bird sounds.

The second study trip in May 2023 was organized in collaboration with the WOODMEADOWLIFE project to visit and exchange experiences with the LIFE-IP "Jednapriroda" project in Czech Republic. This trip focused on communication strategies, engaging landowners in nature conservation activities, and training advisors to improve our project's actions regarding landowner consultation system (Action A3 Task 1). In addition to project partners, two awarded seminatural grassland managers participated.

The third study trip in June 2024 explored Ireland's extensive experience with result-based payments for grasslands. LIFE-IP Wild Atlantic Nature project team gave an overview about the topic, that is crucial for improving and developing Estonia's result-based subsidy schemes (Action A3 Task 2). EB also introduced developing and testing RBAPS scheme in Estonia. As with the second trip, two meadow managers joined the visit to further enhance the knowledge in the field of seminatural grassland.

All study trips hosts were involved in LIFE-IP projects, making this content relevant for networking with other LIFE projects (Action E.5 Task 2) as well.

Major problems/drawbacks: n/a

Milestones:

- First phase study trip arranged by 3rd quarter 2022 - in accordance with the project timeline study trip was arranged in September 2022.
- Second phase study trip arranged by 2nd quarter 2024 - in accordance with the project timeline study trip was arranged in May 2023.

In the second phase, EB also organized an additional third study trip in June 2024 to support the development of project activities, particularly regarding result-based subsidy schemes and updates to seminatural grassland management subsidies.

Deliverables: No deliverables were foreseen in the 2nd phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: Organizing at least one more study trip focused on sharing experiences related to biodiversity in agricultural landscapes and the creation of landscape elements.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
A.8 **Task 2**	**Objectives:** Raising awareness and capacity of main stakeholders and general public including using innovative tools and solutions.	3 study trips have been organized.	Strong collaboration among field experts (scientists, land managers, conservation staff). Enhanced cooperation between key speakers and state-level stakeholders. Grassland managers who participated in the trips carry the gained knowledge and messages forward to other managers as well.
	Expected results: Study visits have raised awareness of the project team and public servants about the best practices implemented in other countries, have given opportunity to change experiences, contacts and learn from each other.		

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 (a total of 0 person-days are planned)

SUB-THEME OF THE PLAN: E.1.3. Monitoring and reporting

ACTION D.1: Developing and implementing monitoring schemes for all concrete conservation actions – *according to the schedule, except dry forest monitoring scheme*

- Foreseen start date: 3rd quarter 2020 Actual start date: 2nd quarter 2020
- Foreseen end date: 3rd quarter 2028 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 3rd quarter 2029

The aim of this action is to monitor the results and success of various restoration works carried out by the project: restoration of wet and dry forests, semi-natural grasslands and coastal meadows and small water bodies.

Monitoring of wet forests (Action C.1 Task 1)
TLU experts are responsible for water, soil and vegetation structure monitoring. UT experts are responsible for species and large-scale forest structure monitoring. The wet forests monitoring methodology was developed in 2022 and updated in 2023-2024. Pre-restoration monitoring started in 2022 and continued in 2023 and 2024. To date, 20 permanent plots and 19 automatic water level loggers have been installed; LIDAR monitoring is carried out (with an airplane, covering 8800 ha and with a drone, covering eight 28 ha areas); woodpecker monitored in four areas (300-400 ha each) and amphibian spawn clumps were counted in eight 28 ha areas (in the same areas, vegetation was monitored and forest structure was assessed). Post-restoration monitoring will begin in 2026, when the first wet forest project sites have been restored.

Monitoring of dry forests (Action C.1 Task 2)
The monitoring methodology will be developed in 2025, after the restoration sites are selected and activities agreed because the monitoring is site and activity specific.

Monitoring of semi-natural grasslands (Action C.2 Task 1)
Semi-natural grasslands are monitored as part of national monitoring scheme described in the 1st Interim Report. Environment Agency is responsible on these monitoring.

Monitoring of coastal meadows (Action C.2 Task 2)
The monitoring methodology for amphibians and plants was developed as part of the pre-selection of possible project sites during the preparation of the project application. In the 1st quarter of 2021, the monitoring methodology for coastal birds was developed. Pre-restoration monitoring of coastal meadow plants, amphibians and birds was carried out in the 1st phase of the project. Bird monitoring continued in 2023 (23 sites) and 2024 (24 sites) in restored and non-restored sites and it was also related to hunting of small predators. Post restoration monitoring of amphibians will begin in 2026 and plant monitoring in 2027; monitoring of these species groups takes place at 2-3 years intervals.

Monitoring result of small water bodies (Action C.3 Task 2)
Monitoring methodology for the monitoring of amphibians and aquatic macro-invertebrates in small water bodies was developed in the 1st phase of the project. Monitoring of amphibians in restored water bodies have been carried out annually since spring 2022.

In 2023 a total of 37 and in 2024 a total of 60 restored water bodies were monitored. We can already say that the impact of the restoration work has been very positive. For example, in Mädapea Tammiku project site where *Triturus cristatus* was not found in the beginning of the project, this species was found in 44% of restored ponds in 2024. In Mõdriku-Roela, where 16 small water bodies were restored in 2022, and *Triturus cristatus and/or Pelobates fuscus* were found in 19% of small water bodies before their restoration, the species were colonized 56% of restored ponds just two years after their restoration. Monitoring of aquatic invertebrates is carried out in water bodies in the third year after restoration (when aquatic vegetation has developed). Thus, in 2024, aquatic invertebrates were monitored for the first time in 17 water bodies restored in the fall of 2021.

Major problems/drawbacks: Monitoring has not started in dry forests. This delay does not affect any other actions of the project.

Milestones: Water and habitat monitoring schemes established on all habitats that are selected for restoration and management during 2020-2023 (except dry forest) – deadline according to the project 4th quarter 2022.

Deliverables: (1) Monitoring result scheme for C1 developed (monitoring schemes for wet forests was developed in 2022 and updated in 2023-2024, for dry forest will be completed in 2025 – deadline according to the project 2nd quarter 2024. (2) Monitoring result schemes of wet forests, semi-natural grasslands, coastal meadows and small waterbodies are inserted into BUTLER.

Proposed targets and goals for the next phase: The monitoring schemes for dry forest will be completed site by site bases in 2025 and 2026. Monitoring of all restoration activities continues.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
D.1	**Objectives:** Improving the conservation status of forest and farmland habitats and species to achieve results benefiting the whole ecosystems. **Expected results:** Monitoring schemes developed for each restoration action. Monitoring actions carried out based on monitoring schemes	Monitoring schemes for C.1, C.2 and C.3 developed /(except for dry forest). Monitoring of restoration activities started and continues.	A good methodological basis and the use of skilled experts are needed to assess the status of species and habitats before restoration work and to determine the impact of restoration.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 1807 person-days, 33,09%

Dissemination actions: The monitoring results were introduced at meetings with landowners, stakeholders and nature conservation specialists as well as in different conferences and seminars.

ACTION D.2: Monitoring of the effects of the project on the conservation status trends of the relevant habitats and species of Community Interest and the degree of implementation of the PAF within the project

Task 1. Overall monitoring of project`s success (incl. PAF) – *as planned*

- Foreseen start date: 1st quarter 2020 Actual start date: 1st quarter 2020
- Foreseen end date: 1st quarter 2028 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 4th quarter 2029

The Monitoring Team with the aim of supervision of the implementation of the PAF and project objectives was formed 09/03/2020. The members of the team are the officials of the Biodiversity Conservation Department of the MoC. Each employee of the department curates one or more project and PAF tasks and objectives according to their field of work. In the first phase of the project five meetings took place.

However, the Monitoring Team does not only monitor the implementation of PAF and project actions. The Moc is responsible for the implementation of the PAF and because of that, the Monitoring Team has two other very important roles, essentially key roles. First, to ensure the financial resources necessary for the implementation of the PAF. Second, to create the prerequisites for the implementation of the PAF at the political level.

In addition to the Monitoring Team, the project Management Team (Action F.1) also monitors the implementation of project actions. Both teams are working in close cooperation. Monitoring Team members also participate in Management Team meetings and in project`s working groups.

In the second phase of the project, two Monitoring Team meetings (16-17/03/2023 and 13/03/2024) and two Management Team (incl. Monitoring Team members) meetings (15-17/11/2022 and 21-22/11/2023) were held.

According to the project proposal, four Monitoring team meetings should take place during the project, but already 9 meetings have taken place during the first two phases of the project.

Monitoring the implementation of PAF and project actions is an ongoing process. An overview of the financial resources required and secured to implement the PAF (as of the end of 2024) has been attached to the report (Annex 3). From the perspective of our project is important that the necessary financing is generally secured for project related activities.

Main problems/drawbacks: No major problems.

Milestones and Deliverables: No milestones and deliverables were foreseen in the second phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: MoC will organize ca 4 Monitoring Team meetings.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
D.2 Task 1	**Objectives:** All project objectives.	The Monitoring Team has formed and is actively working.	The involvement of experienced officials has helped to implement the actions and solve the problems.
	Expected results: Report about the implementation of PAF in the frame of the project.		

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 (a total of 0 person-days are planned)

ACTION D.2: Monitoring of the effects of the project on the conservation status trends of the relevant habitats and species of Community Interest and the degree of implementation of the PAF within the project

Task 2. Assessment of the LIFE Key project level indicators – *as planned*

- Foreseen start date: 1st quarter 2021 Actual start date: 1st quarter 2021
- Foreseen end date: 4th quarter 2029 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 4th quarter 2029

Key project level indicators (KPI) are defined in the Grant Agreement of the project. In 2021, KPI`s were entered into the LIFE KPI database. At the end of the second phase, the information was reviewed and changed according to the EMT advice.

KPI changes are described in more detail in Chapter 7, "Key project-level indicators".

The project results (KPI values) will be entered into the database at the end of the project and five years after the end of the project. The latter is the responsibility of the coordinating beneficiary MoC. The monitoring of KPI`s is one of the tasks of the Monitoring Team (Action D2 Task1).

Main problems/drawbacks: The action is ongoing by plan.

Milestones and Deliverables: No milestones or deliverables were foreseen in the second phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: Monitoring of KPI indicators.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
D2 Task 2	**Objectives:** All project objectives.	KPI`s are entered into the database and updated.	The choice of the right indicators needs to be carefully considered.
	Expected results: KPI`s have been entered into the database and updated according to the schedule.		

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 (a total of 0 person days are planned)

ACTION D.3: monitoring the effects of the project to the public perception, its impact to socio-economy and ecosystem services – *as planned*

- Foreseen start date: 3rd quarter 2026 Actual start date: 2nd quarter 2024
- Foreseen end date: 1st quarter 2029 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 1st quarter 2029

The aim of the action is to measure the projects' effects on social change, socio-economy and provision of ecosystem services. Three studies and report will be delivered by the end of the project: (1) interim report on social change of agriculture landowners/users, conservation officers, public; (2) interim report on social change of forest owners; (3) final report of social, socio-economic and ecosystem services change.

Measurement of social change among agricultural landowners was supposed to start 2026 but we saw the need to intervene earlier and give already now expert inputs to the actions A3 and A4.

During the preparatory work, it became clear that agroecological experiments have been started or soon will be starting also in other projects of Estonian universities and research institutions, and therefore it was decided to conduct a joint comprehensive background analysis among the Estonian agricultural land users. In 2024 the questionnaire for agricultural land users was prepared to help us to analyse the economic situation of land users and farmers, to learn about the main characteristics of their business environment (socio-economic context), about their willingness to test different agro-ecological techniques and methods in their fields as well as to find out what factors encourage them to use agroecological techniques further.

To compile a standardized questionnaire for agricultural enterprises, first the interviews were conducted with the farmers participating in our project, then the questionnaire was tested with other agricultural producers and project partners, then the contact data was asked from PRIA about its clients (around 12 000 farmers for sample analysis, based on sample analysis, 2000 contacts for survey).

Invitation to participate in the land use survey among will be sent out in early 2025.

In addition, the methodology for a standard survey of semi-natural meadow managers was prepared as the last statistical overview of them was completed five years ago. The survey will also begin in early 2025.

Standard surveys, together with repeated surveys will give us a better understanding of the socio-economic situation of agricultural land users and provide input for agricultural policy recommendations.

Milestones and Deliverables: No milestones or deliverables were foreseen in the second phase.

Major problems/drawbacks: No major problems.

Proposed targets and goals for the next phase: To prepare for the socio-economical evaluation report, at least three seminars on evaluation results will be organised with the project stakeholders, a report based on surveys of farmers will be prepared (input from research groups working on other participatory research projects will also be taken into account). At least 20 additional interviews

with farmers will be conducted, and based on all mentioned above, an evaluation report will be combined, which will also provide input for further developments in agricultural policy.
In 2025 several additional seminars are planned to start the discussion about the role of LIFE IP activities in wider agricultural context and project participation in agricultural policy making regarding a new CAP period.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
D.3	**Objectives:** Raising awareness and capacity of main stakeholders and general public incl. using innovative tools and solutions. **Expected results:** Reports on social, socio-economical and ecosystem service change.	The preparation of reports are on schedule.	The journey to the final evaluation report needs to be participatory to enable stakeholders make their own conclusions along the research process and contribute to change. The collaboration of researchers and analysts is important to evaluate the efforts of the research participants.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 44 person-days, 13,54%

Dissemination actions: comprehensive questionnaire to the farmland users and owners.

SUB-THEME OF THE PLAN: E.1.5. Natura 2000-related communication and awareness raising measures, education and visitor access

ACTION E.1: Project visibility and dissemination info on project activities and their effects

Task 1. Project website creation and management – *maintained as planned*

- Foreseen start date: 2nd quarter 2020 Actual start date: 2nd quarter 2021
- Foreseen end date: 4th quarter 2034 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 4th quarter 2034

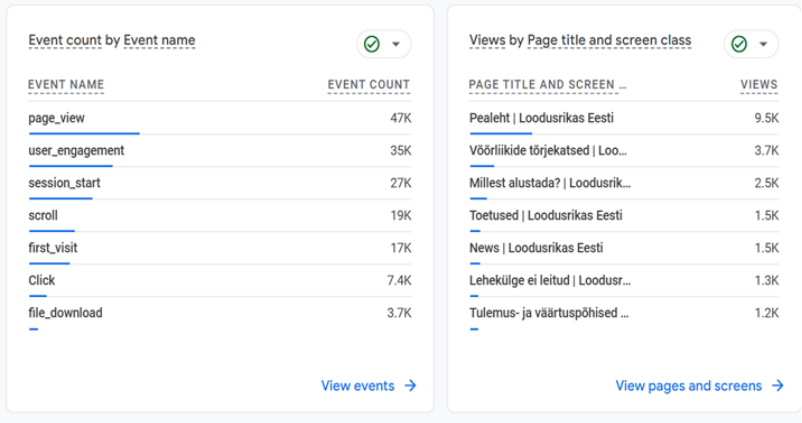
The project website www.loodusrikaseesti.ee (in English: www.loodusrikaseesti.ee/en) was created during the 1st phase. Its technically built on software platform Drupal 9 with several advanced features for enabling the content managers to create new content with ease, administrators to keep the page up to date and to collect relevant information, i.e. statistics on visits, etc. The website is always up to date and its one of the main communication channels of the project.

The content of the website is divided into five parts (forests, species, semi-natural grasslands, agricultural landscapes and so-called "our stories" – the feature stories of people investing into nature) giving thorough overview of all the activities within these five directions. In addition, the website hosts the consultation centre for the managers of the semi-natural grasslands (Activity A3 Task 1). Up-to-date news, events and engagement activities (as campaigns, competitions, etc) are posted on the front page of the website. Map application www.loodusrikaseesti.ee/et/projektialade-kaart provides a comprehensive overview of the restauration areas and other actions.

The website has good traffic. During the 2nd phase, the front page of the website is visited 9500 times, there are approx. 20 000 individual page visits and 3700 downloads.

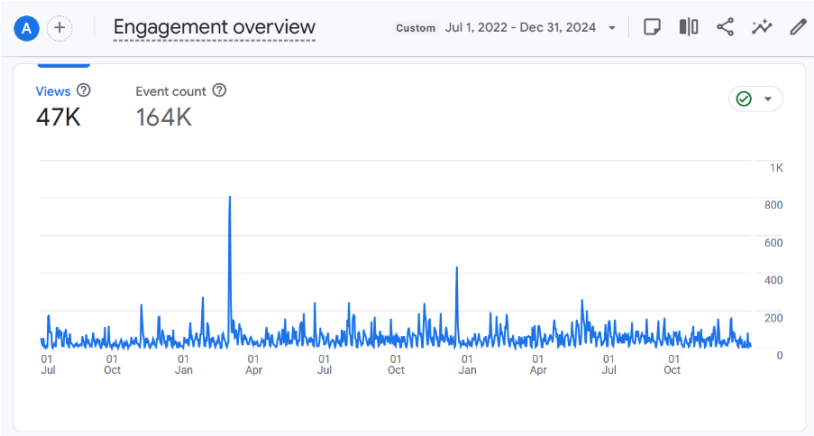
Different sub-pages of the consultation service for the semi-natural grassland managers have been visited 4700 times. Popular is also the section of the control and eradication works of the alien species (visited 3700 times). News section is visited 1500 times.

Visitors spend on the website nearly three minutes which is considered to be a very good time.



From the engagement overview it can be see that during their visits the readers have made 16 400 different actions (clicks, downloads, research) which means that the content of the website interests the reader.

In addition to the project website, heapõld.ee was created in the 1st phase by the project benefitciary UT, dedicated to the land managers and farmers who are willing to learn about good agricultural techniques that help maintain biodiversity, improve the environment and soil health. During the 2nd phase practical information is constantly being added to the website and its now also available in English.



Milestones and Deliverables: No milestones or deliverables foreseen for the 2nd phase. Screenshot of the website inserted into BUTLER.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: Keep the website up to date in both languages and use it as a good source of information as well as a platform for upcoming public engagement procedures (public consultation on dry forest management plan in autumn 2025 and pollinators action plan coming up in 2026).

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
E.1 Task 1	**Objectives:** Raising awareness and capacity of main stakeholders and general public including using innovative tools and solutions.	The website provides good insights to the project objectives, activities and results but also providing comprehensive material for the managers of the semi-natural grasslands (via consultation system placed to the website).	We have nice colourful website full of easily understandable information people obviously like to read and study. It's a key to keep the information up-to-date and refer to the website wherever its possible.
	Expected results: Project website ready and operational	The website is actively visited, the content is used for improving knowledge and understanding on nature conser-vation and increasing the understanding of complex challenges it faces.	

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 (a total of 0 person days are planned)

Dissemination: We consciously direct interested parties to obtain additional information from the website.

ACTION E.1: Project visibility and dissemination info on project activities and their effects

Task 2. Project on-spot visibility (e.g. information boards) – *according to the plan*

- Foreseen start date: 3rd quarter 2020 Actual start date: 3rd quarter 2020
- Foreseen end date: 4th quarter 2021 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 2nd quarter 2028

During the 1st phase 10 roll-ups in Estonian and English language were produced and placed to the premises of beneficiaries as well as set up while having public events. Small (A.3) information boards for the restoration sites of semi-natural grasslands are designed in the 1st phase but installed to the project sites during the 2nd phase.

In addition, small information boards are made and installed to explain the needs and matters of

- the restoration sites of coastal grasslands;
- the restoration of small waterbodies for amphibians;
- agro-environmental interventions in the agricultural fields;
- control actions of alien species (goldenrods, knotweeds)

Examples from each of the information board is attached to the report as Annex 8.

Texts for larger (1m*1m) information boards on semi-natural grasslands, agricultural interventions and invasive species are drafted but not yet finalized. Printing and installations will take place in summer 2025.

Milestones: First information boards and signs installed by 4th quarter 2022 – accordingly to the project timeline first semi-natural grassland information boards and signs were installed.

