



## GESTIRE Project

Development of a strategy to manage the Natura 2000 network in Lombardy



birdlife

forests

Habitat Directive

water habitats

improving biodiversity

preservation  
techniques

management too

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The LIFE GESTIRE project was conceived to face the need of an integrated strategy for the management of the Natura 2000 network in Lombardy, contributing – in line with the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 – to the restoration and maintenance of a sufficient conservation status of the sites, habitats and species in a region like Lombardy, characterized by strong pressures related to human settlements and production, and at the same time by a high richness of natural landscapes and presence of numerous habitats and species, many of which of community interest. Within the **242** Natura 2000 sites of Lombardy – 193 SCIs and 67 SPAs, in some cases overlapping among them – censuses have been taken of 61 species of community interest included in the Annex II of the Habitat Directive, 87 bird species included in Annex I of the Birds Directive, as well as 13 priority habitats (referred to in Annex I of the Directive 92/43/CEE) located in the Alpine and Continental biogeographical regions. GESTIRE is one of the 9 European projects (among which 3 are Italian), which were funded by the LIFE program in 2011 for the first time, with the aim of developing management and restoration programs for Natura 2000 sites, as well as a national-regional level *Prioritized Actions Framework (PAF)*. The main objective of the project was to contribute to stop loss of biodiversity and decline of ecosystem services (ES) through the implementation of three specific activities:



1. Creation of an enlarged and participatory system to manage the Natura 2000 network in Lombardy, providing for the maintenance and restoration of an optimal conservation status of sites, species and habitats;
2. Development of a long-term strategic plan for the management and restoration of sites, species and habitats in order to put them in an optimal conservation status, taking into consideration all potential funding sources at regional, national and European levels, and defining a list of actions till 2020;
3. Increase of the level of population's attention and awareness about the Natura 2000 sites.

## OBJECTIVES

The project was proposed as a driving force for a new cultural and management approach to the Natura 2000 network, which could serve as model for several Italian regions and not only: it's a pilot project which faces for the first time the complex challenge to conjugate the conservation of habitats and species of community interest (as an untreatable good) with occupational and economic issues. In fact the Natura 2000 sites, besides having a crucial role in the biodiversity conservation in Europe, provide for a wide range of ecosystem services and other benefits for the society and local communities. The project was conceived in line with the functionality and coherence of the Natura 2000 network, to boost ecological interconnectivity among the Natura 2000 sites or wider measures in support of the sites, like the Regional Ecological Network.

## PROJECT PHASES



The definition of a long-term strategy for the management and conservation of the sites, habitats and species present in the Natura 2000 sites in Lombardy has foreseen different types of actions, from preparatory, analytical, scientific, implementation and monitoring activities, to outreach and communication to public. The project was carried out by the General Directorate of Environment, Energy and Sustainable Development of the Lombardy Region, together with other public and private subjects with experience in biodiversity issues, such as ERSAF (Regional Agency for Agriculture and Forestry Services), FLA (Foundation for Environment of Lombardy); Lipu (Italian League for Birds Protection), CTS (Student and Youth Tourist Center) and “Comunità Ambiente e Fondazione Cariplo” (Environment and Cariplo Foundation Community) in quality of co-founder.

GESTIRE project has implemented the following main actions:

- Collection of all existing documentation about the Natura 2000 sites in Lombardy and their analysis;
- Creation of a “Natura 2000 Group”, gathering representatives of all regional General Directorates concerned with the management of the Natura 2000 sites (agriculture, culture, tourism, services, infrastructure and mobility, etc ...) and experts of the network, in order to ensure the coherence of the Natura 2000 networking programmes in Lombardy with the different regional policies;
- Study of the measures and best practices related to the management of habitats and sites in other European regions;
- Analysis and estimate of the socio-economic value of the Natura 2000 network in Lombardy, also taking into account green jobs locally created by Natura 2000, and proposals on how to incentivize them;
- Analysis of the regulatory measures in force and eventual updating proposals;
- A detailed consultation of different stakeholders in Lombardy, whom were asked a contribution to the development of the integrated management strategy of the Natura 2000 network in the region;
- Organization of a regional level information and communication campaign to raise awareness about the Natura 2000 network in Lombardy and its importance in the biodiversity conservation;
- Development of guidelines for citizens and businesses on biodiversity conservation in the Natura 2000 network;
- Definition of management measures for sites without a Management Plan, and of measures to interconnect the Natura 2000 sites;
- Development of a Management Policy Document of the Natura 2000 network in Lombardy;
- Development of the PAF (Prioritized Actions Framework) for Lombardy.

