



ALFAwetlands – Wetland restoration for the future

Press Release

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ALFAwetlands Midterm Conference Press Release

ALFAwetlands Midterm Conference

ALFAwetlands Midterm Conference took place during 21-24 of May 2024 at the Austrian-Hungarian Living Laboratory site. The main location of the Conference was the Neusiedl See - Seewinkel National Park Visitor Center in Illmitz, Austria.

The **Conference** aimed to review the ALFAwetlands implementation progress, present and exchange current results as well as to discuss further plans. Moreover, the project consortium interacted with national and local stakeholders, the broader public and raised awareness about the importance of wetlands restoration. In addition, meetings of the **Advisory Board and Sister projects** took place.

The Conference also included **Field trips to the Hungarian and Austrian sites** of the Living Lab to observe them and receive first-hand information about past and current restoration projects as well as to meet stakeholders and discuss further cooperation within ALFAwetlands.

Furthermore, two additional events took place: the **ALFAwetlands Living Lab Open Day and the Living Labs Photo Exhibition** which allowed visitors to get better acquainted with all 9 ALFAwetlands Living Labs, their activities, biodiversity and discuss citizens involvement into protection and restoration of wetlands.

ALFAwetlands Living Labs

The Living Labs in ALFAwetlands constitute a joint system in which ecological (measurements, experiments, monitoring etc.), most of the social science related work (e.g. co-creation process) and partly remote sensing and modelling are conducted. Living Labs play a key role in supporting and integrating interdisciplinary research on ecological, environmental, economic and social science at the local level.

ALFAwetlands comprises 9 Living Labs (including 33 sites) across Europe: Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Latvia, Spain, Sweden. They serve as hubs or platforms for collaboration between different actors while aiming to produce new solutions that can be applied there and upscaled to other areas.

ALFAwetlands in Austria

ALFAwetlands project is particularly important for Austria, since it contributes to the country's Peatlands Strategy implementation, which has the aim to jointly develop new ways of preserving peatlands.



The **Austrian Peatland Strategy 2030+** is intended to bring together all those who are involved with peatlands: in nature conservation, agriculture, forestry and water management, in planning and science, in administration and politics, landowners, managers, nature conservation organizations and many more. It contributes to achieving the following goals by 2030 and beyond:

- Conserve near-natural peatlands and their ecosystem services
- Restore degraded peatlands and their ecosystem services
- Raise public awareness of the sustainable use of peat soils
- Motivate collective action to protect these unique habitats.

ALFAwetlands research news

Under its 5 research Work Packages (WP) ALFAwetlands is working on:

WP1. Meta-analyses & Land Use Assessment for Enhancing European Wetland Knowledge

WP1 has advanced the geospatial knowledge base on European wetlands by developing comprehensive wetland databases and land use/land cover (LULC) maps for various catchments, which will be used in several subsequent analyses within ALFAwetlands. The creation of the preliminary European Wetland Map significantly improves available wetland data. Additionally, collaboration with EU sister projects has been established to align results and amplify impact.

WP2. Co-creation & Inclusive Wetland Restoration

The midterm results highlight significant theoretical and methodological contributions to knowledge co-production and sustainability transformations, along with deeper insights into the social-ecological contexts influencing inclusive wetland restoration. The team contributed in advancing nature-based solutions and is in the process of creating a guidebook to support local capacity building and co-creation processes.

WP3. Efficiency of Innovative Ecosystem Scale Restoration Practices

WP3 has synthesized existing knowledge and gathered new experimental data to understand ecosystem responses, including biodiversity and climate change mitigation, across different wetland management regimes in temperate and boreal zones. Key tasks have included methodologies development, data collection, remote sensing tools and algorithms, literature reviews on biodiversity and ecosystem services, and soil analyses.



WP4. Modelling & Scenarios

WP4 is focused on developing policy-relevant scenarios for climate change and biodiversity at the EU level. So far, the team has improved wetland inventory in EU-scale models and enhanced modelling capacities for upscaling ecosystem services' responses to management and restoration practices. Baseline and "wetland" projections are being developed for short- and mid-term land demand under various land use and climate change scenarios and to explore potential mitigation options.

WP5. Economic & Social Impacts of Wetland Restoration

WP5 has reviewed previous wetland restoration valuation studies and identified gaps, noting the challenges of presenting complex biodiversity and ecosystem service benefits. The ongoing work includes a comprehensive Public Participation geographic information system survey, with initial results expected later this year, and aims to provide a multi-country perspective on the societal impacts of wetland restoration.

"We are glad to host ALFAwetlands conference at the Burgenland and discuss our further cooperation. Currently we are considering possible ALFAwetlands input for ground water modelling", says Philipp Reiner, Office of the Burgenland State Government.

About ALFAwetlands

The ultimate goal of ALFAwetlands is to improve the geospatial knowledge base of wetlands, to evaluate the pathways of wetland restoration that incorporate a co-creation process, and to provide information and indicators for sustainability to maximize climate change mitigation, biodiversity and other benefits.

ALFAwetlands has assembled a team of experts from 14 organizations +1 affiliated entity across 10 EU countries to realize the project aims. Coordinated by Natural Resources Institute Finland (Luke), the consortium includes an array of European environmental NGOs, research institutes and centers for higher learning.

Project duration: 06/2022-11/2026.

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