Deliverables: no deliverables were foreseen in 2nd phase. The roll-ups (pdf files) produced in the 1st phase are inserted into BUTLER.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: In 2025-2026 large be-lingual (Estonian, English) information boards will be created and installed to the pre-selected places. Small info boards for the restoration of wet and dry forest habitats will be made according to the action timeline. Work for the info board of the alien species will be finished.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
E.1 Task 2	**Objectives:** Raising awareness and capacity of main stakeholders and general public including using innovative tools and solutions. **Expected results:** 18 roll-ups produced, 10 large and 100 small info-boards designed and installed.	Info boards have the link to the project website and therefore we hope people to visit the website and learn more about the project. 20 roll-ups are ready and in use. Approx. 50 small info-boards on the restoration of semi-natural grasslands and coastal grasslands, control of alien species, restoration of small waterbodies for amphibians, and agro-environmental interventions in the agricultural fields are designed.	With roll-ups everything worked out smoothly. The EB who is in charge of info-boards has a long term plan to replace physical boards with the virtual ones and therefore some additional coordination had to be made for reaching out to an agreement to install boards.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 (a total of 0 person days are planned)

ACTION E.1: Project visibility and dissemination info on project activities and their effects.

Task 3. Creating and distributing adverts - *according to the schedule*

- Foreseen start date: 2nd quarter 2020 Actual start date: 3rd quarter 2020
- Foreseen end date: 4th quarter 2029 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 4th quarter 2029

All the communication channels set up during the 1st period (project website, Facebook page, Instagram as well as newsletters to the topic-based interest groups) are in frequent use also during the 2nd reporting period.

The project **website** **www.loodusrikaseesti.ee**, as its kept updated and interactive, is frequently visited (see the Action E.1.1 for more precise visitors' information).

Facebook page www.facebook.com/loodusrikaseesti followers have grown from 1200 individuals to 1700+, and the outreach can be considered (depends on time and subjects) good or very good. We keep telling stories rather than issuing press releases type of texts and sharing the news on partners' (MoC, EB, other LIFE projects) websites and newsfeeds also helps to reach out to potentially interested people and parties. Nevertheless, Facebook changes quite often its algorithms and therefore there is a constant catch to find out what and how works the best in a current moment. We also struggle to get more attention from men (75% of our followers are woman) but it seems to be the tendency with all the nature protection projects. For the advertisements, events and invitations to the different events we also use the booster (i.e. paid content) time to time but most of the posts are not boosted.

Videos and short films posted directly to Facebook are viewed by many more people than videos uploaded to **YouTube**. However, we also keep our YouTube channel active and currently have all 33 videos we have produced on it. The videos and short films are also linked to the project website.

In connection with the consultation system, **the electronic newsletter** is published two or three times per year, intended for owners and managers of the semi-natural meadows (more than 6000 people), informing them about the values of the grasslands, notifying on management support schemes, introducing inspiring people engaged to the lifestyle, etc. Newsletters can be found also on the project website. The newsletter has received a lot of good feedback, and we have very few unsubscribes among the thousands who get the letter.

Some of our partners have their own newsletters, therefore for example the forest related topics of the project are covered in the newsletter of the Environmental Investment Centre, explicitly aimed at private forest owners. We have been asked by the farmers to create also a newsletter for them but so far www.heapõld.ee website is used to upload good practices on biodiversity and climate-friendly food production and nature friendly land management.

As of the topics, big amount of time has been used during the 2nd phase to run the communication (stories, films, etc) on the competition of semi-natural grassland managers (the competition take place in every second year), promote the farmers who have joined us to enrich agricultural

landscapes and tell their stories to inspire others, run the public participation process on wet forest management plan and explain the restoration issue for the wider public, activate the semi-natural grassland managers to participate in different trainings which help them to maintain their lands better as well as on topics related to the eradication of alien species. In all these subjects also local municipalities, if appropriate, central and local newspapers, public broadcasts have been contacted for providing stories and content. The list of media coverage can be found in Annex 6.

Some more intense advertisements and postings are also used while inviting people to participate in the celebration of Semi-natural Grasslands Day (2nd of July). The tradition is yet very young – established within the project 2020 and therefore more efforts need to be made to establish the tradition and certain activities of the day. Here the cooperation with other LIFE projects, Estonian Fund for Nature and others is an asset. Before any information days or local study visit contacts

Deliverables & Milestones: No deliverables or milestones were foreseen in the first phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: during the 3rd phase **pollinators action plan** as well as the **dry forest action plan** will get ready and public participation processes related to these plans will be organised.

In 2025, we will hold six public meetings related to the **restoration works on wet forest habitats**. Public meetings for the **restoration works on dry forest habitats** will begin in 2026.

January 2025 a big media campaign is organised together with Ekspress Group to find out the most **favourite managers of the semi-natural grasslands** among the readers of the "Maaleht". For these purposes five outstanding managers are selected among 10, video films and articles are made of them and public voting is set up to select the best. This is an opportunity to give a bigger platform and a wider readership to an important topic for us. If the campaign is successful, we want to continue it in the future.

In addition, we would like to reach out to the **agricultural institutions and outlets** for the bigger cooperation and networking on biodiversity related agricultural subjects. We continue with the newsletter and communication to support the activities related to any other topic will continue as before.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
E.1 Task 3	**Objectives:** Raising awareness and capacity of main stakeholders and general public including using innovative tools and solutions. **Expected results:** God knowledge about the project among its main stakeholders, and general knowledge among the wider audience. At least 25 adverts created and published in different channels (newspapers, websites, Facebook, etc.) during the whole project duration.	Well established information flow both in social media and project website. Good cooperation with partners network and well engaged campaigns and activities. Various communication activities (campaigns, etc.) take place to support the project content or to meet the legal requirements (public involvement). Approximately 20 adverts created and published in different channels during the 2nd phase of the project. But its is just a small part of the communication of the project. Most of the information is not given out in the forms of advertisements.	It is still valid to find more ways to advertise the project and its activities outside of social media (i.e regular project newsletter, fieldworks, nature hikes, voluntary camps, etc). Project communication is an essential part of the project success it supports the topic-related developments. Stakeholders of the project are not only mapped but studied thoroughly by now and everyday work to reach out to them is happening.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 (a total of 0 person days are planned)

ACTION E.1: Project visibility and dissemination info on project activities and their effects

Task 5. Products with LIFE and project logo – *slightly delayed*

- Foreseen start date: 4th quarter 2024 Actual start date: 2nd quarter 2022
- Foreseen end date: 4th quarter 2029 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 4th quarter 2029

The aim of the action is to order different products with LIFE and project logo, which can be shared to the volunteers, partners, stakeholders participating in the project actions, visitors (e.g. other projects) and when visiting other projects. In the first phase, 600 copies of the educational card game "What Frog Is It?" and 600 copies of the booklet "Frogs in Estonian Folklore" were produced and half of them distributed as project gifts to partners and collaborators.

In the second phase another 600 card games and books were distributed and gifted. In September 2023, the first procurement process was launched to find a designer for the creation and production of 200 representative project-branded T-shirts. Due to the lack of suitable and modern designs, a second procurement was initiated in June 2024; however, no proposals were received. In October 2024, a suitable designer was selected, and the design of the project-branded T-shirts and sweaters was completed (Annex 9) and is ready for production.

Major problems/drawbacks: Since two procurement rounds failed to find a suitable design for project-branded clothing, the production and distribution of representative items have taken longer than initially planned. However, this delay does not impact any other project activities.

Milestones: 600 frog related card game and books have been distributed.

Deliverables: no deliverables were foreseen in the 2nd phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: Distribute the newly designed T-shirts and sweaters to project partners, stakeholders, and volunteers actively participating in project activities.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 (a total of 0 person days are planned)

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
E.1 Task 5	**Objectives:** Raising awareness and capacity of main stakeholders and general public including using innovative tools and solutions.	Educational card game "What frog it is?" and a little book "Frogs in Estonian folklore" and are produced and gifted. Design for T-shirts and sweaters is completed.	Designers usually specialize in creating designs, so design and production of T-shorts should be ordered from different places.
	Expected results: 500 gift bags with LIFE logo made and distributed.		

ACTION E.2: Raising awareness about the conservation aims and challenges of forest and farmland landscapes to the main stakeholders

Task 1. Implementation of the Communication Plan – *according to the schedule*

- Foreseen start date: 1st quarter 2021 Actual start date: 1st quarter 2021
- Foreseen end date: 4th quarter 2029 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 4th quarter 2029

The communication plan is based on the Communication and Participation Strategy (A9) developed during the 1st phase of the project. To be more proactive and follow the dynamics of the project, more concrete media plans are set up for each topic, implemented and updated based on project activities. Media plans are co-created by the communication manager and project partners.

The communication plan consists (1) topics/actions to be communicated, (2) stakeholders and interest groups to be reached out; (3) key messages to be delivered, (5) spokespersons to talk about the topic, (6) potential conflicting issues to be tackled, (7) exact timing for delivering messages, (8) division of precise roles and tasks among partners.

During the 2nd period the biggest focus (following the timeline of project activities) has been on:

- **semi-natural grasslands** (A.3 Task 1, C.2 Task 1), incl. restoration of coastal areas (C.2 Task 2) which initially caused some conflicts with landowners and especially with some local governments, but has found solutions and agreements due to the meaningful communication and involvement of key stakeholders to the planning process;
- selection and celebration of most **outstanding semi-natural grassland managers** in every second year (as part of the A.3 Task 1 activity); award ceremony in January 2023 was set up to recognize these grassland managers who stand out for their dedication, take exemplary care of their lands, contribute to the activities of the local communities and are the promoters of the semi-natural grasslands and its maintenance challenges.
- **wet forest action plan**, **restoration site selections** and future works on the wet forest restoration (A.1 Task 1; C.1 Task 1), the topic has become highly politicised and polarised and have required lots of efforts and awareness raising work. Unfortunately, also some journalists have chosen sides and have not maintained a neutral journalistic approach to the issue;
- **nature-based solutions for the traditional farmlands** (C.3 Task 1), innovative farmers and their pilot activities with us. Our coverage of agricultural topics has brought us many new (social media) followers, and there is great interest in sustainable agriculture. The large number of participants in the regenerative agriculture conference (Northen Roots in Tallinn January 2024) proves that there is excessive interest in the topic in Estonia as well as in neighbouring countries, and our project sees the prospect of working with various interest and stakeholders' groups precisely in this direction.
- **eradication work of invasive species** (C.4), the topic of alien species control always receives a lot of coverage, and since Estonia is moving to the direction of making alien species control an owner's responsibility, there is also a lot of discussion around the topic;
- **studies on farmland birds** (A.4). These studies have provided new, previously unknown results, and it has been a great to communicate them. However, we are still looking for agricultural landowners who would be willing to experiment with unsown spots in the middle

of a cropland and collaborate with ornithologists to implement more bird-friendly agricultural practices.

In addition to our own social media posts and news on the project and its partners website, there are 101 articles in local and national media issued since the beginning of the project, 18 TV and 7 radio broadcast made. Based on results it could be concluded that in next phase more needs to be worked with radio channels and programmes. However, we are satisfied that the highly rated nature conservation program "Osoon" in public broadcasting ERR has covered all of our current topics, using our key experts as spoke persons of the programme.

Deliverables & Milestones: No deliverables or milestones were foreseen in the 2nd phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: During the 3rd phase during the pollinators action plan as well as the dry forest action plan will get ready and public participation processes (as set by law) related to these plans will be organised.

In 2025, we will hold six public meetings related to the restoration works on wet forest habitats. Public meetings for the restoration works on dry forest habitats will begin in 2026.

January 2025 a big media campaign is organised together with Ekspress Group to find out the most favourite managers of the semi-natural grasslands among the readers of the "Maaleht". For these purposes five outstanding managers are selected among 10, video films and articles are made of them and public voting is set up to select the best. This is an opportunity to give a bigger platform and a wider readership to an important topic for us.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
E.2 Task 1	**Objectives:** Raising awareness and capacity of main stakeholders and general public including using innovative tools and solutions. **Expected results:** All 4 Communication Plans are executed.	127 articles, radio and TV broadcasts are issued based on our actions. Active social media newsfeed, up to date website. The project is visible and the aims/actions/results of the project well communicated. Stakeholders are engaged in participatory manner. Communication Plans are arranged around topics and not based on years.	Cooperation with partners and proper planning will bring the results.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 (a total of 0 person days are planned).

ACTION E.2: Raising awareness about the conservation aims and challenges of forest and farmland landscapes to the main stakeholders

Task 2. Information days and site visits – *as planned*

- Foreseen start date: 2nd quarter 2021 Actual start date: 2nd quarter 2021
- Foreseen end date: 3rd quarter 2027 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 3rd quarter 2027

Under this task 23 information days and site visits are planned for landowners, local government officials, and other stakeholders, covering various project-related topics. During the 1st phase **5** information days were successfully carried out.

In the 2nd phase, a total of **37** information days (included also 17 site visits) were organized. These events covered broad range of project topics:

- Actions related to seminatural grassland RBAPS piloting (A.3 task 2) were introduced to land managers, owners, and local communities through **10** information days (also included 10 site visits).
- Actions related compensation measures for private forest owners (action A.5 task 1 and 2) were presented to policy makers and representatives from forest owner associations through **5** information days.
- Actions related to wet forest restoration projects (action A6 task 1) were presented to all interested parties through **4** information days.
- Actions related to seminatural grassland and coastal meadow restoration (action C.2 task 2) were introduced to land managers, owners, and local communities through **5** information days.
- Actions related to biodiversity-friendly agriculture interventions (action C.3 task 1) were introduced to farmers and policy makers through **6** information days (3 also included site visits).
- Actions related to restoration of small water bodies (C.3 task 2) were introduced to conservation specialists and students through **2** information days (also included 2 site visits).
- Actions related to alien species (action C.4) were presented to local government representatives and gardening enthusiasts on through **2** information days.
- **One** information day about overall project overview (F.2) to the students and academic staff of the University of Tallinn was organised.
- In addition, the project organized **2** nature hikes for Ukrainian refugee children (to Lahemaa and Matsalu national parks) to introduce Estonian nature.

A detailed overview of the information days and site visits is described in Annex 10.

Major problems/drawbacks: During project implementation, it became clear that additional site visits and information days were necessary to cover a broader range of topics beyond the originally planned focus on alien species. Since activities related to alien species started later than expected, more site visits will be arranged in the next phase.

Milestones:

- 8 site visits carried out to alien species test plots by 3rd quarter 2023 - two alien species information days were organized.

- Info day about forest measures for private forest owners by 2nd quarter 2024 – five info days about compensation measures for private forest owners were organized.

Additional site visits were needed to cover a wider range of project topics. As a result and accordingly to project timeline all together 35 information days (included 15 site visits) were organized, focusing on the restoration of small water bodies, the values of seminatural grasslands, wet forest restoring projects and biodiversity-friendly agricultural interventions.

Deliverables: No deliverables were foreseen in the 2nd phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: Continue organizing information days and site visits according to needs arising from project activities and progress.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
E.2 Task 2	**Objectives:** Raising awareness and capacity of main stakeholders and general public including using innovative tools and solutions. Expected results: 16 site visits carried out to alien species test plots, at least 2 info days about forest measures for private forest owners, at least 3 info days for biodiversity friendly agricultural support scheme, at least 2 info days for semi-natural grassland actions.	42 info days and site visits have been carried out in the 1st and 2nd phase, including topics of restoration of small water bodies, actions of seminatural grasslands, forest-related measures and biodiversity-friendly agricultural schemes.	As a new approach to sharing advice on controlling alien species, EB and MoC participated in Türi Flower Fair. It is a major event that draws large crowds of visitors, many of whom are key figures in discussions related to invasive species. Direct communication with garden owners and enthusiasts at the event also helped raise awareness about the importance of controlling alien species in their own gardens. A key factor of successful information days was the active participation of a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including landowners, policy makers, local communities, and forest owner associations. The involvement of scientists and local specialists ensured that the information shared during the events was scientifically sound and practical to the stakeholders.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 4 person-days, 40%

Dissemination actions: Topics of restoration of small water bodies, seminatural grasslands, forest-related measures, wet forest restoration and biodiversity-friendly agricultural interventions are published in nationwide, local newspapers and in social media channels.

ACTION E.3: Spreading conservation ideas: everyman's nature conservation, community-based management, volunteer involvement, site-based cooperation networks

Task 1. Organizing nature conservation camps – *as planned*

- Foreseen start date: 2nd quarter 2020 Actual start date: 3rd quarter 2020
- Foreseen end date: 3rd quarter 2029 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 3rd quarter 2029

During the 1st reporting period **five** voluntary nature conservation working camps were organised. Approx. 65 people participated in these camps.

During the 2nd reporting period:

- **three** camps were organised in Kesselaid island (July 2022, August 2023, August 2024) in cooperation with ELF to restore alvars;
- **two** camps were organised in Kõinastu lee in Saaremaa island (October and November 2023) in cooperation with ELF to restore alvars;
- **one** camp was organised by the project team to restore coastal meadows in Osmussaare island (September 2024) for the ministry's employees related to the project.

Approx. 90 people participated in these camps.

In each of the camp the representative of the project has been present, giving an overview of the project activities and problems the project is trying to solve.

All together 20 camps will be organised during the project's lifetime.

Dissemination: The camp in remote Kesselaid island remains being extremely popular and the places are filled in 5-10 minutes after the camp schedule is announced. Pictures of Kesselaid nature camps are available at www.flickr.com/photos/126986850@N06/albums/72157719637746187. In 2024 a Latvian nature activist joined the camp in Kesselaid and made a short film about the restoration work www.youtube.com/watch?v=qINdGJ9qXkM seen nearly 1000 times in last seven months.

In addition, ELF publishes an annual newsletter dedicated to the camps and their results. At the end of the year, a party is organized for those who participated in the camps.

Deliverables and milestones: No deliverables or milestones were foreseen in the 2nd phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: another voluntary camp in Osmussaare island will be organised in August 2025; hedge and shrub planting nature conservation camp in one of our pilot agricultural land will be organised in September/October 2025. Overall, for the 3rd reporting period five camps are foreseen.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
E.3 Task 1	**Objective:** Raising awareness and capacity of main stakeholders and general public including using innovative tools and solutions. **Expected results:** 20 nature conservation camps.	Nature camps are traditional tools to involve people into practical nature protection and through the years they have proven to be a right gear to develop peoples' love towards nature and engage them to the conservation work. 11 voluntary camps organised so far.	There has been a long cooperation with Estonian Fund for Nature and as they are experiences nature conservation camp organisers, everything is always organised very well and the need for specific camps in specific places are carefully considered.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 (a total of 0 person days are planned)

ACTION E.3: Spreading conservation ideas: everyman's nature conservation, community-based management, volunteer involvement, site-based cooperation network

Task 4. Improving protected areas web-page (making it interactive) - *completed*

- Foreseen start date: 3rd quarter 2022 Actual start date: 2nd quarter 2021
- Foreseen end date: 4th quarter 2025 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 3rd quarter 2024

For fulfilling the objectives to contribute to public awareness, disseminate nature protection related news as well as raise awareness on nature conservation values, the user-friendliness of the website of protected areas https://kaitsealad.ee needs to be improved.

Website improvement is done in cooperation with Ministry of Climate, EB and KeMIT. During the 1st period the map application of the website was changed from Google Maps into official Land Board map layer (https://kaitsealad.ee/et/Kaart) providing more detailed information to the landowners and visitors. The map displays different layers important for nature conservation, e.g. movement restrictions, semi-natural habitats (related to A3 Task 1), etc. Land Board keeps the map layers updated.

The rest of the website improvement was outsourced at the beginning of 2024, development works took place from February to June, testing was made in August and improved website was launched in September 2024. The content management of the website was improved but its also now more user-friendly, attractive and meets all the accessibility requirements. The values, goals and visiting possibilities of our protected areas are better introduced and it invites people to discover, preserve and take pride of protected areas and their values. As of a result the awareness of nature conservation values are more widely distributed.

The front page has a better display on the list of protected areas, map, news, events, news are translated into English and several new photos are added.

This task helps to implement Action E3 Task 3.

Milestones: Protected areas web-page improved and widely used by 4th quarter 2025 – task was completed by the end of 3rd quarter 2024.