## PROJECT RESULTS

The elaboration of the [Analytical Report on the Lombardy-located Natura 2000 sites' Management Documents](#) (analysis of 422, regional, national and European level management documents of the Natura 2000 sites, as well as other transversal documents related, in particular, to climate change) and of the [Collection of ad-hoc Case Studies and Best Practices within the Management of Habitats and Sites in other European Regions](#) (following an extensive literature search, different case studies have been identified and analyzed, such as the [Catchment Sensitive Farming](#) related to aquatic environments; the [LIFE ECO-RICE](#) project - LIFE09 NAT/IT/000093 - for agricultural environments, or the [Econnect](#) project, funded by the ECT “Alpine Space” Programme, related to forests) provided useful instruments for the development of the regional management strategy of the Natura 2000 network, as well as solution models to some problems largely diffused in Lombardy.

The [Analysis of the management costs of the Natura 2000 network in Lombardy](#) in the period 2008-2011 (including also an estimate of the costs foreseen for the 2014-2020 period), a [study of the funding instruments of the Network](#) in the 2007-2013 period (European, national and regional funding granted for interventions and projects bringing benefit to the Natura 2000 sites, for an overall value of 60,6 M€), as well as a [financial plan for the Network's management](#) in 2014-2020 (in practice a forecast based on past costs and revenues expressed with reference to three potential scenarios: pessimistic, neutral and optimistic) allowed to better know the engaged economic and human resources as well as the future needs for a better implementation of the Natura 2000 network. The work performed to develop the financial plan served as basis for the creation of a dedicated website ([www.finanziamenti-naturachevale.it](http://www.finanziamenti-naturachevale.it)) which allows to identify, in a simple and intuitive way, all funding available in the 2014-2020 programming period for specific interventions in Natura 2000 sites. This website aims to increase the capacity of all actors involved in the management of the Natura 2000 Network, and in particular of the Managing Bodies, to attract public and private funding, thereby increasing the economic and financial sustainability of the Network itself.

In the frame of the GESTIRE project an estimate of the [socio-economic value of the Natura 2000 network in Lombardy](#) – based on the economic evaluation of services provided by the sites – has also been elaborated. This work represents the first estimate of economic evaluation of Ecosystem Services (ES) in relation to the Natura 2000 network in Lombardy, and offers – for the first time in Italy – a systematic methodological approach for this kind of evaluation at regional level, functional for the development of a natural-resources-accountancy system compatible with analogous international systems and in line with the provisions of the last Environmental Law (introducing changes also to the Stability Law). The strict and complex methodology used – together with



the *benefit transfer* method – allowed to have an estimate of "willingness to pay" for so-called "non-market" services (eg. recreational value) as well as estimates of the value of marketable services (eg. timber production, non-wood forest products, forage, carbon fixing). The evaluation of the marketable ES has showed how an important part of the economic value of the regional Natura 2000 network, of the value ranging from 130 to 177 million euros, is already commercialized or could be commercialized on the market. The [Report on green jobs in the Natura 2000 network in Lombardy](#) has allowed to further deepen the understanding of the relation between the socio-economic enhancement of the sites and job development, giving a qualitative and quantitative appraisal of the nature conservation related jobs in Lombardy (more than 36.000 people working in Natura 2000 areas, 700 of whom are directly involved in the management of the sites). Both studies have thus provided useful inputs for the definition of strategic actions for the enhancement of ES for an effective managing of the Natura 2000 sites and for activating other funds for the conservation of the sites, as well as for incentivizing sustainable development related employment in the Natura 2000 areas. The result of the green jobs report have been also used for providing indications to the *Managing Authority in Lombardy of the Regional Operational Programme – ESF 2014-2020* about the training needs related to the development of new competences for the management and enhancement of Natura 2000 sites.