Deliverables: Protected areas webpage improved by 4th quarter 2025 – webpage is improved by 3rd quarter 2024 and therefore deliverable achieved and inserted into BUTLER.

Dissemination actions: Project banner is displayed, and project related news are shared on the website

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: Keep the website up to date.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
E.3 Task 4	**Objectives:** Raising awareness and capacity of main stakeholders and general public including using innovative tools and solutions. **Expected results:** Protected areas webpage improved	Protected areas webpage is improved being user-friendly, accessible and attractive.	Good cooperation between Ministry of Climate, EB and KeMIT. Good and effective cooperation between outsourced company and EB (regular meetings, online chat group for operational feedback).

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 (a total of 0 person days are planned)

ACTION E.4: Creating and distributing of a high-quality communication products

Task 1. Guidelines and digital booklets – *as planned*

- Foreseen start date: 1st quarter 2021 Actual start date: 2nd quarter 2021
- Foreseen end date: 4th quarter 2029 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 4th quarter 2029

During the 1st phase most of the guidelines were in the working progress, by now several finalized guidelines can be mentioned.

Semi-natural grasslands:

- the book on plants of nature-rich meadows (available online www.loodusrikaseesti.ee/sites/forest/files/2023-10/Eesti_parandniitude_taimed_digi_keskmine.pdf and printed) to help semi-natural grassland managers to recognise the plants of their meadows;
- updated guideline materials www.loodusrikaseesti.ee/sites/forest/files/2024-06/JUHEND-paarandniidu-vaartuse-hindamiseks_07.07.24.pdf and evaluation forms www.loodusrikaseesti.ee/et/parandniidu-vaartuste-hindamine for the value-based assessment of the semi-natural grasslands (related to action A3 task 1&2)
- the entire section of semi-natural grasslands www.loodusrikaseesti.ee/et/maaomanike-noustamine-0 on the project website can be considered as of well-structured guideline for the meadow managers (see also deliverable "the guideline for stakeholders" inserted into butler).

Agri-environmental interventions for agricultural landscapes:

- "How to create biodiverse hedges and shrubbery strips?" www.loodusrikaseesti.ee/sites/forest/files/2023-11/Kuidas-rajada-elurikkaid-hekke-ja-p66sasribasid-juhend-2023.pdf
- "How to recognize valuable permanent grassland?" www.loodusrikaseesti.ee/sites/forest/files/2023-11/kuidas-tunda-ara-vaartuslik-pysirohumaa-juhend-2023.pdf
- "How to create grassland strips?" www.loodusrikaseesti.ee/sites/forest/files/2024-09/Rohumaaribade-rajamine_juhend_0.pdf
- wide range of practical materials on biodiversity, improvement of the agricultural environment and landscapes as well as soil health are available in the website www.heapõld.ee run by the project team of the Tartu University (related to action A4 and C3 Task 1).

In addition, big amount of practical information (and video advices) on different everyone's nature conservation solutions are posted to the website www.loodusrikaseesti.ee, for example on how one could create small water body to his yard (related to Action C3 Task 2), how to eredict invasive species (Action C.4) or how to manage the private forest more nature friendly manner (Action A.5).

Deliverables & Milestones: No deliverables or milestones were foreseen for the 2nd phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: During the next phase we start working on the guideline for the gardeners and municipal officials (1) on the control and eradication of the alien species, and (2) restoration of small water bodies for amphibians.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
E.4 Task 1	**Objectives:** Raising awareness and capacity of main stakeholders and general public including using innovative tools and solutions. **Expected results:** 10 guidelines/booklets created and uploaded on the website.	Guidelines are distributed widely and well received by recipients. So far six digital guidelines/books are ready, in addition two websites www.heapõld.ee and www.loodusrikaseesti.ee give enormous amount of practical advices on different topic-related subjects.	Guidelines have to be short, practical and well-illustrated in order to be found and used.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 (a total of 0 person days are planned)

ACTION E.4: Creating and distributing of a high-quality communication products

Task 2. Videos – *ahead of plans*

- Foreseen start date: 2nd quarter 2021 Actual start date: 1st quarter 2021
- Foreseen end date: 4th quarter 2029 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 4th quarter 2029

During the 1st phase of the project (1) **two** introductory videos (in Estonian and English) of the project was made, in addition (2) **public broadcast** on kick-off seminar as well as the virtual press conference was organised, still available for a watch, (3) **four** inspirational talks on project themes and topics were filmed with the topic leaders of the project, (4) **seven** feature videos on semi-natural grasslands managers were completed, (5) **four** "how everybody could contribute to the nature protection" clips were made with project key experts.

During the 2nd phase –

- **one** study video was made on restoration of small water bodies for amphibians (released in autumn 2022);
- **one** video was made on importance of amphibians in the ecosystem (released in autumn 2022);
- **five** study videos were made on regulation of alien species, one per plant as well as one to combine all the methods and efforts of eradication of the species and to bring a wider picture of the threat of the alien species worldwide (released in winter 2023, available with English and Russian language subtitles);
- **three** feature videos were made on semi-natural grassland managers, the winners' of 2022 competition of most outstanding managers of meadows (released in autumn 2023)
- **five** feature videos were made on semi-natural grassland managers (the winners' of 2024 competition of most outstanding managers of meadows, not yet released as the winners' ceremony will be organised in January 2025)

All the videos are available on the project YouTube channel www.youtube.com/@loodusrikaseesti284 and www.youtube.com/@loodusrikaseesti as well as in the project website. Videos have also been distributed in our Facebook channel and there they fly high. Some feature videos of the grass-land managers have been watched more than 20 000 times.

Deliverables and Milestones: No deliverables or milestones were foreseen in the 2nd phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: Public procurements will be made at 2025 autumn to find a film maker to follow the restoration works of the wet forest habitats and in 2026 to introduce different agro-ecological techniques on agricultural fields as well as tell the stories of the farmers who are pioneering these techniques.

Scrips of the films are drafted together with topical experts of the project.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
E.4 Task 2	**Objectives:** Raising awareness and capacity of main stakeholders and general public including using innovative tools and solutions. **Expected results:** 10 high quality videos.	Creating and disseminating videos has became a key to raise public awareness and deliver the messages of the project. Approx. **33 videos and broadcasts** are made since the beginning of the project.	Instead of reading, people prefer watching; therefore, more video materials than initially planned are produced so far. As people's attention is distracted and limited, the video material must be compact, fast, short and visually attractive. Not sure that stories of the nature can be told shortly but we try to get better in it.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 (a total of 0 person days are planned)

ACTION E.4: Creating and distributing communication products

Task 3. Mobile app for bird songs – *ahead of the plan*

- Foreseen start date: 1st quarter 2020 Actual start date: 1st quarter 2020
- Foreseen end date: 4th quarter 2028 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 4th quarter 2029

The very first version of mobile app for bird songs was completed in 2020 outside the project. Project team concluded that the most reasonable way is to continue its development by the project and to include a new beneficiary SIUTS to the project. According to the Agency`s letter dated December 21, 2022, SIUTS has been added to the Grant Agreement as the associated beneficiary. This is described in more detailed in the First Interim Report.

At the end of the first phase of the project, the application had information about one hundred species (songs, description of habitat and nesting).

During the 2nd phase, the number of supported bird species in Siuts mobile application was scaled up to 200 and released to the public in autumn 2024. This was a milestone originally planned for the end of 2026, but it was undertaken earlier in favour of adding new features to the app.

Major part of the work was done on things which are not directly visible but are very important for long term maintainability and productivity. This included:

- Updating and improving technical aspects in order to futureproof the application for changes required by iOS and Android platforms;
- Uniting code base for iOS and Android applications - new design can be achieved by writing the code once for both applications instead of writing the same thing for iOS and Andorid devices separately;
- Rewriting and improving Machine Learning framework and Neural Network architecture, allowing to be faster and more flexible on improving the underlying Neural Network model for achieving better bird classification accuracy.

Major problems/drawbacks: The new features (range maps and conservation statuses) were originally planned for the second phase of the project. This however was left for the next phase of the project due to two main reasons:

- user feedback showed that people would rather like to see better coverage of bird species and better accuracy in detecting birds;
- prototyping indicated that with current design, adding range maps and conservation statuses would make the User Interface too cluttered and potentially confusing.

Milestones:

- 4th quarter 2022 - Bird`s mobile app is updated (100 species) - goal achieved 4th quarter 2022
- 4th quarter 2026 - Bird`s mobile app is updated (200 species) - goal achieved 4th quarter 2024

Deliverables: No deliverables were foreseen in the second phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: Design upgrade, including range maps and conservation statuses and English language support. Improvement in bird classification accuracy. Preparation work for integrating the application to a public database. Info campaigns about the app.

The planning for new design and features involves:
1. prototyping design and user experience;
2. finding data sources for range maps and conservation statuses, including deliberations on the licensing terms;
3. extensive testing of existing application and competitors in different biotopes over Estonia and usability testing with target audience.

In general, there were no major problems or drawbacks, just minor changes in plans which had no negative impact on the task.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
E.4 Task 3	**Objectives:** Raising awareness and capacity of main stakeholders and the public including using innovative tools and solutions. **Expected results:** Bird's mobile app ready (2 bird songs).	The application has over 10 000 active users at peak season. Installed on about 13 000 Android devices and at least 12 000 iOS devices. Application with 200 birds is available for iOS and Android users.	Previous investment in software architecture enabled to scale up to 200 bird species faster than expected. Users prefer better accuracy in favour of new features. Competitors have shown that there is room for improvement in this area.

Perso-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 140 person-days, 23,61%

Dissemination actions: There has been relatively small advertising effort - a yearly Facebook post on the project's Facebook (2023 and 2024) by MoC. Nevertheless, app user base shows gradual increase over time, while at peak season there are over 10 000 active users.

ACTION E.5: Raising awareness of stakeholders in international context

Task 1. Organizing international conference for presenting projects results (project's final conference) and participating in international events – *as planned*

- Foreseen start date: 3rd quarter 2020 Actual start date: 1st quarter 2020
- Foreseen end date: 4th quarter 2029 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 4th quarter 2029

In the first phase experts participated in two international conferences. During second phase project partners participated actively international conferences to share project experience by oral presentations or posters and gain new knowledge.

1. **In September 2023, TLU** presented an oral presentation "The effect of hydrology parameters on the spatial distribution of plant communities on large calcareous fen affected by drainage" on the international conference „Power to the Peatlands" held in Antwerpen, Belgium.
2. **In September 2023, UT** participated at International Wader Study Group Annual Conference on Island Sylt in Germany. An oral presentation „Giving more space for coastal grassland waders", was given, which presented the project activities on coastal grasslands.
3. **In January 2024, UT** introduced project actions related to biodiversity in agriculture and solutions tested in the project with a poster at the Northern Roots "Regenerative Agriculture Forum" held in Tallinn, Estonia. Additionally, UT led a panel discussion on landscape diversity, creating space for biodiversity, combining grain and livestock farming, existing financial subsidies and the necessity of their changes.
4. **In August 2024,** at the SERE 14th European Conference on Ecological Restoration held in Tartu, Estonia, **UT** presented project actions related to biodiversity in agriculture with a poster The project actions were also showcased on-site at Sadala Agro to selected conference participants. As part of the SERE conference, **UT** organized two excursions to small waterbody restoration sites, both attended by selected participants of the conference. **UT** also presented project actions related to coastal meadow restoration for breeding waders with a poster "Expanding breeding grounds for waders". Regarding grassland subsidy schemes, **EB** led a special session titled „Results-Based Payment Schemes for Habitat Restoration and Maintenance" and gave an oral presentation on the testing of the results-based support scheme in Estonia. **TLU** introduced an oral presentation about the spatial prioritization analyses process using programme „ZONATION", presented data about the conservation values of mire habitat types and emphasized the need for restoration among existing mire conservation sites. **TLU** guided one-day field-excursion on two restored calcium-rich minerotrophic fens and prepared booklet about the pre-and post-restoration state of the two fens.
5. **In September 2024, EB** delivered an oral presentation at the Neobiota Conference „Biological Invasions" held in Lisbon, Portugal where they introduced the project actions related to alien species and discussed the various eradication methods being employed in Estonia.
6. **In September 2024, TLU** participated the international Peatland Science Conference held in Freising, Germany. TLU had an oral presentation titled „Response if vegetation on the water level drop-down gradient on a calcareous fen (NW Estonia).
7. **In September 2024, UT** participated at International Wader Study Group Annual Conference in Montpellier, France. A poster presentation „Introducing predator control for wader

conservation in Estonia: outcomes and lessons learned", was given, which presented the results of the predator control pilot project on coastal grasslands.

8. **In November 2024, representatives from EB, UT and MoRA** participated in the seminar „Looking towards CAP 2027+ - discovering the keys to design effective collective and result based schemes delivering biodiversity and healthy soil" organised by Centre of Estonian Rural Research and Knowledge, held in Põltsamaa county, Estonia. EB delivered an oral presentation introducing the testing of results-based support schemes in the LIFE-IP project.

Many international events are also related to networking with LIFE and other projects and are described under Task 2. Project`s final international conference will take place in 2029.

Major problems/drawbacks: No major problems.

Milestones and Deliverables: No milestones and deliverables were foreseen in the 2nd phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: Continue participating international events and conferences according to needs arising from project activities and progress.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
E.5 Task 1	**Objectives:** Raising awareness and capacity of main stakeholders and general public including using innovative tools and solutions. **Expected results:** Participation in at least five international conferences. Project`s final conference.  100 participants in the international conference and project`s results disseminated in the EU level.	Experts and specialist have participated 10 international conferences and shared project experience and knowledge about different topics.	The project experts have actively participated in various international events, which have provided valuable networking opportunities and strengthened collaboration with other organizations focused on biodiversity and habitat restoration. Sharing project experiences on topics such as the consultation system for landowners, bird studies, and piloting RBPS schemes has risen international interest and increased the project's visibility. Gaining new insights, such as piloting RBPS schemes in other countries has contributed significantly to advancing the project's action A3 task 2.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 (a total of 0 person days are planned)

ACTION E.5: Raising awareness of stakeholders in international context

Task 2. Networking with LIFE and other projects – *as planned*

- Foreseen start date: 3rd quarter 2020 Actual start date: 4th quarter 2021
- Foreseen end date: 4th quarter 2029 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 4th quarter 2029

In the first phase due to Covid-19 majority of international meetings, seminars and workshops were postponed. Participation occurred in one LIFE project event.

In the second phase, strong collaboration and networking has been established between Estonian LIFE-IP projects - 2-3 times in year the general managers of ForEst&FarmLand, BuildEST (LIFE20 IPC/EE/000010), CleanEST (LIFE17IPE/EE/000007), AdaptEST (LIFE21-IPC-EE-LIFE-SIP-AdaptEst/101069566) and WetEST (LIFE23-IPE-EE-LIFE SIP WET-EST) projects gather to discuss mutual topics related to the projects and explore opportunities for networking and collaboration. A separate small working group within the LIFE-IP projects has also been established, focusing on communication themes and actions. National cooperation with other LIFE projects is strong - once a year, Estonian LIFE projects come together for a joint networking seminar and field excursions. In addition, the annual Semi-Natural Grassland Celebration Day has been organised in collaboration with the WOODMEADOWLIFE (LIFE20 NAT/EE/000074), CoastNet LIFE (LIFE17 NAT/FI/000544), and LIFE Connecting Meadows (LIFE19 NAT/EE/001006) projects.

Internationally, the Nordic-Baltic platform meetings have been reinstated, with the ForEst&FarmLand project being represented at all of them: in 2022 in Lithuania, 2023 in Finland, and 2024 in Latvia. Partners have also participated in various networking seminars and events, and the hosted other projects, introducing actions and progress of project. Overview of the networking events with LIFE and other projects is in Annex 11.

Additionally, three study trips to Lithuania, Czech Republic and Ireland (action A.8 task 2) were organized, where representatives from LIFE-IP projects NaturaLit (LIFE16IPE/LT/016), Jednapriroda (LIFE17/IPE/CZ/000005), and Wild Atlantic Nature (LIFE18IPE/IE/000002) hosted and guided site visits. Participation in conferences and other international cooperation is described under task 1.

Major problems/drawbacks: No major problems.

Milestones: Participation in 20 LIFE or other project events during 2020-2029 - by the end of 2024, participation has occurred in 21 LIFE or other project events.

Deliverables: No deliverables were foreseen in the second phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: Continue participating in international events and networking with other projects according to needs arising from project activities and progress.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
E.5 Task 2	**Objectives:** Raising awareness and capacity of main stakeholders and general public including using innovative tools and solutions. **Expected results:** Networking system with other projects in place, participated in 20 LIFE or other project events.	A good network has been established with other EU LIFE projects and strong collaboration nationally with other LIFE projects. Participation in 21 LIFE or other project events.	A good co-operation and network with experts from other LIFE projects in different EU countries and in Estonia, allows to share knowledge and experiences and thereby find more relevant insights and solutions.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 (a total of 0 person days are planned)

ACTION A.9: Preparation of the Communication Plan – *as planned*

- Foreseen start date: 2nd quarter 2020 Actual start date: 1st quarter 2020
- Foreseen end date: 3rd quarter 2028 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 3rd quarter 2028

The Communication and Participation Strategy (inserted into BUTLER) was created during the 1st phase of the project to set up strategic objectives of communication and stakeholders' involvement as well as to propose communication-related activities and principles. The Strategy aims to be very practical – there is still a lack of practical knowledge about nature conservation and environmentally sustainable practices among ordinary people, farmers, and forest owners. Thus, there is a need to provide different target groups with knowledge-based and practical information and examples, which will help people to make environmentally conscious choices and thereby achieve behavioural change.

Comprehensive strategy serves our needs and actions till now and therefore we have not seen a need to update the strategy. Based on strategy, several Media/more precise Communication Plans have been created to set out a detailed communication plan per topic and to outline the key messages, activities and channel that help to achieve the set objectives. The structure and design of the Media Plan can be used in all subsequent years. The plan itself is hosted online making it accessible for all the project partners and continuously updated. The screenshot of selected media plans is inserted into BUTLER.

Dissemination: The existing Communication and Participation Strategy is a comprehensive document which has been disseminated as an exemplary paper among several nature conservation projects. Often projects have communication plans but not a long-term strategy for facilitating changes via stakeholders' engagement and communication. The Media Plan is a living document distributed among the contributors of the partners organisations on the bases of the joint actions.

Deliverables: Communication/Media Plan was ready by 3rd quarter 2023.

Milestones: No milestones were foreseen for the 2nd phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: The long-term Communication and Participation Strategy is based on recent societal changes and needs that are relevant from the perspective of the project, hence the strategy is up to date and needs to be reviewed by mid-course of the project. The 2nd Communication Plan will be compiled in 2023. The Media Plan is updated on regular bases (two-three times per year).

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
A.9	**Objectives:** Raising awareness and capacity of main stakeholders and general public including using innovative tools and solutions. **Expected results:** Four Communication Plans.	The Strategy was compiled during the 1st phase taking into account the ideas and thoughts of all the partners of the project. Every message/action and stakeholder's group was discussed, analysed and agreed upon before finalising the Strategy. This gave a good bases for future communication. The Communication/Media Plan for everyday actions is set up online making it easy to follow and update by project partners. Strategical approach to the communication aims, messages and protocols help to engage our stakeholders and interest groups throughout the project period in timely and appropriate manner. 2nd Communication Plan is compiled.	Only properly set up strategy which is broadly discussed, agreed and followed among the project partners can be successfully implemented. More precise media/communication plan is needed to be set up based on topics, and not the years of the project.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 (a total of 0 person-days are planned)

ACTION F.2: Project seminars – *as planned*

- Foreseen start date: 2nd quarter 2020 Actual start date: 1st quarter 2021
- Foreseen end date: 4th quarter 2029 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 4th quarter 2029

The aim of this action is to organize 4 seminars for the beneficiaries and main stakeholders (e.g. landowners participating in the project, universities, associations, public servants, consultants, policy makers, etc.) to introduce the progress and results of the project. In the first phase opening seminar was organized 27.01.2021.

The second seminar was organized by the Ministry of Climate in cooperation with the NGO Matsalu Nature Film Festival in September 2022. The seminar focused on environmental education and included topics from the project's communication strategy (Action A.9) – how and whether different environmental awareness initiatives support and influence nature conservation messages. More than 100 participants attended on-site, and over 400 people watched the web broadcast. The Ministry of Climate selected the best nature film and revived the tradition of awarding it.

The third seminar was co-organized with the young farmers NGO organization Northern Roots in January 2023, in Tallinn. The two-day event brought together over 400 participants to listen to and discuss topics related to regenerative farming and biodiversity in agriculture. UT presented poster about solutions tested in the project and led a panel discussion on landscape diversity, creating space for biodiversity, combining grain and livestock farming, existing financial subsidies, and the necessity of their changes.

The fourth organized event was the European Conference on Ecological Restoration, held on August 2024, in Tartu. UT was the main organizer, and the conference was attended by 700 researchers, practitioners, and policymakers from 47 countries. UT presented project activities related to biodiversity-friendly agriculture (Action C.3 task 1) and coastal meadow restoration for breeding waders (action C.2 task 2) on a poster session. UT also organized two excursions to small waterbody restoration sites (action C.4 task 2) and hosted a site visit to Sadala Agro for selected participants, where the UT has established sample areas in cooperation with farmers to monitor the effects of different agroecological techniques on yield and biodiversity (action C.3 task 1). EB led a special session and gave an overview of the result-based support scheme in Estonia (action A.3 task 2). TLU introduced an oral presentation about the spatial prioritization analyses process using programme „ZONATION“ and led a field excursion to two restored calcium-rich fens (action C.1 task 1).

In addition, the Ministry of Climate has conducted short seminars and briefings for nature conservation professionals and policymakers. Since the project covers multiple topics, an effective approach has been to organize an annual seminar for project partners, experts, and key figures from relevant organizations (action F.1).

Major problems/drawbacks: no major problems.

Milestones: 2nd seminar arranged by 1st quarter 2023 - accordingly to project timeline 2nd seminar was arranged in September 2022. Additionally, 3rd and 4th seminar was arranged in January 2024 and in August 2024.

Deliverables: no deliverables were foreseen in the 2nd phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: Organize at least one more seminar.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
F.2	Objectives: Raising awareness and capacity of main stakeholders and general public including using innovative tools and solutions. Expected results: Four seminars have been organized.	The project have been introduced in a innovative way to stakeholders, policy makers and the general public which creates a good basis for achieving the project`s goals and for public awareness increase. Four seminars have been organized.	In cooperation with other organizations, more specialized topic-related events have been organized to introduce project activities and progress while reaching a broader range of target groups.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 (a total of 0 person days are planned)

Dissemination actions: All events were actively promoted through social media channels and covered by various news. The University of Tartu received the “Conference Act of the Year 2024” award from the Tartu City in recognition of successful organization of the European Conference on Ecological Restoration.

PILLAR E.2: Site-related maintenance and restoration measures, within and beyond Natura 2000

Pillar E.2 is related to restoration and protection of wet and dry forest habitat types and semi-natural grasslands and with the development of the nature-friendly agricultural measures.

Following sub-themes and LIFE-IP project actions belong under the Pillar E.2:

Sub-theme of the Plan E.2.4. Grasslands (Action A.3 Task 1-2; Action A.6 Task 4; Action C.2 Task 1-2)
Sub-theme of the Plan: *additional measures beyond Natura 2000 (wider green infrastructure measures) (Action A.4; Action C.3 Task 1)
Sub-theme of the Plan E.2.6. Woodlands and forest (Action A.6 Task 1-3; Action C.1 Task 1-2; Action A.5 Task 1-2; Action C.5)

Main achievements of the 2nd reporting period:

- Consultation system for semi-natural grassland landowners and managers is operating.
- In January 2023, an award ceremony was held to recognize grassland managers.
- 10 coastal and floodplain meadow managers (managing approximately 500 hectares) were selected to pilot the elements of RBAPS. A voluntary value assessment activity subsidy is popular among managers of seminatural grasslands. UT compiled a plant species booklet.
- 26 restoration plans for coastal meadows were compiled.
- 12 coastal meadow sites are in the progress of restoration and one site is completed;
- Results of bird studies have raised interest at the international level, especially concerning the corncrake, who is rare in most European countries;
- UT established a close collaboration with ten farms for biodiversity interventions. Three guidelines were compiled.
- The first wet forest restoration project is adopted.
- Report on updated Natura 2000 private forest support was completed earlier than planned and based on new calculation compensation was increased.
- In the second phase 12 land units with a total area of 230 ha were acquired. A total of 382 ha has been acquired, what was the goal of third phase.

Main drawbacks of the 2nd reporting period:

- Farmers' low interest in conducting bird-friendly interventions on their farmland and unwillingness of some farmers to allow inventories on their land.
- The transition to a procurement-based process is significantly more time-consuming and costly compared to the national restoration subsidy scheme of seminatural grasslands. Many potential restoration partners have been reluctant to participate in the procurement process, perceiving it as overly complex and bureaucratic.
- Six wet forest restoration projects will be completed later than planned, but the restoration work is expected to be completed on time.
- Dry forests restoration projects will be completed later than scheduled and restoration is delayed accordingly.

Sub-theme of the Plan E.2.4. Grasslands

ACTION A.3: Design and communication of measures for semi-natural grasslands of EU interest

Task 1. Design and launch of a consultation system for semi-natural habitats managers and owners – *as planned; activities will continue*

- Foreseen start date: 1st quarter 2021 Actual start date: 1st quarter 2021
- Foreseen end date: 3rd quarter 2026 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 4th quarter 2029

The objective of this action is to design and launch consultation system and raise the awareness of landowners about semi-natural grasslands and their land values. Also to provide systematic advice to landowners and managers on the possibilities for restoring and sustainably managing grasslands.

In the 1st phase, the EB consultation team developed guidelines for consultants and stakeholders and initiated contacts with landowners.

The semi-natural grassland database includes approximately 11,700 unmanaged land units. By the end of the second phase, updated data had been collected for about 4,000 land units, covering 11,386 hectares. Landowners are provided with information on the ecological value of their properties, available subsidies, and practical guidance on grassland restoration. The team also organises trainings to landowners and managers who chose the additional activity of value assessment subsidy (action A.3, task 2).

In the 2nd phase, the consultation team tested various communication methods to identify the most effective ways to engage landowners. Initial contacting via email, including property-specific maps, proved time-consuming and had limited feedback. The strategy was refined to focus on owners of meadows larger than 5 hectares, forest companies, and CAP subsidy applicants. In spring 2024, a more efficient system was applied: the consultation team sends two mass email notifications per month to groups of 30–50 land unit owners, followed by phone calls to non-respondents. Calling has proven to be the most effective method for obtaining quick feedback and clarifying the email content.

To expand outreach further, the consultation team publishes an electronic newsletter two to three times per year. The newsletter is sent to over 6,000 landowners who have at least 1 hectare of grasslands, as well as to grassland managers who already graze and mow meadows.

For landowners unable or unwilling to manage the meadows themselves, the consultation team helps to facilitate connections between landowners and potential lessees by sharing land rental information for semi-natural habitats. In 2022, a dedicated map layer was developed in cooperation with the Land Board to display lease interest on both state and private lands.

In January 2023, an award ceremony was held to recognize grassland managers who demonstrated exceptional dedication to land stewardship. Managers were acknowledged for their care of semi-natural grasslands, contributions to local community initiatives, and efforts in promoting awareness of grassland conservation challenges.

The overview of consultation system elements is given in Annex 12. At the beginning of 2023, EB also compiled a comprehensive vision document (Annex 13) outlining best practices for engaging and advising landowners and managers on grassland restoration and maintenance. The consultation system has proven to be successful and necessary, the plan is to continue with it until the end of the project.

Major problems/drawbacks: No major problems.

Milestones: No milestones were foreseen in the second phase.

Deliverables: 1st phase deliverables (guidelines for consultants and stakeholders) are inserted into BUTLER. No deliverables were foreseen in the second phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: Continue consultancy work and actively contact additional landowners throughout the 3rd period. Organize training sessions and information days and share best practices to support sustainable grassland management. Organize media campaign and recognition event in January 2025 for best semi-natural grassland managers and present composed videos about the winning managers.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
A.3 Task 1	Objectives: Improving the conservation status of forest and farmland habitats and species to achieve results benefiting the whole ecosystems such as: grassland habitats Expected results: Consultation system launched and piloted.	Consultation system launched and operating.	The structured consultation system has improved engagement with semi-natural grassland managers and landowners. The counselling team provides specific advice, helps increase the awareness of land values, and highlights the importance of restoring and sustainably managing these habitats. Over the years, EB has explored and tested various communication methods and identifying the most effective approaches to engage landowners. A noteworthy outcome has emerged from direct communication with applicants of CAP subsidies. As a result, a significant number of land managers chose to apply for the semi-natural grassland management subsidy rather than the basic income support available through the CAP scheme.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 1409 person-days, 44,11%

Dissemination actions: Newsletters were sent to landowners (March 2023, June 2023, Dec 2023, May 2024, Dec 2024). Ceremony to recognize the best grassland managers was published in national and local newspapers. Videos about best semi-natural grassland managers were shared in social media channels and on project homepage. The design and practical side of counselling system has been presented to an international audience numerous times through various conferences, seminars and LIFE networking events (described under Action E.5 Task 1 and 2).

ACTION A.3: Design and communication of measures for semi-natural grasslands of EU interest

Task 2. Analysing and updating the agri-environment schemes for semi-natural grasslands – *according to the schedule*

- Foreseen start date: 2nd quarter 2021 Actual start date: 2nd quarter 2021
- Foreseen end date: 3rd quarter 2027 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 3rd quarter 2027

The objective of this action is to analyse and update the current system of agri-environment schemes for semi-natural grasslands. As part of this process the result based agri-environment payment schemes (RBAPS) method is being tested in Estonia.

During the first phase, the methodology and scorecards of RBAPS were tested and analysed in various grasslands in collaboration with local grassland managers and EB specialists. This process continued into the second phase. UT also compiled a plant species booklet to support the identification of indicator species for each grassland habitat when filling out the RBAPS scorecards.

To pilot the elements of RBAPS, EB issued a public call to find coastal and floodplain meadow managers to participate in the project. A total of 23 meadow managers expressed interest, of whom 10 (managing approximately 500 hectares) were selected in early 2023. In collaboration with UT, a five-year action plan was developed for each participant. Additionally, individual training was provided to ensure proper completion of the scorecards. The piloting began in 2023, with consultations held in 2024 and set to continue in 2025.

To promote a broader understanding and adoption of results-based subsidies, a voluntary paid value assessment activity was created as part of the meadow maintenance subsidy under the Common Agricultural Policy measure. This activity enables farmers to practice filling out scorecards and independently assess the condition and biodiversity of their land. In the first year (2023), 40 managers applied the value assessment activity, while in the second year (2024), the number increased to 287. EB organised 10 information days and site visits for these applicants. Assessing the values of land also contributes to project Action E.3 Task 3.

Major problems/drawbacks: When preparing action plans for the managers, obtaining consent from species experts proved challenging, particularly when testing alternative management techniques or proposing different management start times.

Regarding the additional value assessment activity, a significant proportion of semi-natural grassland managers are unaware of the specific Natura habitat type they are managing, and this information is not easily accessible. Since the RBAPS scorecards are categorized into five different groups based on habitat type, many managers faced difficulties in selecting the appropriate scorecard.

Milestones: Pilot sites were selected and agreements signed with landowners by 2nd quarter 2023 - accordingly to the project timeline selecting pilot sites and getting consents from landowners was achieved on time.

Deliverables: No deliverables were foreseen in the second phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: Continue organizing information days and trainings for the land managers and gather farmers feedback through various meetings. A workshop "Biodiversity in the Agricultural Landscape" will be held for the farmers participating in the pilot. The goal is to foster connections among participants, discuss key challenges, and explore strategies to improve biodiversity conditions in agricultural areas (Action A.4, C.3 Task 1).

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
A.3 Task 2	Objectives: Improving the conservation status of forest and farmland habitats and species to achieve results benefiting the whole ecosystems such as grassland habitats **Expected results:** The updated subsidy system for semi-natural habitats.	The RBAPS scorecards and scoring guidelines, along with the species booklet, have been compiled. Piloting RBAPS scheme elements are in process – farmers have piloted already 2 years (2023, 2024). Value assessment activity was created as part of the meadow maintenance subsidy.	The development and testing of RBAPS methodology and scorecards were carried out in close cooperation with local grassland managers and biodiversity experts, ensuring practical relevance and making it more specific and suited to Estonian conditions. The value assessment activity subsidy has proven popular among managers and has contributed to a better understanding of the values of their land, also helping to raise awareness of the results-based approach. Since many semi-natural grassland managers were unaware of the specific Natura habitat type, they were managing, the scorecards and the project homepage were updated after first year of piloting to provide clearer guidance for selecting the correct habitat

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 366 person-days, 22,95%

Dissemination actions: Numerous social media posts and website news have been published about the on-site testing and trainings. The piloting of RBAPS in Estonia has been presented to an international audience numerous times through various conferences, study trips, and seminars (described under Action E.5 Task 1 and 2 and Action A.8 Task 2).

ACTION A.6: Preparatory actions necessary for restoration works

Task 4. Restoration plan for coastal meadows - *completed*

- Foreseen start date: 2nd quarter 2021 Actual start date: 1st quarter 2020
- Foreseen end date: 4th quarter 2024 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 4th quarter 2024

The aim of this action is to prepare site-specific restoration plans for 20 coastal meadows.

The selection of suitable coastal meadow sites began prior to the start of the project. 18 coastal meadow restoration plans were compiled by UT in 2020 and was financed by the Environmental Investment Centre. Additional 8 coastal meadow areas were selected during the first and second phase of the project. In total, UT has prepared restoration plans for 26 coastal meadow sites as a precautionary measure, in case some landowners do not consent to the restoration. Detailed and practical restoration activities to improve meadow conditions at each site in Hiiu, Saare, Pärnu, and Saare counties are described in restoration plans. The recommendations include expansion of meadow areas at the expense of pine plantations, reduction of fragmentation through the removal of trees and shrubs, improvement of the water regime through the closure of ditches or their conversion into ponds.

In the 2nd phase EB informed landowners about the planned activities and sought their permission to proceed with the practical restoration works. Additionally, numerous site visits and information days (Action E.2, Task 2) were organized, providing landowners with the opportunity to hear directly from project experts and scientists and ask questions about the project activities. So far, nearly 90% of all landowners have been contacted, with 66% have given consent to carry out the planned activities.

By the end of 2024, 26 restoration plans are compiled. Coastal meadow restoration works (Action C.2 Task 2) have started on 12 coastal meadow sites and restoration on one site is completed. However, significant efforts are still required to engage and get agreements with landowners to achieve the project's target of 20 restored coastal meadows.

Major problems/drawbacks: getting landowner consents and engaging them proactively is time-consuming and a critical step in the successful implementation of practical restoration works. The process of obtaining consent remains challenging, largely due to complexities in procurement procedures.

Despite having detailed restoration plans in place, project sites are still subject to change. As the final selection of project locations and the implementation of the restoration work depend on the outcome of ongoing negotiations with landowners and land managers.

Milestones: No milestones were foreseen in the 2nd phase.

Deliverables: Restoration plans for 20 coastal areas are completed by 4th quarter of 2024 – accordingly to the project timeline UT has prepared 26 restoration plans for coastal meadows. 18 restoration plans were compiled by UT in 2020 before the start of the project. In addition, 8 restoration plans were selected during the project. Restoration plans in two files have been inserted into BUTLER.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: Continue with consultation work that helps to gain consents from landowners. Continue restoration work on coastal meadows.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
A.6 Task 4	**Objectives:** Improving the conservation status of forest and farmland habitats and species to achieve results benefiting the whole ecosystems such as: * grassland habitats *1630, (*)6210, *6270, *6280, 6450, *6530, 9070, 7230; * birds and other species related to grasslands and arable land. **Expected results:** Restoration plans for 20 coastal areas completed.	26 Natura 2000 (IBA) coastal meadow sites have been pre-selected and preliminary plans for restoration created. Restoration works have started on 12 project sites on coastal meadows and 1 site is restored.	Restoration plans were prepared for 26 coastal sites, exceeding the initial target of 20, as a precaution in case some landowners do not consent to the restoration. This proactive approach ensures flexibility as more important meadow areas are included in the project. Good cooperation and communication with landowners and –managers are essential to restore meadow areas. EB has successfully organized numerous site visits and information days, allowing landowners and local communities to better understand the restoration activities and ask questions directly to project experts and scientists. This open communication has increased landowner trust and cooperation, making significant progress in engaging landowners.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 206 person-days, 76,01%

Dissemination actions: On-site visits to meet with landowners and managers during project 2nd phase.

ACTION C.2: Restoration and management of different semi-natural grasslands by adapting best practices and testing innovative ideas planned in the habitat action plans compiled in the project

Task 1. Restoration of semi-natural grasslands – *according to the plan*

- Foreseen start date: 4th quarter 2020 Actual start date: 3rd quarter 2020
- Foreseen end date: 1st quarter 2028 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 1st quarter 2029

The objective of this action is the restoration of 1000 hectares of semi-natural grasslands. EB plans restoration work, negotiates with landowners and/or land managers and signs agreements, prepares procurement documentation and supervises restoration work.

The 1st phase of restoration activities began in July 2020 and was initially implemented within the framework of the national semi-natural grassland restoration subsidy scheme. Under this scheme, landowners and managers could apply for subsidies to carry out restoration work, such as clearing shrubs and trees, removing reed and reducing the tree canopy cover.

Following the submission of the 1st phase progress report, concerns were raised by CINEA regarding the eligibility of restoration works financed through national subsidy scheme. This issue prompted an extensive exchange of correspondence and explanatory letters between MoC and CINEA to clarify the situation and explore acceptable alternatives. It was concluded that restoration activities should be done through public procurement procedures. As a result of this clarification 295 hectares of restoration work completed during 1st phase were deemed eligible and were reallocated from the budget line "External" to "Other Costs".

During 2nd phase EB conducted two public procurement procedures and signed 28 contracts, covering 305 hectares, with a total contract value of approximately 592,022 euro. This amount also includes restoration works on coastal meadows under Action C.2 Task 2. By the end of 2nd phase, restoration activities had been fully completed on 51 hectares. The remaining works are ongoing, with most contract deadlines extending into 2025–2026 and restoration works continue until 2029.

Major problems/drawbacks: The transition to a procurement-based implementation scheme has revealed several challenges. The procurement process is significantly more time-consuming and costly compared to the national restoration subsidy scheme. Additionally, EB has experienced delays in securing agreements with landowners, as the negotiation process has proven to be also time-consuming. Many potential restoration partners have been reluctant to participate in the procurement process, perceiving it as overly complex and bureaucratic.

Milestones: Semi-natural grasslands are restored (including 10 sites of coastal meadows) on 350 hectares by 1st quarter 2024 – a total of 346 hectares (including one site of coastal meadows completed and 12 sites were works are ongoing) have been restored.

Deliverables: No deliverables were foreseen in the 2nd phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: 700 ha semi-natural grasslands will be restored. Dynamic procurement procedure will be implemented.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
C.2 Task 1	**Objectives:** Improving the conservation status of forest and farmland habitats and species to achieve results benefiting the whole ecosystems such as: * grassland habitats *1630, (*)6210, *6270, *6280, 6450, *6530, 9070, 7230; * birds and other species related to grasslands and arable land. **Expected results:** 1000 ha of semi-natural grasslands have been restored.	The conservation status of restored sites has improved and better conditions for the semi-natural grassland species are created. The restoration works have been done on 346 ha.	Support provided to procurement participants by experienced specialists and the consultation team, helped to improve the quality and efficiency of restoration works. Based on lessons learned, the EB plans to implement a dynamic procurement procedure in the next project period. This more flexible approach is expected to simplify participation and speed up the procurement process.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 341 person-days, 37,89%

Dissemination actions: Information about the transition to procurement-based restoration and calls for tenders were repeatedly disseminated through social media channels, project homepage and in project newsletter to ensure wide outreach and encourage participation.