A [detailed study of the regulatory framework concerning the Natura 2000 network](#) – including all EU, national and regional levels – has instead showed the criticalities in the application of some of these norms (in particular, conflicts and/or incoherence between the disposals concerning the network and those concerning other regulated issues). Due to it the study represented a useful reference to improve the regulatory action, to enhance transparency of the decision-making process and to take the opportunity to make a revision of the regional regulation on the Natura 2000 network. Being the general knowledge about the network very limited, a [Communication Plan](#) has also been developed and implemented to raise public awareness on the issues of biodiversity. The Plan addressed three different categories: the "Natura 2000 network Community" (approx. 300 municipalities in Lombardy), the regional public and the category of enterprises; among the developed tools, inspired by ["Lombardy: natural heritage and biodiversity"](#), the "Z-Cards" - issued in a credit card format – are high quality information material which offers a detailed map of all provinces in Lombardy interested by Natura 2000 areas (with indication of all SCIs and SPAs, their characteristics and precise geographical localization; see here an [example of the Como province](#)).

Other products of the outreach activity were the [specific guidelines for the public](#) and [for enterprises](#) which describes some of the natural environments of the Natura 2000 areas in Lombardy, and for each of them it is illustrated what can be done to contribute to their protection. The participation to the numerous meetings of officials from the Lombardy Region, local authorities, managing Bodies, supervisory bodies, universities, environmental associations, tour operators, as well as freelancers, farmers and breeders, which addressed different issues (impact assessment, water resources, capacity building, regulatory framework, financial aspects, sanctions and controls, conflict management, etc...), allowed to collect precious inputs for the development of a complete and effective management strategy of the Natura 2000 areas, capable to implement the biodiversity conservation objective. The process of public consultation and the involvement of different stakeholders made also possible the development of the document ["Management of impact assessment in Lombardy – Key points for the operators"](#), which offers to the involved personnel useful indications to better deal with the often very complex procedure. The [Unified Planning Document](#) (UPD) – approved by the Lombardy Region ([Dgr. n. 4429 of 30/11/2015](#)) – has been realized as the result of a knowledge sharing process and kind of mentoring to the Managing Bodies without a Site Management Plan, which saw the involvement first of all of the "Natura 2000 Group" (the advisory body for all project activities, gathering all the DGs of the Lombardy Region involved for different competencies) and allowed to complete the designation of SACs. This important tool, together with the conservation measures of the other sites with an adopted management plan, form the strategic framework for the conservation of habitats and species of community interest in Lombardy, pursuant to the provisions of art. 6 of the "Habitats" Directive and art. 4 of the "Birds" Directive. The UPD, developed in the frame of the project GESTIRE, identifies also new measures aimed at improving the ecological connection among the Natura 2000 sites, and contains the norms for the protection of the Regional Ecological Network (REN). Due to the project, the Lombardy Region has adopted also a **Scientific Monitoring Programme of the Natura 2000 network**, related both to [fauna](#) as well as [plant species and habitats](#). This programme was developed taking into account the actual size of the regional natural heritage and is compliant with the available regional biogeographic data, so as to fulfill the requirements of information provided for under art. 17 of the "Habitats" Directive.

Thanks to the results of the different project activities and the expertise gained within the LIFE project GESTIRE, a [Managing Document](#) has been elaborated, containing the objectives and strategic priorities of the Natura 2000 network management in Lombardy. An Annex of the document provides an [assessment of possible effects of the climate change on species of community interest and/or indicator species](#), utilized, this latter, to prove the reaction of the biological communities of their respective habitats. Such an assessment is crucial for an appropriate planning of conservation strategies. The strategic priorities identified by the Managing Document are foreseen to be implemented in the 2015-2020 period accordingly to the [Regional Prioritized Actions Framework](#), the reference plan which contains the urgent priority measure for managing the Natura 2000 network in Lombardy and identifies the potential resources, with a view to integrate the different available financial resources, such as LIFE and Horizon 2020, the structural funds EAFRD, EMFF, ERDF and ESF, as well as other national, regional and private funds. The PAF