Seven videos featuring semi-natural habitat managers have been produced to promote the importance of grassland management and restoration. Two of those were presented at the recognition event for semi-natural grassland managers in January 2023.

The restoration of semi-natural grasslands in Estonia has also been introduced to an international audience numerous occasion. A detailed description of international cooperation activities is provided under Action E.5 Task 2.

ACTION C.2: Restoration and management of different semi-natural grasslands by adapting best practices and testing innovative ideas planned in the habitat action plans compiled in the project

Task 2. Restoration of coastal areas – *delayed*

- Foreseen start date: 4th quarter 2021 Actual start date: 3rd quarter 2022
- Foreseen end date: 1st quarter 2026 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 1st quarter 2029

The aim of this action is to restore 20 coastal meadow sites in Hiiu, Saare, Pärnu and Saare county. The restoration of these meadows requires removing trees and bushes, restoring water regime, cutting reed, limiting predation effects etc. Project site descriptions and specific actions has been described in site-specific restoration plans prepared by UT (Action A.6 Task 4) for 26 project sites.

By the end of the 2nd phase, restoration works have been completed at one project site and currently ongoing at 12 project sites. In total, there are approximately 640 hectares (310 land unites) that require restoration work, so far around 100 hectares are restored. Over 220 private landowners have been contacted, and nearly 150 landowners have agreed to carry out the restoration works.

One of the additional measures that enhances the results of the restoration works is the hunting of small carnivores (Action A.7 Task 2). EB organized hunting in cooperation with the Estonian Hunters' Association. Hunting started in the 1st phase and continued in the seasons of 2022/2023 and 2023/2024. The results were evaluated during each breeding season by UT and are described in Annex 7.

Major problems/drawbacks: The switch to procurement has been both more time-consuming and expensive compared to the subsidy scheme. Establishing contacts with landowners and obtaining their consent has proven to be an also time-consuming process. Many landowners lack an understanding of the necessity of the restoration. Limited access and poor road conditions have obstructed restoration efforts in several project areas. There is a possibility that the restoration work may not be feasible across all the project areas and restoration works continue till 2029.

Milestones: Semi-natural grasslands are restored (including 10 sites of coastal meadows) on 350 hectares by 1st quarter 2024 – a total of 346 hectares (including one site of coastal meadows completed and 12 sites were works are ongoing) have been restored. Delays have occurred due to the transition from subsidy scheme to procurements, which is explained under Task 1.

Deliverables: No deliverables were foreseen in the 2nd phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: Continue negotiations with landowners to secure their consent for restoration works. Restoration works have been completed or are in progress in at least 15 project sites. Hunting of small carnivores will proceed during the 2024/2025 season.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
C.2 Task 2	**Objectives:** Improving the conservation status of forest and farmland habitats and species to achieve results benefiting the whole ecosystems such as: * Grassland habitats *1630, (*)6210, *6270, *6280, 6450, *6530, 9070, 7230. * Birds and other species related to grasslands and arable land. **Expected results:** 20 coastal meadows have been restored as a pilot.	The site-specific restoration plans are prepared. Practical restoration works are ongoing on 12 project sites out of the 20 coastal meadows, and one site has been completed.	Effective communication and personal interaction play a crucial role in collaboration with stakeholders. On-site visits are important for engaging local communities and landowners, providing them with clear explanations of the planned restoration activities. Hunting of small carnivores has proven to be effective additional measure to improve the condition of coastal meadow areas. An award from The European Federation for Hunting and Conservation was given for a pilot project focused on the hunting of small carnivores.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 553 person-days, 84,69%

Dissemination actions: In September 2025 The European Federation for Hunting and Conservation honoured the Estonian Hunters' Society with an award in recognition of their outstanding contribution to nature and wildlife conservation.

Several articles about restoration of coastal meadows were published in local newspapers and in public broadcast. EB organized information days to landowners and local communities about the restoration works in project sites that are described under Action E.2 Task 2.

The restoration of coastal meadows has been presented to an international audience numerous times through various LIFE networking events and site visits. Details about international cooperation are described under Action E.5 Task 2.

SUB-THEME OF THE PLAN: *additional measures beyond Natura 2000 (wider green infrastructure measures)

ACTION A.4: Effectiveness of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) support schemes for farmland biodiversity – *slightly delayed*

- Foreseen start date: 1st quarter 2021 Actual start date: 1st quarter 2020
- Foreseen end date: 4th quarter 2026 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 4th quarter 2026

The aim of this action is to analyse effectiveness of different CAP support schemes on farmland birds, vascular plants, and soil micro- and macrofauna. The activity consists of two parts, a survey of field birds and a survey of nature-friendly CAP schemes in selected sites.

In the project EOÜ studies three species – the corn crake, the grey partridge, and the common starling. In the first phase a total of 46 transmitters were tested in 2020-2022. Based on the knowledge obtained during the testing, in the second phase, a tender for the purchase of additional transmitters was prepared at the end of 2023, and the purchase of new devices was conducted at the beginning of 2024 (15 tags for grey partridge, 35 for corncrake and 20 for starling). In 2024, 22 corncrakes and one starling were tagged with new transmitters, and tagging will continue in 2025.

The second part of this action is a survey of nature-friendly CAP schemes in selected sites. For this, farmers must choose appropriate schemes to implement in their fields and project sites are selected among them. In 2024, three kinds of bird-friendly farmer interventions were studied: six grassy strips, 20 unmown grasslands ("rest-year" grasslands), and three skylark plots. To conduct surveys, a specific methodology was developed for monitoring vegetation, pollinators, spiders, predatory arthropods, soil characteristics and biota, and birds.

Major problems/drawbacks: The main drawback during this phase was farmers' low interest in conducting bird-friendly interventions on their farmland and unwillingness of some farmers to allow inventories on their land. The work on this issue to get sufficient plots studied in 2025 is continued.

Milestones:

- Preliminary results from farmland bird studies by 4th quarter 2024 – accordingly to the project timeline preliminary results from farmland bird studies are described in Annex 14.
- Study sites selected, appropriate methodology established by 1st quarter 2023 - accordingly to the project timeline study sites were selected and appropriate methodology (Annex 15) was established on time.

Deliverables: No deliverables were foreseen in the second phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: Finishing bird tagging, finalising the database of telemetry data, and making analyses to propose suggestions to agri-environmental measures and suggest new, more appropriate measures to stop farmland bird decline in Estonia.

EB is planning to prepare an Action Plan for farmland birds and the first meeting with officials and experts from EOÜ is scheduled for January 2025. Another international initiative is COST Action and EUFLYNET plans to make a European Action Plan for farmland birds; the first meeting is scheduled for February 2025. Two visits to similar project areas in Ireland (corncrake) and Germany (grey partridge) are in the consultation phase.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
A.4	**Objectives:** Improving the conservation status of forest and farmland habitats and species to achieve results benefiting the whole ecosystems, such as birds and other species related to grasslands and arable land. **Expected results:** Report on effectiveness of assessed CAP agri-environmental schemes on biodiversity. Proposal for improving agri-environment schemes for the years 2028+.	Field studies have started, and the first results have been received. The dissemination is active.	EOÜ has collected new data on the movement patterns of three target species. A breakthrough was achieved in 2024, when new technology provided outstanding data on within-season movements of corncrakes. This is a significant step forward in understanding this elusive species and habitat usage. The monitoring data also revealed a higher-than-expected level of bird mortality due to predation and human-related factors. Some farmers do not allow bird inventories on their land, making it difficult to conduct studies on the effectiveness of applied management interventions. Therefore, more time is needed for preparation and contacting potential farmers directly.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 1731 person-days, 49,53%

Dissemination actions: EOÜ has actively disseminated the knowledge obtained by now. Preliminary results of bird studies are published; six articles and two more manuscripts are ready for publishing, and one is in preparation. Before the biodiversity monitoring started, UT focused on disseminating general knowledge about the importance of landscape structure and management practices for biodiversity. UT has published one scientific article and two local analyses in the "Agriculture and Environment" series.

Results of bird studies have raised interest at the international level, especially concerning the corncrake, who is rare in most European countries. Unique expertise in tagging these species allowed EOÜ to join several international initiatives, like the International Corncrake Study team and the International Corncrake Tagging Group, where EOÜ made several presentations. Joining these groups will give access to the world's best know-how on ecology and the conservation attempts of this species. In March 2023, EOÜ visited the University of Göttingen, where similar bird-related issues are being studied.

ACTION C.3: Designing more nature friendly landscapes as demonstration sites

Task 1. Enhancing the agriculture-environment relationship in Estonia by designing demonstration sites for environmentally friendly farming – *slightly delayed*

- Foreseen start date: 1st quarter 2020 Actual start date: 2nd quarter 2020
- Foreseen end date: 4th quarter 2027 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 4th quarter 2028

The aim of this action is to test the effectiveness of agroecological interventions in arable fields by establishing demonstration sites. In the first phase of the project, the first potential collaborators were identified and the web page heapold.ee was launched for introducing best practices in agroecosystems.

In the second phase, UT established through a participatory planning process a close collaboration with ten farms, who agreed upon the planned interventions in their fields. Interventions have been carried out in 13 fields. Most farmers chose to establish grassland strips with different seed mixes on ten fields. On one field rocky mid-field islets were created, on two fields species-rich temporary grassland was established and 130 m of hedgerow was planted on one field.

The first assessment of biodiversity in demonstration sites was conducted in the summer of 2024 on one field. Plants, pollinators, spiders, and natural enemies of agricultural pests were observed and collected. Additionally, soil properties and biodiversity sampling were conducted in 2023 and 2024 in all fields.

Information boards were erected at four fields in 2024 and three guidelines were compiled - guide to establishing grassland strips (Annex 16), guide to establishing hedges and shrub strips (Annex 17) and guide to recognising valuable permanent grassland (Annex 18). All these guidelines are available on the project website.

Major problems/drawbacks: Finalising field plans and agreements took longer than expected to obtain a permit from the CINEA to establish demonstration sites outside the Natura 2000 network. All plans were finalised in the 2nd quarter of 2024. Interventions in a few fields have been delayed due to the weather, time constraints, landowner permits, equipment issues, time needed for ecological processes and lack of available saplings. However, these delays do not substantially hinder data collection within the project nor the capacity to draw conclusions from the interventions.

Milestones:

- Test regions are selected, agreements with farmers have been achieved, participatory planning processes have been launched, 4th quarter 2023 – test regions were selected, and the participatory process was initiated by the 3rd quarter of 2023. One farmer additionally joined in the 1st quarter of 2024.
- Pre-intervention assessment of biodiversity, soil health, crop yield has been carried out, 4th quarter 2023 – initial assessments have been partially carried out in the 3rd quarter of 2023 and 2024 (methodology described in Annex 19).
- Landscape- and field-scale agroecological interventions have been applied, 4th quarter 2023 – in three fields, agroecological interventions were fully or partially carried out in the 2nd quarter

2023. Ten demonstration sites were created, and the first hedgerow was planted by the 4th quarter of 2024.

Deliverables: Report on stakeholder involvement and participatory planning process by 4th quarter 2023 - the stakeholder involvement report was completed 4th quarter of 2024 and inserted into BUTLER.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: By the end of the 2nd quarter of 2025, all interventions will be completed in demonstration fields. Sites are being observed and suitable management is devised together with the farmers. Final biodiversity sampling will be conducted in 2027 and the survey report completed by the 4th quarter of 2028. Map application for creating landscape elements will be published at heapold.ee. Dissemination of the importance of ecological intensification and project results continues.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
C.3 Task 1	**Objectives:** Improving the conservation status of forest and farmland habitats and species to achieve results benefiting the whole ecosystems. Raising awareness and capacity of main stakeholders and general public including using innovative solutions. **Expected results:** Ca 30 farmers/farming companies will be involved. Demonstration sites will be covering ca 250 ha. Efficient interventions determined. Web platform established.	From the initial ca 40 farmers contacted, 10 farms (7 farmers) joined the project. Demonstration sites have been established in 20 fields (409 ha), on 13 of those, interventions have been fully or partially carried out (358 ha). First assessments of the intervention efficiency are ongoing.	Close collaboration with the farmers, as well as the policy-makers, has effectively assisted the establishment of demonstration sites, dissemination and development of better agricultural measures. The combination of time constraints, weather events and other *force majeure* cannot be underestimated when working in agricultural fields.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 1054 person-days, 55,47%

Dissemination actions: Project goals and actions have been introduced to Estonian farmers and policymakers at the Annual Exhibition of Estonian Agriculture (Oct 2022) and on information days (Apr 2023 and Dec 2024), including on the demo site at Sadala (Nov and Aug 2023, July 2024). Project actions were introduced with a poster to an international audience at the Northern Roots forum (Jan 2024) and SERE conference, including an excursion to Sadala demo site (Aug 2024). Detailed description about events and international cooperation is described under Action E.2 Task 2 and Task 1.

UT has translated the heapold.ee webpage into English (livingfarm.eu).

SUB-THEME OF THE PLAN: E.2.6. Woodlands and forests

ACTION A.6: Preparatory actions necessary for restoration works

Task 1. Restoration project for wet forest - *delayed*

- Foreseen start date: 3rd quarter 2022 Actual start date: 2nd quarter 2022
- Foreseen end date: 3rd quarter 2023 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 1st quarter 2026

Before the actual restoration activities, it is necessary to prepare specific restoration project for each project site. Every project describes practical activities in such a detailed level that it is possible to outsource the implementation work and carry out the work (Action C.1 Task 1).

During the 1st phase of the project, the RMK together with the partners involved in preparation of the wet forest action plan (Action A.1 Task 1) selected and specified the sites to be restored and performed initial fieldwork for that purpose.

At the beginning of the 2nd phase, the RMK continued with more comprehensive preparatory work with seven pre-selected pilot sites:

- Peterna-Laashoone, Viljandi county (1480 ha)
- Laulaste, Pärnu county (414 ha)
- Karuskose, Viljandi county (273 ha)
- Ohepalu, Harjumaa county (263 ha)
- Tudusoo, Lääne-Virumaa county (592 ha)
- Pihla-Kaibaldi, Hiiumaa county (527 ha)
- Mustjõe, Jõgeva county (67 ha)

The total area of these sites is 3616 ha (the project target is to restore 3500 ha).

The preparatory work performed by the RMK included fieldworks, contacting and receiving initial agreements from different stakeholders (landowners, EB, local municipalities, etc.) and compiling documents for procurements.

In the 2nd phase of the project, the RMK prepared and carried out five successful procurements for designing technical restoration projects for five pilot sites (Peterna-Laashoone, Laulaste, Karuskose, Ohepalu, Pihla-Kaibaldi) and signed contracts with engineering companies. Procurement for Tudusoo and Mustjõe sites technical engineering is planned to be publish in the middle of 2025.

The final technical restoration project of Peterna-Laashoone site was adopted on 27/09/2024. Other four restoration sites (Laulaste, Karuskose, Ohepalu, Pihla-Kaibaldi) are in designing phase and final deadlines for external contractual partners are in the first half of 2025. The restoration plans for Tudusoo and Mustjõe sites are planned to finalize in 2026.

Major problems/drawbacks: According to the schedule, all restoration projects were to be completed in 2023. In practice, restoration projects will be completed on a site-by-site basis between 2024 and 2026. It has only a very small negative impact to the restoration schedule (Action C1 Task 1). Restoration works on 1754 ha will begin in 2025, at least 3000 ha will be restored by 2027 and all sites at the beginning of 2028.

Milestones: No milestones were foreseen in the second phase.

Deliverables: Restoration project for wet forest habitats will be completed between 2024-2026 – deadline according to the project 3rd quarter of 2023. The restoration project of Peterna-Laashoone is inserted into BUTLER.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: All wet forest restoration projects will be completed (four in 2025 and the last one in 2026) and discussed and agreed upon with the main stakeholders.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
A.6 Task 1	**Objectives:** Improving the conservation status of wet forest habitats (*9080, *91D0, *91E0, 91F0, drained peatland forest) and forest species to achieve results benefiting the whole ecosystems. **Expected results:** All wet forest habitats restoration projects are completed (3500 ha).	The project for restoring the natural water regime of Peterna-Laashoone wet forests was adopted on 27/09/2024. (1480 ha / 3500 ha, i.e. 40%). 4 sites (1480 ha) in engineering phase.	Close cooperation with various experts allows us to find the best solutions for nature.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 131 person-days, 56,96%

Dissemination actions: 28/05/2024 and 10/05/2025 meetings were organised in Tartu to present the restoration project of **Peterna-Laashoone** to partners involved in the preparation of the action plan for wet forests, and to all other interested parties. 26/06/2024 public meeting was organised in Palupõhja to present the restoration project of Peterna-Laashoone to the interest parties.

05/09/2024 Peterna-Laashoone restoration project was presented in Alam-Pedja Nature Reserve on their 30th anniversary meeting.

04/10/2024 a meeting was organised in Tartu to present the restoration projects of **Laulaste** and **Karuskose** to partners involved in preparation of the action plan for wet forests as well as to other interested parties.

There is always updated information on the project website about the preliminary work for the forest restoration.

ACTION A.6: Preparatory actions necessary for restoration works

Task 2. Soil and water analyses necessary for the wet forest restoration projects – *as planned*

- Foreseen start date: 3rd quarter 2022 Actual start date: 2nd quarter 2022
- Foreseen end date: 3rd quarter 2023 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 1st quarter 2026

Soil and water analyses in wet forest restoration sites are necessary for the selection pf project (restoration) sites (Action A6 Task 1), for the preparation of the restoration projects (Action A6 Task 1) and for monitoring the success of restoration of wet forests (Action D1). Responsible for this action is TLU. Restoration sites were selected during the first phase of the project and preparation of restoration projects started in the second phase of the project. For soil analyses the Estonian Soil Map was used, which provides data on the distribution of soil types, incl. peat depth.

In the project *"Forested peatlands outside protected sites"* (finished in 2010), TLU made analyses of some nutrient elements (N, P, Ca) from peat and water samples in relation with not only with tree layer species composition but also affecting herb and moss layers composition and with hydrology (depth to water level) as of primary abiotic agent. TLU assumed that data collected earlier are informative for assessing the restoration potential and achieving the targeted result also in LIFE IP project. Data obtained during indoor work was verified during fieldwork. The results are an important contribution to the selection of restoration sites and in preparation of restoration projects as well as for monitoring the success of restoration of wet forests (described in Action D.1).

Major problems/drawbacks: According to the schedule, all restoration projects were to be completed in 2023. In practice, restoration projects will be completed on a site-by-site basis between 2024 and 2026 and this action will progress accordingly.

Milestones and Deliverables: No milestones and deliverables were foreseen in the second phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: All analyses will be completed.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
A.6 Task 2	**Objectives:** Improving the conservation status of wet forest habitats (*9080, *91D0, *91E0, 91F0, drained peatland forest) and forest species to achieve results benefiting the whole ecosystems. **Expected results:** All analyses are completed.	Analyses for selection of the project sites have been completed. Continuing according to the preparation of restoration projects.	The use of databases research results has made it possible to work more efficiently and faster.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 824 person-days, 90,65%

ACTION A.6: Preparatory actions necessary for restoration works

Task 3. Restoration projects for dry forests - *delayed*

- Foreseen start date: 2nd quarter 2023 Actual start date: 2nd quarter 2024
- Foreseen end date: 4th quarter 2023 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 2nd quarter 2026

Before the actual restoration activities, it is necessary to prepare specific restoration project for each project site. Every project describes practical activities in such a detailed level that it is possible to outsource the implementation work and carry out the work (Action C1 Task 2). Responsible for this action is RMK.

Restoration sites are selected during the preparation of the action plan for dry forest. In 2020, it was decided to compile at first the action plan for wet forest (Action A1 Task 1) and only after that continue with action plan for dry forest (the reasons were described in the 1st Interim Report). The preparation of the wet forest action plan has been delayed (described in Action A1 Task 1) and the preparation of the action plan for dry forest started in 3rd quarter 2022.