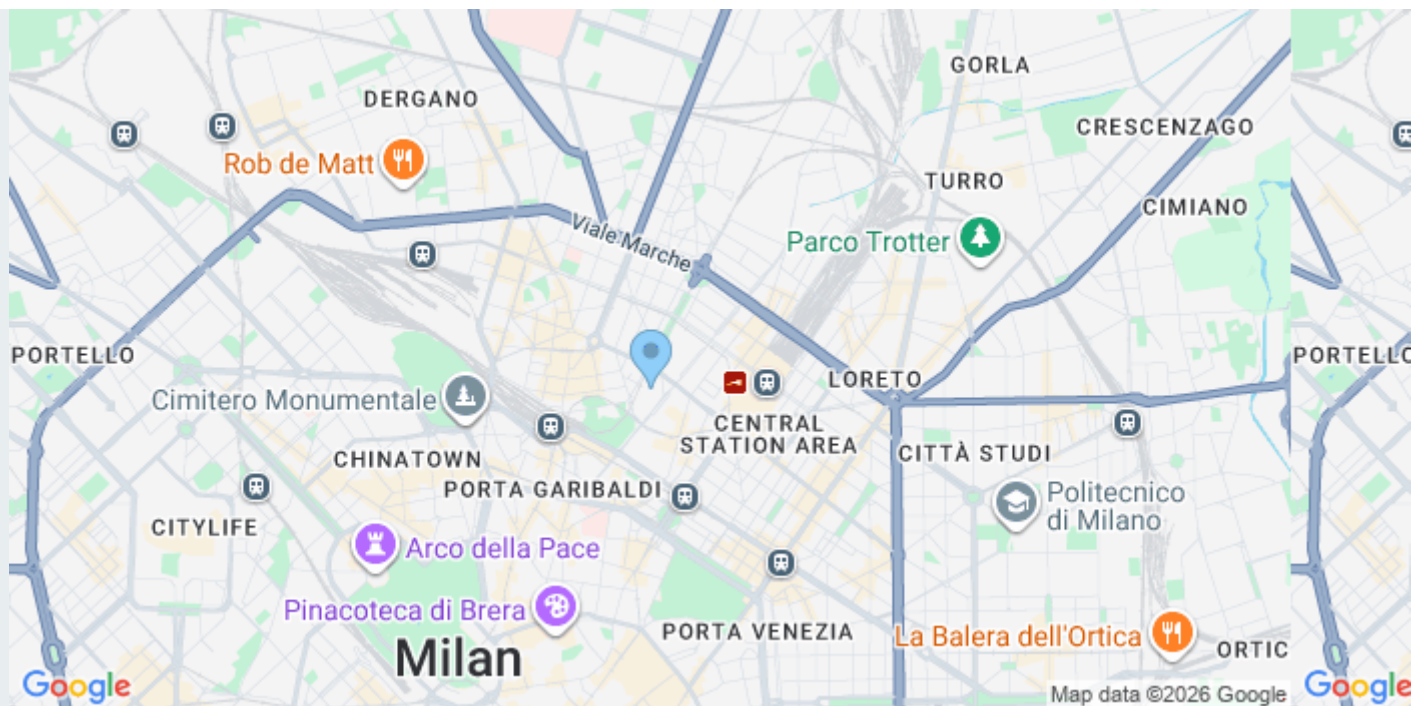


describes the priority actions concerning species/ habitats/ target sites in a synthetic manner, dividing them in 25 different types of intervention activities.

The precious work done within the LIFE+ project GESTIRE gave origin to a new LIFE project, the **integrated project GESTIRE 2020** (LIFE14 IPE/IT/000018), with which the Lombardy Region intends to implement the integrated management strategy for the whole Natura 2000 network. In particular, the LIFE Gestire 2020 project – with a foreseen duration of 8 years (2016 -2023) – has the goal to ensure the biodiversity conservation objectives foreseen in the “Habitats” and “Birds” Directives through the activities envisaged by the regional PAF, improving the management capacity within the Natura 2000 network and aiming at integrating different funds and regional policies.

The implementation of the [After-LIFE Conservation Plan](#) of the LIFE GESTIRE project has already been started by the Lombardy Region, with the financial contribution ensured by the integrated project. The aim of this document is to systematically link the results of LIFE GESTIRE actions with the actions of the Integrated Project GESTIRE 2020 in order to understand the ways in which the management of the Lombardy Natura 2000 Network is addressed and which funds can be used for the implementation.

Finally thanks to the coordination between the DGs of the Region, another important result was achieved within the GESTIRE project: a paragraph on “Compensatory payments for Natura 2000 agricultural areas ”(specifically dedicated to the financing of Natura 2000) was included in Lombardy’s [Regional Development Program \(RDP\) 2014-2020](#) (Point 12.1).



**Acronym**  
GESTIRE

**Number of reference**  
LIFE011/ NAT/IT/00044

**Reference Programme**  
[LIFE](#)

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2011

**Start Year**  
2012

**End Year**  
2015

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