In 2024, selection of sites to be restored by the project began. The sites were finally selected and approved by the dry forest action plan working group (Action A1 Task 2) on 20/12/2024. The sites were divided into two groups, first priority (8 sites with a total area of 552 ha) and second priority (5 sites with total area of 360 ha.

The restoration projects will be prepared site by site and restoration will start accordingly. Furthermore, dry forests restoration projects and restoration itself is significantly easier than the restoration of wet forests. Similar to wet forests, dry forest restoration sites are selected on state land and therefore there is no need for time-consuming and often unsuccessful coordination with private forest owners.

Major problems/drawbacks: The delay in drafting the action plan for dry forest has affected related actions on restorations (A6 Task 3, C1 Task 2). In 2023, when we submitted 1st Interim Report, we expected that 200 ha of dry forest would be restored in 2024. Now we have to admit that the restoration will be delayed up to two years (see also Action C1 Task 2). The delay will not cause a negative impact on the implementation of other project actions, including also post-restoration monitoring (Action D1).

We can also now say that too little time was planned for the action (foreseen start date: 2nd quarter 2023 - foreseen end date: 4th quarter 2023).

Milestones: No milestones were foreseen in the second phase.

Deliverables: Restoration projects for dry forest habitat will be completed 2025-2026 – deadline according to the project was 4th quarter of 2023

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: All restoration projects will be completed in the third phase of the project.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
A.6 Task 3	**Objectives:** Improving the conservation status of dry forest habitats (2180, *9010, *9020, 9050, 9060, *9180) and forest species to achieve results benefiting the whole ecosystems.	The restoration sites are selected.	n/a
	Expected results: All restoration projects completed (500 ha).		

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 person-days, 0%.

ACTION C.1: Restoration and management of different forest ecosystems (e.g. water regime, species habitats, natural processes) by adapting best practices and testing innovative ideas planned in the habitat action plans compiled in the project

Task 1. Restoration of wet forest ecosystems – *slightly delayed*

- Foreseen start date: 1st quarter 2024 Actual start date: 3rd quarter 2025
- Foreseen end date: 1st quarter 2027 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 1st quarter 2028

The aim of this action is to restore 3500 ha of wet forest habitats to improve the habitat conditions and create new habitats for many protected and threatened species. RMK is responsible for the implementation of this action (i.e. it organises the procurements, restoration work, etc.).

The restoration sites were selected during the 1st phase of the project (Action A1 Task 1). 10 sites were selected, seven of which will be restored by the project (total area 3616 ha).

The restoration will be carried out according to the site-specific restoration projects (Action A.6 Task 1). Main activity in case of wet forest habitats is filling and damming the drainage ditches to restore the hydrology. The first site specific restoration project was finalized in September 2024. The preparation of four project was started in autumn 2024 and will be completed in the first half of 2025. The restoration plans for two sites are planned to finalize in 2026.

Restoration of the biggest site (**Peterna-Laashoone** in Viljandi county, 1480 ha) starts in the end of summer 2025. Work on four sites will start in 2026 and on last two site in 2027. This corresponds to the time schedule set out in the project and allows post-restoration monitorings (Action D1).

Major problems/drawbacks: Restoration work can be carried out only from late summer to spring. Spring and earlier summer is the nesting period for birds and work is prohibited. Because of that the main problem is weather conditions (too rainy autumn and warm winter). Even if some winters are not very suitable for the restoration, based on RMK`s experience, we can confirm that the restorations can be completed with a maximum delay of one year.

Milestones and Deliverables: No milestones or deliverables were foreseen in the second phase.

Proposed target and goals for next phase: Approximately 3000 ha of wet forests will be restored.

Dissemination actions: 28/05/2024 and 10/05/2025 meetings were organised in Tartu to present the restoration project of **Peterna-Laashoone** to partners involved in the preparation of the action plan for wet forests, and to all other interested parties. 26/06/2024 public meeting was organised in Palupõhja to present the restoration project of **Peterna-Laashoone** to the interest parties.

05/09/2024 **Peterna-Laashoone** restoration project was presented in Alam-Pedja Nature Reserve on their 30th anniversary meeting.

04/10/2024 a meeting was organised in Tartu to present the restoration projects of **Laulaste** and **Karuskose** to partners involved in preparation of the action plan for wet forests as well as to other interested parties.

There is always updated information on the project website about the preliminary work for the forest restoration.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
C.1 Task 1	**Objective:** Improving the conservation status of wet forest habitats (*9080, *91D0, *91E0, 91F0, drained peatland forest) and forest species to achieve results benefiting the whole ecosystems. **Expected results:** 3500 ha of wet forest habitats have been restored.	Restoration sites are selected and first restoration project is completed.	n/a

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 person-days, 0%

ACTION C.1: Restoration and management of different forest ecosystems (e.g. water regime, species habitats, natural processes) by adapting best practices and testing innovative ideas planned in the habitat action plans compiled in the project

Task 2. Restoration and management of dry forest habitats - *delayed*

- Foreseen start date: 1st quarter 2024 Actual start date: 3rd quarter 2026
- Foreseen end date: 4th quarter 2025 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 4th quarter 2027

The aim of this action is to restore 500 ha of dry forest habitats to improve the habitat conditions and create new habitats for many protected and threatened species. The restoration is organised by RMK (procurements, supervision, etc.).

The task will be carried out according to the site-specific restoration projects (Action A.6 Task 2). Main activities in dry forest habitats are: increasing structural diversity by creating gaps, increasing the amount and quality of dead wood, increasing the amount of burnt substrates on specific habitats, increasing the area of small open sandy areas, increase the share deciduous tree species in stand composition. The activities cover at least 500 ha.

There has been no activity during 2nd phase of the project, because site specific restoration projects are not ready.

Main problems/drawbacks: Preparation of the action plan for dry forest was delayed and began in the second half of 2022 (see also Action A.1 Task 2). Because of that, only in autumn 2024, selection of sites to be restored by the project began. The sites were finally selected and approved by the working group in December 2024. Therefore, restoration projects will only be completed in 2025-2026 (action A.6 Task 3).

In 2023, when we submitted 1st Interim Report, we expected that 200 ha of dry forest would be restored in 2024. Now we must admit that the restoration will be delayed up to two years. The delay will not cause a negative impact on the implementation of other project actions, including also post-restoration monitoring (Action D.1).

Milestones: Forest structure and composition on 200 ha of dry forest habitats will be improved 4th quarter of 2026 – deadline according to the project was 4th quarter of 2024.

Deliverables: No deliverables were foreseen in the second phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: Approximately 350 ha of dry forests will be restored.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
C.1 Task 2	**Objectives:** Improving the conservation status of dry forest habitats (2180, *9010, *9020, 9050, 9060, *9180) and forest species to achieve results benefiting the whole ecosystems.	n/a	n/a
	Expected results: 500 ha of dry forest habitats have been restored		

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 person-days, 0%

ACTION A.5: Design of private forest measures in protected areas

Task 1. Analysing and updating the Natura 2000 private forest support - *completed*

- Foreseen start date: 2nd quarter 2020 Actual start date: 3rd quarter 2020
- Foreseen end date: 1st quarter 2025 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 4th quarter 2024

The current method for compensating Natura 2000 restrictions to the forest owners has two bottlenecks. Firstly, value of compensation depends on restrictions, but it does not take all the aspects of restrictions into account. There are multiple different levels of restriction but only two different compensation levels. Secondly the forest quality is not considered in the compensations. Well growing forest and forests on poor soils get the same average compensation.

The development of the new methodology was coordinated by the EIC (2020-2022 PFC) together with the working group consisting of experts and officials from MoC. EB, EEML, MoRA and UT. In the 1st phase two surveys were conducted with private forest owners to understand the problems regarding the current compensation system. In the 1st phase, the necessary work was done to develop the basic principles of the new methodology.

In the 2nd phase the main topic to study potential new compensation measures and therefore in 2023 a contract was signed with the EMÜ to provide a methodology for calculating the loss of income for landowners due to restrictions on Natura 2000 forest areas. The study was finished in February 2024 with the methodology which allows for estimating the loss of income due to conservation restrictions in each protected forest compartment and to calculate lost timber volume in case of different levels of restrictions.

While initially the methodology was developed by making calculations only for some protected areas, then in order to analyse the possibility of revising the compensation measure in Estonia as a whole, we commissioned additional calculations for all protected private forests in Estonia by compartment. The annual loss of income due to nature conservation was calculated for each protected forest compartment, taking into account the forest type, timber stock and the precise conservation requirements. To make those calculations, EB had to form a table where all nature protection areas had their forestry related restrictions named. That kind of database had not previously existed in Estonia.

The new methodology was handed over to the MoC in autumn 2024 (full report in December 2024). Based on the calculations made, the MoC`s first step was to increase the special management zone compensation from 134 euros to 160 from 01/01/2025. As the use of new methodology is possible in many ways and requires new IT solutions, MoC is continuing to work on its implementation.

Major problems/drawbacks: While EMÜ was doing the first study to find the values for different restrictions, it became evident that MoC plans to change the rules of the restrictions. Therefore, some of the possible changes were tried to be incorporated to the almost finished study. However, the exact changes are to be seen and depending on the final wording of legislation and therefore it is highly possible that the few additions to the current methodology needs to be made.

There is also the question of cost-effectiveness of the new system. Currently there are no IT-systems that could processes the data in such specific manner. New solution would have to be made and tested first. Cost of this development is unknown at the moment.

Milestones: No milestones were foreseen in the second phase.

Deliverables: Report on updated Natura 2000 private forest support (inserted into BUTLER) was completed in 4th quarter 2024 - deadline according to the project is 1st quarter of 2025.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: This project activity ended in the 4th quartal of 2024, new compensation rates based on studies made during the research are valid since 1st of January 2025.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
A.5 Task 1	**Objective:** Improving the conservation status of forest and farmland habitats and species to achieve results benefiting the whole ecosystems such as: * forest habitats *9010, *9020, 9050, 9060, *9080, *91D0, *91E0, 91F0; * forest species such as woodpeckers, black stork, eagles, dragonflies, amphibians, etc.	New methodology for calculation of Natura2000 private forest support is developed. The new support scheme has not yet been updated at large but prices of the current subsidy were updated based on studies and calculations made during the research.	Professionals at EMÜ and EB were able to combine different datasets to make a theoretical solution. Using the new method in practice requires significant investments and IT-developments.
	Expected results: Report on updated private forest support schemes.		

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 364 person-days, 91,46%

Dissemination: The issue of compensating lost income for private forest owners as well as the need to increase the amount of compensation has been a much-discussed topic in the media. Therefore, the media closely followed possible new solutions, and the subject received quite some coverage in the spring of 2024 (see the Annex 6).

Several meetings with different forest owner`s associations were organised to introduce new draft methodology and gather their inputs and recommendations to the method before the finalisation of the report. Every meeting gathered about 20 representatives of private forest owners, in addition to the officials, scientists and other stakeholders.

ACTION A.5: Design of private forest measures in protected areas

Task 2: Elaboration of active forest measures for protected areas in order to improve the conservation status of forest habitats and species – *delayed*

- Foreseen start date: 2nd quarter 2020 Actual start date: 3rd quarter 2020
- Foreseen end date: 1st quarter 2024 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 4th quarter 2025

There aren't currently any active support mechanisms for forest owners that are designed to improve status of protected species. Aim of the action is to find out if there are potential activities that are suitable for achieving set goals.

During the 1st period a list of 20 possible activities were created by a think-tank (Action A7 Task 2) and four most preferred activities were selected for further elaboration: (1) shaping residual water bodies and their shores to be more natural and improving forest hydrological regimes; (2) diversifying tree stands by planting broad-leaved trees; (3) shaping young forests through selective cutting; (4) using light machinery for forestry work.

2nd phase of the project has been used to study potential options further. There is the need to find out if the activity is cost effective and could be useful in real life conditions. For that EIC together with other beneficiaries (MoC, EB, EEML) has analysed possible cost, and capacity that would be required for those methods. Also, the remaining methods that were not selected at first were evaluated again to possibly use some aspects of those. At the end of the 2nd phase the draft of the report was compiled.

Major problems/drawbacks: As additional funding by state has not been available and the project does not have funds for testing solutions in real life, these methods can`t be tested in the nature. While all four and generally all 20 options are good for conservation status of forests and species, in some cases they might not be suitable everywhere. Improving the quality of protected areas depends on the protected species and forest type. Therefore, it would be nearly impossible to set rules that could be applied everywhere.

The action is behind the schedule. The project is developing both new methodology for compensating Natura 2000 restrictions to the forest owners (Action A5 Task 1) and active forest measures. The participating officials and experts are the same for both actions. In 2023 and especially in 2024, the focus at political level was on compensations and a new methodology was expected from our project. As a result, we decided to work mainly with the methodology and there was less time to deal with active forest measures. Nevertheless, the draft was compiled and the final report of this action will be finalised in 2025. This delay has no negative effect to other project actions, because no other project action is related to it.

Milestones: No milestones were foreseen in the second phase.

Deliverables: Report on elaborated active forest measure will be completed 4th quarter 2025 – deadline according to the project 1st quarter of 2024.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: Report on elaborated active forest measure will be completed in 2025.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
A.5 Task 2	**Objective:** Improving the conservation status of forest and farmland habitats and species to achieve results benefiting the whole ecosystems such as: * forest habitats *9010, *9020, 9050, 9060, *9080, *91D0, *91E0, 91F0; * forest species such as woodpeckers, black stork, eagles, dragonflies, amphibians, etc.	Possible activities have been analysed. The content of measures is prepared and presented to MoC. The draft is ready.	Think-tank that provided options was compromised of professionals whose work lead to current solutions. Reasoning why some ideas aren't suitable as actions supported by state should have been made aware earlier during the process.
	Expected results: New active forest measure elaborated.		

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 260 person-days, 63,11%

Dissemination: Two seminars and one introductory event for forest owners, associations and officials were held (see Annex 10).

ACTION C.5: Land purchase for conservation purposes – *ahead of the plan*

- Foreseen start date: 2nd quarter 2020 Actual start date: 1st quarter 2020
- Foreseen end date: 4th quarter 2029 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 4th quarter 2028

Objective of the action is to purchase at least 500 ha private forest land in protected areas (Natura 2000 sites). Purchasing of land with high nature conservation value is integral part of the nature conservation works in cases where the traditional and economically reasonable use of the land is not allowed due to nature conservation objectives. In most of the cases the objective is to purchase land where the main aim is to leave the land for natural development.

The land purchase will be carried out in accordance with the procedure in force in Estonia: the land purchase will be prepared by the EB, coordinated by the MoC and implemented by RMK, which will also enter into a notarial purchase and sale agreement with the landowner. The purchased land will be managed by RMK.

In the 1st phase of the project experts and officials from MoC, EB and RMK developed the criteria for land to be purchased within the project and 14 land units with a total area of 152 ha were acquired. The total cost was 750,762 euros and the average price per hectare was 4,939 ha. In the 2nd phase of the project 12 land units with a total area of 230 ha were acquired. The total cost was 3,096,682 euros and the average price per ha was 13,464 euros.

All purchased land units are entered in the Land Purchases Database. Maps of land units purchased in the 2nd phase are attached to this report (Annex 20). In accordance with the agreement with EMT, all ministerial directives and notarial purchase and sale contracts related to land units purchased in 1st and 2nd phase of the project are attached to this report (Annexes 20).

Major problems/drawbacks: In accordance with Government of the Republic Regulation No 22 of 09/03/2023 "Procedure for the extraordinary valuation of immovables", a new methodology for assessing the value of forest land was introduced in Estonia. The valuation now also takes into account the loss of income, which has resulted in a significant increase in the price of forest land. In order to fulfil the goal of the action, to purchase at least 500 ha of forest land to the state, it was necessary, according to our calculations, to increase budget of the action by 1,5 million euros. We requested this changes along with other changes in Amendment Request no 2. The Agency accepted it and modified Grant Agreement was signed in March 2025. The amount was shifted from EB`s budget (Action C2) to RMK.

Milestones: By the end of 2nd phase (4th quarter 2024) 382 ha has been purchased – target according to the project 240 ha purchased 4th quarter 2024

Deliverables: No deliverables were foreseen in the second phase.

Proposed targets and goals for the next phase: The project schedule stipulated that in total 380 ha of forest land will be purchased by 2027 and at least 500 ha by 2029. The target of 3rd phase is already achieved in 2024 and we expect that this action ends earlier than planned.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
C.5	**Objectives:** Improving the conservation status of forest and farmland habitats and species to achieve results benefiting the whole ecosystems such as: * forest habitats *9010, *9020, 9050, 9060, *9080, *91D0, *91E0, 91F0; * forest species such as woodpeckers, black stork, eagles, dragonflies, amphibians, etc.	382 ha of land has been purchased.	The fulfilment of the planned goals has been ensured by close cooperation between project beneficiaries and involvement of officials in the field.
	Expected results: 500 ha of land is purchased		

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 (a total of 0 person days are planned)

Dissemination actions: Updated information on land purchasing system and purchased lands are available on the project website. The instructions for landowner of a property who wishes to sell his protected forest land to the state are on the website of the EB.

PILLAR OF THE PLAN: E.3. Additional species-specific measures not related to specific ecosystems or habitats

Pillar E.3 is related to the species protection.

Sub-theme of the Plan E.3.1. Species-specific measures and programmes not covered elsewhere (Action C.4, Action A.2, Action C.3 Task 2)

Main achievements of the 2nd reporting period:

- 52 small waterbodies have been created during the second phase. 62 was the target but the gap is not large.
- The project ran a citizen awareness campaign from May to November in 2022 to track and identify invasive alien species.
- Eradication works started in 44 test plots and in 16 control areas.
- As a new approach to sharing advice on controlling alien species, EB and MoC participated in Türi Flower Fair.

Main drawbacks of the 2nd reporting period:

- Completion of the pollinator action plan will be delayed by one year. The draft is ready but still needs significant improvement.

SUB-THEME OF THE PLAN: E.3.1 Species-specific measures and programmes not covered elsewhere

ACTION C.4: Testing of novel eradication methods of invasive alien species in agriculture landscapes – *slightly delayed*

- Foreseen start date: 3rd quarter 2020 Actual start date: 3rd quarter 2021
- Foreseen end date: 3rd quarter 2026 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 4th quarter 2027

The aim of action is to test novel eradication methods for *Fallopia sp (Fallopia japonica, F. sachalinensis and F. x bohemica), Solidago sp (Solidago canadensis, S. gigantea), Symphoricarpos albus* and *Sorbaria sorbifolia* in 44 pilot plots mapped during the 1st phase of the project. In addition to the usual mowing and trimming, EB treats invasive species with hot steam and herbicide, cover them with durable geotextile and shred plants with a chain shredder.

The aim of the trials is not to clean up large areas, but rather to test the effectiveness of different methods and, based on the results, to draw up combating guidelines that will enable landowners and local authorities to combat invasive species more effectively.

Two to three eradication methodologies are used in each pilot area and the comparison is made with the control samples (16) where eradication works are not carried out.

The methodology (presented in the 1st report) foresees three assessments: before the eradication work in 2022, in the middle of the eradication work in 2024 and after the completion of eradication work in 2027. During the 2nd phase of the project the pre-term and mid-term assessments (short overview is given in Annex 21) were carried out.

Major problems/drawbacks: Due to time consuming negotiations with private landowners (who had some of the test areas for alien species control on their lands) as well as late arrival of a specific and innovative eradication technology (steam machine), EB started practical eradication works in 2023 (not in 2022 as initially planned) after the first assessment was made in 2022 and carries them till the end of 2027. This change does not affect the implementation of any other actions.

Milestones: Eradication work carried out for the first year in 44 test plots by 3rd quarter 2022 - eradication works were carried out in 2nd quarter 2023 in 44 test plots and in16 control areas.

Deliverables: No deliverables were foreseen in the 2nd phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: Seasonal eradication work will continue for another three years to test the effectiveness of different methods and based on the results, to write the guideline that will enable landowners and local authorities to combat invasive species more effectively.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 523 person-days, 56,54%

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
C.4	**Objectives:** Improving the conservation status of farmland habitats and species to achieve results benefiting the whole ecosystem such as: lessening the impacts of invasive species by controlling the following species *Fallopia sp, Solidago sp, Symphoricarpos albus* and *Sorbaria sorbifolia* **Expected results:** Eradication of invasive alien species *Fallopia sp* in 12, *Solidago sp* in 8, *Symphoricarpos albus* in 12 and Sorbaria sorbifolia in 12 pilot plots; *Practical guidance* document for eradication.	Methodology for evaluating the effectiveness of control methods for invasive alien species has been elaborated. Eradication works have been carried out for two years (2023 and 2024) in 44 test sites, first conclusion on tested the methodologies are drafted.	Good cooperation (personal face to face communication) with landowners and the representatives of local municipalities is a key for a success.

Dissemination actions: Similar to the 1st phase, the topic of alien species received lots of coverage and public attention in the 2nd phase of the project.

In 2022 –

- the project ran a citizen awareness campaign from May to November to track and identify invasive alien species and encourage the use of a nature observation database application. The initiative resulted in over 400 recorded observations, with prizes awarded to the top 12 contributors among 94 participants.

In 2023 –

- the project published five videos on alien species control and eradication, also providing instructions on how to control alien species on your own. Videos were distributed on the project website as well as on Facebook and they received plenty of comments and discussion.
- public broadcasting environmental programme „Osoon“ focused on invasive alien species of the project and their eradication methods;
- project activities related to the alien species were presented to the Latvian project “Life for species” during their study trip to Estonia;

In 2024 –

- EB and MoC participated in Türi Flower Fair to share with gardening enthusiasts advices for controlling alien species in their home yards;
- a webinar was organised for local government representatives (80 participants took part of it) to introduce the project activities on regulation of invasive alien species and the eradication methods;
- EB made a study trip to Latvia to exchange knowledge about the alien species control activities carried in LIFE project LatViaNature.
- EB alien species specialist Mrs. Eike Tammekänd made a presentation at Neobiota conference in Lisbon introducing the project and eradication methods the project uses in Estonia.

ACTION A2: Developing Action Plan for Pollinators - *delayed*

- Foreseen start date: 1st quarter 2022 Actual start date: 2nd quarter 2021
- Foreseen end date: 4th quarter 2024 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 2nd quarter 2026

The aim of this action is to develop action plan for pollinators.

The action plan is being developed as a collaboration among various organisations and stakeholders: EB, MoC, UT, and various other stakeholders and experts (among others: Estonian University of Life Sciences and Estonian Fund for Nature). The EB will eventually approve, adopt and implement the pollinators action plan.

During the first phase of the project the necessary information was collected and working group established.

Within the second phase, the necessary research, literature and data compilation were performed. One of the most important and also difficult topics was developing the structure of the plan. There are very many species of pollinating insects (several thousand species in Estonia) and their ecological needs and habitats are different. Consequently, the pollinators action plan cannot be species-based or habitat-based (like classical plans) but must be a synthesis of both. For this reason, assembling the structure took a lot of time but it was done.

By the end of the year 2024, the initial draft of the pollinator action plan was compiled.

In summary, the action plan aims at improving the status and trends of pollinating insects and gives scientifically supported recommendations for various relevant measures and actions. More specifically, the action plan recommends:

- maintaining and improving the condition of existing pollinator habitats at a sufficient quality across all landscape types (agricultural landscapes, meadows, forest landscapes, bogs and marshes, settlements, and infrastructure-related landscape elements);
- increasing landscape heterogeneity (especially in agricultural landscapes) to a sufficient degree by creating new habitats and restoring the existing ones;
- updating relevant regulations, including introducing additional restrictions on pesticide and fertilizer use;
- improving the status of endangered and protected species;
- enhancing and strengthening scientific research and monitoring of pollinators;
- raising public and stakeholder awareness of the ecological importance and needs of pollinators.

Major problems/drawbacks: Developing of the structure of the plan was much more complicated than expected (description above). Other two aims – to get the feedback to the draft of the pollinator action plan from all stakeholders and the adoption of the plan – were not achieved because of the delay with finalizing the draft. The delay was caused by the increased scope and volume of the plan, as well as the need for a more detailed consultations among the main parties: MoC, EB, UT, MoRA.

The delay does not affect any other part of the overall project. The result of the action is one of the inputs for updating the action plan for the semi-natural grasslands (Action A.1 Task 3). Deadline of

this plan is 4th quarter 2027 and this fits with the fact that the pollinators action plan will be adopted in the 2nd quarter of 2026.

Milestones: 2nd quarter 2024, research done, action plan compiled and submitted by the UT to the EB – research is done, but the plan will be completed and submitted to EB in 2025.

Deliverables: originally by 4th quarter 2024 the action plan for pollinators was supposed to be adopted – we expect the plan to be adopted in the 2nd quarter of 2026.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: After collecting the feedback from all stakeholders during 2025, the draft action plan for pollinators will be finalised, and the final version will be made public for discussions. The plan will be adopted in 2026.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
A.2	**Objectives:** Improving the conservation status of forest and farmland habitats and species to achieve results benefiting the whole ecosystems such as pollinators.	The initial draft of the pollinator action plan completed.	Problems with planning (the scope and volume of the plan increased about two-fold; time planning needs to be more accurate (incl. for getting feedback from experts and stakeholders). To solve these issue, more extensive collaboration among all involved parties is needed.
	Expected results: Action plan for pollinators adopted		

Dissemination actions: The head of the pollinators working group for the action plan, Mrs. Virve Sõber has introduced the *secret world of pollinators* in the environmental public broadcasting "Osoon" in summer 2024. She also has been one of the key speakers of articles dedicated to the pollinators well-being.

More precise dissemination actions, including the stakeholder's involvement process starts once the pollinators action plan is ready for the public disclosure.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 460 person-days, 79,72%

ACTION C.3: Designing more nature friendly landscapes as demo sites

Task 2. Restoration of small water bodies – *slightly delayed*

- Foreseen start date: 2nd quarter 2020 Actual start date: 2nd quarter 2020
- Foreseen end date: 4th quarter 2025 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 4th quarter 2026

To improve the spawning conditions of amphibians, especially the common spadefoot toad (*Pelobates fuscus*) and the northern crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) in the agricultural landscapes, the project restores 100 small waterbodies.

UT experts make a pre-selection of small water bodies to be restored based on previous inventories and the Estonian base map. The pre-selection criteria are following: (1) presence of target species; (2) location in agricultural landscape; (3) Natura area.

Next, the pre-selected small water bodies are inventoried and those suitable for restoration are selected. After selecting the waterbodies, the EB identifies the owners of the inventoried ponds, negotiates with them and concludes goodwill agreements. EB also organizes tenders for restoration works. The restoration of small water bodies is supervised by UT experts. Restoration works are carried out in the autumn.

In the first phase of the project, 17 small water bodies were restored. In the second phase, 52 small water bodies were restored: 20 in 2022, 23 in 2023 and 9 in 2024. All these water bodies were inventoried and selected in the first phase of the project. The locations of the restored water bodies are shown on the map on the project website.

In addition, 42 small water bodies were inventoried in 2024, 37 of them were selected for the restoration. EB has started preparatory work for concluding the necessary agreements.

All restored waterbodies are monitored annually throughout the project. The monitoring results have already shown the effectiveness of this work. The amphibian species richness has increased in several protected areas, and the number of small water bodies with target species has also increased in almost all protected sites where the waterbodies were restored.

Major problems/drawbacks: Although the restoration of small water bodies has proceeded according to schedule, there was a small backlog in 2024, when only 9 water bodies were restored. Although 17 small water bodies were selected, the necessary permits for the restoration of all of them were not obtained. The main reason was that these water bodies were completely overgrown and the updated Estonian Base map did not have a water body symbol to mark them. In such cases, the restoration of water bodies is treated as the construction of new ones and the permission from the local municipality is also required. Seven of the selected waterbodies were located on the land of the same municipality and the municipality did not give permission due to fears of restrictions on possible economic activities.

This minor delay does not affect the action or any other actions of the project. Restoration is directly related only to monitoring (Action D.1) and by now enough small water bodies have been restored to obtain information about the effects of restoration.

Milestones:

- 4th quarter 2022 –40% waterbodies created (40 waterbodies in total) – 37 have been restored
- 4th quarter 2023 –60% waterbodies created (60 waterbodies in total) – 60 have been restored
- 4th quarter 2024 –80% waterbodies created (80 waterbodies in total) – 69 have been restored

Deliverables: No deliverables were foreseen in the second phase.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: The restoration work will continue in autumn 2025. All 100 small waterbodies will be restored at the latest 2026.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
C3 Task 2	**Objective:** Improving the conservation status of farmland habitats and species to achieve results benefiting the whole ecosystem; * birds and other species related to grasslands and arable land.	The restoration of small waterbodies has created preconditions for the improvement of the habitat and breeding conditions of species related to these habitats. 69 small waterbodies have been restored in 2021-2024.	Good cooperation with landowners, as a large part of the ponds are located on private land. It is important to communicate with landowners, local communities and municipalities. But sometimes even that doesn`t help.
	Expected results: 100 restored small waterbodies.		

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 520 person-days, 74,5%

Dissemination actions: The principles of restoration of small water bodies and the success of this work was introduced to the nature conservation specialists from many organisations (including project beneficiaries) and to students from universities. In 2023, the actual work and the principles of restoration of small water bodies was introduced to the several Latvian LIFE projects. There has been 11 articles/TV/radio broadcasts on the topic.

In May 2023 the principles of restoration of small water bodies and the effectiveness of this work was introduced to the contact persons of LIFE programme from different EU countries.

In May 2024. Riinu Rannap (UT) presented the results of restoration of small water bodies at the seminar "LIFE Platform Meeting: Amphibian and Reptile Conservation" held in Spain.

As part of the SERE conference in August 2024 in Tartu two excursions were organised to the restoration sites, both attended by the selected participants of the conference.

Project Management

Project management is necessary for the project as well as the PAF implementation, nevertheless these actions are not included to any of the pillar actions. Chapter consists of Actions F.1, F.3, F.4 and F.5.

Action F.3 “Compilation of PAF 2028+” is part of the third phase and Action F.5 “After-LIFE Plan” is a fourth phase action, therefore they are not discussed in this report.

As of achievements – project management works well, Management Team and Steering Committee meetings are regular and the input from them very useful. Necessary project amendments have been requested and approved by the Agency. The audit has been carried out and its results show that the project has been implemented in accordance with the Grant Agreement, regulations and laws.

ACTION F.1: Overall project management – *as planned*

- Foreseen start date: 1st quarter 2020 Actual start date: 1st quarter 2020
- Foreseen end date: 1st quarter 2030 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 1st quarter 2030

The purpose of project management is to ensure the implementation of project actions and the achievement of objectives in accordance with the Grant Agreement.

The project work organisation was established in the first phase of the project. Working groups have been formed to carry out the project actions. Each working group is led by the beneficiary responsible for it and includes experts of different beneficiaries. If necessary, experts from other institutions will also be invited. At least one project manager from the coordinating beneficiary participates in all working groups. As this work organisation was effective, it was continued in the second phase. More detailed description is presented in chapter 3.

In the second phase there were some changes regarding project managers. Project manager Voldemar Rannap and deputy manager/communication specialist Kaidi Tingas have led the project from the beginning. Financial manager, who was hired in 2021 quit her job in August 2022. In June 2023 a new deputy manager Kaidi Silm was hired. She has worked in the field of semi-natural grasslands for many years. After that the work was reorganised and tasks re-divided. V. Rannap is responsible for project overall management, financial topics and forest issues. K. Silm is responsible for semi-natural grasslands and agricultural actions. In addition, she is organising project events, deals with international cooperation and participates also in communication activities. K. Tingas is responsible for communication, including media, project homepage, social media, stakeholders' participation, reporting and presenting, arrangements of different events, etc.

During the second phase two Amendment Request were prepared and submitted to the Agency. In summary, both amendments in addition to the technical and financial changes included also requests for the changes related to beneficiaries. Administrative changes are described in chapter 3 and substantial financial changes in chapter 9. Technical changes were mainly deadline changes.

The project managers form the Project Lead Team. In their daily work they cooperate with the employees of MoC (nature conservation specialists, lawyers, financial specialists, procurement specialists, public relations specialists, etc.) and work in close cooperation with beneficiaries.

Project Management Team (MT) was formed in 2020 and the members are project managers of beneficiaries. MT regular work takes place in the form of e-mails, meetings (face to face, TEAMS, etc.). MT members also participate in the work of working groups related to their institutions. Once a year CB organises MT meetings, in which project experts also participate (ca 40 persons). The main content of the meetings is the implementation of actions, problems encountered and their solutions. One of the most important aspects of these meetings is that all participants have a comprehensive overview of project progress and the coordination the work of beneficiaries. During the second phase two meetings were organised (15-17/11/2022, 21-22/11/2023). The next MT meeting will take place on Aprill 8-9, 2025 and also include visit to project sites.

The Steering Committee (SC) was formed in 2020. It includes representatives and key specialists from different fields and is chaired by the Deputy Secretary of the MoC. During the second phase three SC meetings were held (29/03/2023, 23/11/2023, 29/10/2024). In SC meetings the implementation of the project and complementary actions and related issues were discussed in substance and always the meetings including the visit of project sites. The next meeting is planned for the second half of 2025.

Major problems/drawbacks: The biggest challenge is the constant reorganisation of the ministry and the accompanying changes in political directions. This has required extra work and adaptation to circumstances. Nevertheless, the management and the progress of the project has been successful.

Milestones:

- At least 20 Project Management Team meetings held by 2030 – During first and second phase 5 Management Team and experts meetings were organised.
- At least 10 Steering Group meetings held by 2030 - During first and second phase 5 Steering Committee meetings were organised.

Deliverables:

- First interim report and request for payment was sent to the Agency 10/02/2023 – deadline according to the project 3rd quarter 2022
- Second interim report and request for interim payment was sent to the Agency 2nd quarter 2025 – deadline according to the project 1st quarter 2025

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: Project management continues and work organisation is carried out according to agreed and proven procedures. Three Management Team meetings with experts and two or three Steering Committee meetings will be organised.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
F.1	**Objectives:** The aim of project management is the fulfilment of all project objectives. **Expected results:** All objectives and results have been achieved.	As a result of project management, actions are progressing, creating a prerequisite for achieving the project's goals in accordance with the Grant Agreement. Project managers, Lead Team, Management Team and Steering Committee are working as planned. Necessary changes into Grant Agreement made.	The key aspects are good cooperation between project beneficiaries and active involvement of stakeholders, landowners and policy makers as well as the effective communication.

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 5116 person-days, 43,97%

Dissemination actions: Information about the project events, info days, media coverage, visits to the project's website and Facebook, etc. related to the presentation of the project and its activities are given under other actions description in this chapter of the report.

ACTION F.4: Financial audit of the project – *as planned*

- Foreseen start date: 3rd quarter 2022 Actual start date: 1st quarter 2025
- Foreseen end date: 1st quarter 2030 Actual (or anticipated) end date: 1st quarter 2030

The aim of this action is to verify the compliance of project costs and financial documentation with Estonian legislation and accounting rules and to certify that all costs comply with the Grant Agreement.

According to the Annex X, "Certificate on the financial statements and accounts" is required for each beneficiary exceeding the following thresholds:

(i) the cumulative amount of payments the beneficiary requests as reimbursement of actual costs is EUR 325 000 or more;
(ii) the maximum grant amount indicated for that beneficiary and its affiliated entities in the estimated budget as reimbursement of actual costs is EUR 750 000 or more.

In our project, six beneficiaries (MoC, EB, RMK, UT, EOY, KEMIT) exceed threshold (ii) and at the end of the second phase, five beneficiaries (MoC, EB, RMK, UT, EOY) exceeded threshold (i).

At the end of the first phase, the amount of expenses incurred and the EU contribution requested for each beneficiary was less than 325,000 euros and therefore auditing was not necessary. As of result, at the end of the second phase, the costs incurred by the five beneficiaries (MoC, EB, RMK, UT, EOY) in the first and second phases were audited.

A call for proposals was sent to five experienced auditing company to find an approved auditor (Ernst & Young Baltics AS, KPMG Baltics OÜ, PKF Estonia OÜ, ELSS OÜ, Fides OÜ). Most of them belongs to international corporation and all have experience in auditing international projects (including LIFE). Unfortunately, we only received one offer from KPMG, with whom the contract was signed. Fortunately, the bid price matched the project budget.

We also asked the reason for the non-offer and it was that at the beginning of the year most companies are tied to long-term auditing contracts, and they just don't have resources (the beginning of the year is a mandatory audit period for many companies.

The audit was carried out from 20/01-15/05/2025. An overview of the audit is provided in chapter 9.4 "Certificate on the financial „statement".

Major problems/drawbacks: The only problem was the limited availability of auditors, which resulted in a lack of submitted offers.

Milestones: No milestones were foreseen in the second phase.

Deliverables: 3rd quarter 2022 First audit report and 1st quarter 2025 Second audit report – in practice, one audit was conducted covering the first two project phases. Certificates on the financial statements of MoC, EB, RMK, UT, EOY are inserted into BUTLER.

Proposed targets and goals for next phase: Next audit will take place at the end of the 3rd phase.

Action	Foreseen in the Grant Agreement	Achieved	Main factors of success and lessons learned
F.4	**Objectives:** Assessment of the eligibility of the costs.	One audit is conducted covering the first two project phases.	The financial management of the project has ensured that the expenses incurred comply with the Estonian laws and LIFE programme rules (Grant Agreement).
	Expected results: 4 audit reports		

Person-days executed (total and % as compared to GA): 0 (a total of 0 person days are planned)

7. Key Project-level Indicators

In 2021, KPI`s were entered into the KPI database. During the preparation of the 2nd Interim Report, the indicators in the KPI database were also updated. The indicators were discussed with the EMT and the update was carried out according to EMT instructions. New knowledge gained in the first half of the project was also considered.

Crex crex, Tetrao urogallus and alien invasive species were deleted from the indicators. In all these cases, the project does not have any specific conservation activities that would directly improve their conditions (in the case of alien species, on the contrary, would reduce their area).
Crex crex – the project only studies their habitat use; Tetrao urogallus – the restoration of forest habitats is not targeted to improve their habitat; alien species – project only tests novel eradication methods on very small test plots. All of these activities are important, and the results will allow to act more efficiently and nature friendly in the future, but the project itself does not directly and measurably improve anything.

The main changes are as follows:

*The new species, Triturus cristatus (Annex II and IV of the Habitats Directive), was added as a new indicator species, because the restoration of small waterbodies (Action C.3 Task 2) is aimed at this species in addition to the Pelobates fuscus.

*The restoration of semi-natural grasslands (C.2 Task 1) was added as a new indicator (target 600 ha by the end of the project). This is in addition to the restoration of coastal meadows (C.2 Task 2), which also remained (target 400 ha).

*In the case of forest restoration, the old indicators were *Western Taiga 9010 (target 250 ha) and *Fennoscandian Deciduous Swamp Woods 9080 (target (1500 ha). The new indicator is the restoration of various forest habitat types in the volume of 4000 ha. The main reason for this change is that now the indicator covers all forest habitat types that will be restored by the project. In addition, one restoration site includes often a wide variety of habitat types that smoothly transition into each other. Last but not least, project restores forests which are in bad condition and the project create basis for future improvement of forests which also means the development of new habitat types.

Based on the implementation of project actions the fulfilment of KPI goals is realistic now. Previously, there were also indicators whose implementation was not and could not be influenced by the project.

The results achieved will be entered into the database at the end of the project and five years after the end of the project. The latter is the responsibility of the coordinating beneficiary MoC. The monitoring of KPI`s is one of the tasks of the Monitoring Team (see also Chapter 6. Evaluation of project implementation, Action D.2 Task 1).

8. Next phase: changes/adjustments

During the first five years of the project, which included the first two phases, various changes have had to be made for reasons independent of the projects as well as for reasons arising from the implementation of the project actions. During this time two amendment request were prepared and submitted to the Agency and all changes (administrative, technical and financial) were approved.
Today, we can confirm that the implementation of all project actions within the time, scope, content and budget specified in the Grant Agreement and the achievement of the project objectives are realistic and have been ensured.

Therefore, only technical changes are foreseen in the third phase of the project, or more precisely, the compliance of the implementation of actions with the project schedule. Shifts have arisen for two main reasons: the start of the activities has been delayed or the extension of the activities is necessary to fulfil them in essence.

Although this chapter is intended to describe the changes in the next (third) phase, we describe also actions that were supposed to be completed in the second phase but were postponed to the third phase. We also describe only significant changes. If an activity is delayed some quarters or most of the activity is completed on time, we will not discuss them. A more detailed overview and explanation of delays are provided in the relevant activities in chapter 6.3 "Technical implementation". Annex 1 "Deliverable and milestones schedule" (main changes, i.e. delays, are marked in bold) and Annex 2 "Timetable" are also updated accordingly.

The changes are described by project topics to provide a better overview of related actions.

Main changes – forest actions

Action plans for wet and dry forest habitats were to be adopted by the end of 2023 (action A.1 Task 1 and 2). Action plan for wet forests was completed in 2024 and will be adopted in the 3rd quarter 2025. Action plan for dry forests is almost completed, will be finalized in 2025 and adopted in the 1st quarter 2026.

Restoration projects for wet forest habitats (A.6 Task 1) were to be completed by 3rd quarter 2023. First project was adopted 27/09/2024, four will be completed in 2025 and last two in 2026.
Restoration projects for dry forest habitats (A.6 Task 3) were to be completed by 4th quarter 2023. Restoration projects will be completed on a site-by-site basis during 2025-2026. Because of that also the monitoring schemes (D.1) for dry forest will be drawn up later (deadline 2nd quarter 2024, will be prepared during 2025-2026).

The restoration of wet forests is nevertheless planned to be completed more or less on schedule (deadline 1st quarter 2027, expected 4th quarter 2027). The restoration of dry forest habitats is delayed (deadline 4th quarter 2025, expected 4th quarter 2027).

Report on elaborated active forest measures (A.5 Task 2) was to be completed by 1st quarter 2024 but it will be completed during 2025. The reason was that the focus in the second phase was on renewing Natura 2000 private forest subsidies (A.5 Task 2), which had a strong social demand and was therefore prepared earlier than planned (deadline 1st quarter 2025, completed 02/12/2024 but the discussions lasted the whole of 2024).

Main changes – semi-natural grasslands

Action plan for semi-natural grasslands was to be updated by the end of 2026 (A.1 Task 3). Now it has been postponed by a year, as the existing plan is valid until the end of 2027.

It was planned to restore 700 ha of semi-natural grasslands by 2026 (C.2 Tasks 1 and 2). Although half of this has already been restored, due to the transition to procurement, we expect that 700 ha will be restored by 2027.

The aim of the action A.3 Task 1 is to design and launch a consultation system for semi-natural habitats managers and owners. According to the milestone, the evaluation of this system was to be completed by 3rd quarter 2026. The system has been very successful, it has already received very positive feedback from landowners, semi-natural grasslands restorers and managers. According to them, the need for such a system and the help from such a system is great. Consequently, it has been decided to keep this system in operation for longer and the plan is to make it permanent.

Main changes – species

Action plan for pollinators (A.2) was to be adopted by 4th quarter 2024. The draft was completed in 2024 but it still needs improvement. The plan is therefore scheduled to be completed in 2025 and adopted no later than 2nd quarter 2026.

The restoration of 100 small waterbodies was to be completed 2025 (C.3 Task 2). In 2024 only 9 were restored (69 have been restored in total) and in 2025 it is realistic to restore ca 20, so the restoration of about 10 waterbodies will take place in 2026.

Invasive alien species eradication (C.4) started in 2023 instead of 2022. Therefore, it will also end in 2027 instead of 2026, because the eradication must take place over five years. The guideline for eradication of IAS (C.4) will also be completed in 2027, a year later.

Main changes – awareness raising

One of the tasks of the project is to create a system that informing and involving landowners of conservation values (E.3 Task 3). The system should be created by the 4th quarter 2025. Although landowners have already begun to be informed using various methods, the entire solution will be completed in 2027. This is related to the completion of the EELIS (C.6) information system, one part of which is designed specifically for landowners and forms a complex system with other solutions.

It was foreseen to organize 8 site visits in the 2nd phase and 8 site visits in the 3rd phase to alien species eradication test plots (E.2 Task 2). In the 2nd phase two info-days were organized. Because of the delay of eradication also the site visits were postponed. In 2025 six site visits and in 2026 also six site visits will be organised. The plan for 2027 will be decided in 2026.

Main changes – agriculture

The aim of the action C.3 Task 1 is to test the effectiveness of agroecological interventions in arable fields by establishing demonstration sites. The test sites must be located on intensively managed fields and are predominantly located outside Natura areas: To act outside Natura 200 network a permission from CINEA was needed and it took time. Accordingly, agroecological interventions will be completed in 2025 (deadline was 4th quarter 2023) and assessments, analysis, etc. will shift approximately by one year.

9. Comments on the financial report

The financial report is based on the financial statements and templates provided by the LIFE programme.

During the second phase of the project, two amendment requests were prepared and submitted to the Agency. Both requests included also financial amendments (incl. the merging the phases in the budget and continuing with the single simplified budget for the whole project duration). All amendments were accepted by the Agency (see also chapter 3). The financial report is based on the last revised budget

To the 2nd Interim Report are attached Payment Request with Consolidated Cost Summary (Annex 22) and Financial Statements of Individual Beneficiaries (Annex 23). All of these cover only the second phase of the project.

9.1. Summary of Cost incurred

Cost category	Approved budget. Eligible costs (€)	Eligible costs accepted in previous Phase(s) (€)	Consolidated cost statement for Phase 2. Eligible costs (€)	Percentage of costs incurred per whole budget (%)
Personnel	5 385 634	721 134,95	1 827 869,16	47,33
Travel	472 593	25 477,02	78 391,40	21,98
External Assistance	6 547 940	127 435,15	611 368,51	11,28
Infrastructure	0	0	0	0
Equipment	15 000	0	5 000,00	33,33
Prototype	0	0	0	0
Land Purchase	5 550 000	750 762,10	3 096 681,98	69,32
Consumables	330 335	100 524,03	124 648,24	68,16
Other Costs	416 909	45 303,22	264 486,97	74,31
Overheads	843 373	44 843,00	171 393,00	25,64
TOTAL ELIGIBLE COSTS	**19 561 784**	**1 815 479,47**	**6 179 839,26**	**40,87**

The amount of expenses reported in the first phase of the project was 2,279,971.11 euros. The Agency decided to consider the cost of restoration of semi-natural grasslands (Action C.2 Task 1) in the amount of 452,487.64 as ineligible (cost category external assistance). In addition, as a result

of this, the declared overhead cost was more than 7%, the overhead cost in the amount of 12,003.80 was also confirmed as ineligible. Therefore, the table above does not reflect these (ineligible) costs. At the same time, in its letter (no 4369908, dated 23/06/2023) the Agency proposed to consider several options for how to proceed with the action C.2 Task 1 and 2. This included the possibility of requesting the inclusion in the project budget a "financial support to third parties cost category" in the EB budget. We chose this option; the corresponding change was included to the Amendment Request no 2 and sent to the Agency on 22/04/2024. The Agency accepted our request (letter no 1325469, dated 19/02/2025) and Amendment no 2 to Grant Agreement was signed in March 2025. Based on this, we included the expenses of restoring semi-natural grasslands (which were ineligible in the cost category "external assistance") from the first phase in the amount of 99,974.97 euros in the cost category "other costs" in the Environmental Board`s second phase financial statement. The financial statement of the first phase of EB highlighting ineligible costs in colours and list of third parties with amounts of support is attacked to the report (Annexes 24 and 25). The table above including the support to the third parties under the cost category "Other costs".

In addition to the change described above, the Amendment Request no 2 included some other significant financial changes.

1) Personnel costs of EB was increased by €151,900 and it was covered by the reduction of external aasistance. The need to increase personnel costs arose because the project had to switch to procurement. This switch significant increased in the volume of work.
2) During the preparation of the terms of reference for the restoration procurement, the need to improve access soil roads in some coastal meadows became apparent. EB proposed to add a new budget cost ("Reconstruction of access roads") with a cost of €100,000 to the EB`s cost category external assistance. The cost was covered by the reduction of the budget of restoration of semi-natural grasslands (external assistance).
3) The national methodology for the valuation of forest land has been changed in 2023. As a result, the price of forest land has increased substantially. To reach the original target (to buy 500 ha of strictly protected private forest land) €1,500,000 ws needed additionally. For this, the project proposed to shift €1,500,000 from Environmental Board (External assistance, Action C2, Restoration and management of different semi-natural grasslands) to State Forest Management Centre (Land purchase, Action C.5). EB confirmed that the original target, 1000 ha of semi-natural grasslands restored, will be reached with less budget.
4) There was need to raise the wages of CB MoC staff due to overall increase in average wage level in Estonia and secondly due to the re-organisation of Ministry of Environment into Ministry of Climate (during which part of the former Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communication was merged with the Ministry of the Environment) and harmonization of wages. For this, the project proposed to shift €100,000 from MoC cost category overheads to MoC cost category personnel.

The table of incurred costs characterises well the progress of the project. The project has been running 5 years, or half of its duration. As the expenditure incurred in some cost categories is significantly less or more than 50%, the reasons for this are described below.

The amount of incurred costs of travel and external assistance is relatively small. In the first case, the reason was increasing replacement of face-to-face meetings with virtual ones (Teams, Zoom).

Therefore, the budget may need to be revised in the third phase of the project. For external assistance, there are two main reasons. The ineligible costs of restoring semi-natural grasslands (Action C.2) and thus the "new start" of this action. Secondly, the restoration of forests (Action C.1 Task 1 and 2), which is one of the most expensive works of the project, will begin in the third phase.

More than half of the budget has been used in three cost categories: 1) land purchase – budget expenditure is 69% and 76% of lands have been purchased; 2) consumables- budget expenditure is 68%, the main part was the purchase of the equipment necessary for the research and monitoring (transmitters for the birds, monitoring equipment), the use of which will continue in the following phases; 3) other costs – budget expenditure is 74%, 1/3 of which was the support to the third parties for the restoration of semi-natural grasslands as it was agreed with the Agency (the subsidies paid for the restoration of semi-natural grasslands were considered ineligible, but 100,000 euros of it was allowed to move from external assistance to other costs as support to the third parties).

9.2. Accounting system

The accountancy procedures of project beneficiaries were established in accordance with the normal accounting conventions imposed on them by law, existing regulations and Grant Agreement. The project budget formed part of the budgets of the beneficiaries. An analytical accounting system (cost centre accounting) was applied for coordinating and associated beneficiaries. This allowed for separating project expenses from other expenses. All beneficiaries used unique project codes, which were associated with corresponding expenses.

Codes identifying the project costs in the accounting systems of beneficiaries

MoC – 9L10-MU00-LIFEIPLKO
EB – 9L70-MU00-LIFEIPLKO
KEMIT - 9L90-MU00-LIFEIPLKO
RMK – FORESTFARM
MoRA – P10-MUUD-LIFE-IP
EOÜ – LIFE-IP
UT – MLTOM20102
TLU – 111_TKA20059
EEML – LIFE-IP ForEst&FarmLand LIFE18 IPE/EE/000007
SIUTS – Siuts-Life
EIC – The code LIFE was used in 2020, and the code 9LS1-LIFE-IP-FFL from 2021. The modification resulted from switching to the new accounting system. Starting from 2023 the code is 9LS2-KEM-LIFE-IP-FFL. The reason for the change is that the previous beneficiary Private Forest Centre was merged with EIC.

Cost approving procedures

In the cost approval procedure, all beneficiaries follow the organisation`s bookkeeping rules and common practice. Although each beneficiary has its own procedural rules, they are generally similar and based on the Estonian Accounting Law.

At first, the cost (invoice, expenditures report, etc.) is verified by the project manager of the beneficiary who checks the relevance of the costs in terms of the respective document (contract, business trip report, etc.) and the budget. The task of the project manager is also to check the presence of the project identifiers (abbreviation and number) on the cost documents. Then the document is sent to accounting where the cost according to the accountancy rules of the organisation are checked. After that, the payment is made by accounting. For state organisations (MoC, EB, MoRA, KEMIT), the State Shared Service Centre makes the payment.

All the costs of associated beneficiaries are double-checked by the coordinating beneficiary and compared against the aims of the project actions and the budget. For that, the associated beneficiaries send filled financial reports together with the copies of all expense documents (contracts, invoices, payment orders, timesheets, etc.) to the MoC. This ensured complete control over the project's expenses.

Procurement/selection procedures

The procedure for finding a service provider and purchasing goods is based on laws, procurement procedures of beneficiaries and the Grant Agreement. According to the Estonian Public Procurement Law the public procurement is mandatory if the expected cost exceeds 30,000 euros without VAT.

Within the project it has been decided that the price offers will be asked from different companies if the amount exceeds significantly 2,000 euros without VAT if it is reasonable and practical. For all beneficiaries, this sum is lower than the internal rule prescribes. For example, we take offers when the expected cost is lower but the service or goods are very common (GPS, print of stands and similar). At the same time, we will not take the price offers if the expected cost is higher, but the service or goods are unique in a way. For example, room rent and catering at a specific place (study day at project sites), MapInfo software has only one seller and similar.

Registration of working time

All beneficiaries using the standard timesheets of LIFE programme. Only exception is EEML, who uses a different format. This format was accepted by the Agency in another LIFE project (LIFE17NAT/FI/000469) where an EEML employee participates. This format contains all information that the LIFE programme standard timesheet contains.

Project employees fill out the timesheets and timesheets are usually signed digitally. The working time is registered on a daily basis and the timesheets are completed electronically.

Several employees do not fill timesheets because they only work on a project and their workload is fixed (for example, project managers of MoC and some employees of EB).

Timesheets are signed at the beginning of next month by the employee and project manager (or superior) of the beneficiary who also checks their correctness. Project manager`s timesheets are signed by the supervisor. In case of late validation, the explanation is added to the timesheet if

possible. In the case of digital signing, it can only be added by the first signer (employee). If for some reason the supervisor signs after that significantly later, it is not possible to add an explanation to the timesheet.

Associated beneficiaries send timesheets to the coordinating beneficiary with all other documents at least three times a year.

Reference to the project

We used two options for adding project references to the project's expense receipts. Either the issuer of an invoice provided a reference to the project (abbreviation and number) or, where this was not possible, the invoices are stamped with the project stamp. The stamp has both the project abbreviation and number. The latter option is needed primarily in situations involving gas stations, store receipts, electronic tickets, etc.

If the invoice provided by the company (service provider) did not have the project identifier, the invoice was sent back and a correct invoice was requested.

Control of the presence of the project identifiers on the documents is the task of the manager of the beneficiary. Presence of project abbreviation and number is double-checked by the project financial manager of MoC.

9.3. Partnership arrangements

Partnership agreements were prepared by project managers together with MoC lawyers at the beginning of 2020 and agreements were signed in April-May 2020. A partnership agreement was signed with MTÜ SIUTS in March 2023, after the Agency had approved the inclusion of a new beneficiary. The agreements stipulated also the conditions of transaction of the EU contribution.

Project managers of MoC together with the financial department developed a standard order form for transfers of EU contribution. The transfer process was described in the first Interim Report. In general, transfers were (and will be) made as needed, but not in a large amount than is necessary to cover one year`s expenses. To apply for a transfer a completed financial statement and supporting documents must also be submitted. This approach ensures the targeted use of EU contribution and reduces possible risks.

Each beneficiary fills the financial forms itself, either the project manager (MoC, EB, RMK, MoRA, UT, EEML, EIC, KEMIT, SIUTS) or bookkeeper (TLU, EOÜ) does it. All financial statements and documents are double-checked by the coordinating beneficiary. Consolidated cost statement was prepared by the coordinating beneficiary according to the financial reports of all beneficiaries.

To simplify the work, a unified file naming system was used, which significantly saves time when searching for a file. It also provides a good overview of existing files, keeps them in order and allows to discover missing files quickly. An example of timesheet: firstname_surname_ts_01_2020 or similar.

9.4. Certificate on the financial statement

In accordance with Article II.23.2.d of the General Conditions, a 'certificate on the financial statement' for each beneficiary and for each affiliated entity, shall be provided if:

(i) the cumulative number of payments the beneficiary requests as reimbursement of actual costs as referred to in Article I.3.2(a)(i) (and for which no certificate has yet been submitted) is EUR 325,000 or more;

(ii) the maximum grant amount indicated for that beneficiary and its affiliated entities in the estimated budget as reimbursement of actual costs is EUR 750,000 or more.

Six beneficiaries meet condition (ii): MoC, EB. RMK, UT, EOÜ, KEMIT. At the end of the 1st phase of the project, none of them had exceeded the threshold for condition (i) and were therefore not audited. At the end of 2nd phase five of them (MoC, EB. RMK, UT, EOÜ) exceeded the threshold for condition (i) and were audited. The auditor selection process is described in chapter 6.3 (Action F.4).

The project was audited by:
KPMG Baltics OÜ
Ahtri 4, Tallinn, Estonia
https://kpmg.com/ee/en
Audit licence No 17
Indrek Alliksaar, Certified Auditor, no 446

According to the project, coordinating beneficiary MoC is responsible for auditing and the audit cost is fully included in the MoC`s budget. Accordingly, the MoC entered solely into a contract with the auditor firm. The contract met the Ministry`s requirements (was drawn up in cooperation with lawyers), covered the auditing of all five beneficiaries and was in accordance with the "TERMS OF REFERENCE". Therefore, no separate "TERMS OF REFERENCE" was signed with each beneficiary. MoC was also the contact between auditor and beneficiaries. The contract between MoC and KPMG Baltics OÜ (signed digitally) and all certificates on the financial statements (signed manually) are inserted into BUTLER.

In summary, it can be said that the costs incurred by the project beneficiaries, financial documents and procedures comply with the Grant Agreement, internal rules of beneficiaries and laws. The auditor examined thousands of documents and found only very few mistakes (some of which are so-called typos and there is no finding of the absence of a project abbreviation in the documents). This shows that the financial management of the project is well organised and effective.

Below our comments on the auditor`s findings which we believe the auditor has made incorrect decision.

Personnel costs

At the beginning of the project, we made one fundamental mistake in few cases. If the employee started to work for the project in February or later but had been working for the beneficiary since the beginning of the year, we reporter hours and salary in few cases from the month the employee joined the project. In such cases, the auditor made a new calculation for the entire year and as a result found that the actual project salary was lower than the financial statement reflected. We would like to point out that this is a calculation mistake.

But the case of Oleksandr Matsibora (Auditor`s Report, University of Tartu, exceptions point 2), we do not agree with the auditor`s decision. He worked on the project from November to December 2022. We reported his working hours and salary for the period 01/07/2022-31/12/2022. The reason is that the first phase of the project ended on 30/06/2022 and the second started on 01/07/2022. Reports (including financial) are phase-based, so it was not possible to add Oleksandr Matsibora to the first phase report. Second phase report started 01/07/2022 and therefore it reflects only second half of the year. The auditor`s calculation reflects the entire year, which is incorrect in this case. According to the auditor`s calculation the amount of ineligible costs is -65,25 euros.

Travel

UT paid travel costs of Minna Ots (Auditor`s Report, University of Tartu, exceptions point 1) before signing the contract. According to the Annex X (VIII.7 OTHER COSTS „*Examples of other costs - travel costs of persons who are not under personnel costs should be placed in the category other costs*". Minna Ots was a volunteer in fieldwork before joining the project. In our opinion the auditor`s opinion is not correct, and UT acted in accordance with the Grant Agreement.