



natura 2000 in lombardia

LAYMAN'S REPORT



Project by



Regione Lombardia

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Today all life on Earth, biodiversity, is under threat. Biological and genetic diversity enable us to adapt to changes and environmental shocks ensuring the survival of species and natural ecosystems.

The project GESTIRE "Development of a strategy to manage the Natura 2000 network in Lombardy" (LIFE 11 NAT IT 044), co-funded by the European Union, represents a valuable contribution to biodiversity conservation.

LIFE and Natura 2000

Established in 1992, the European financial instrument LIFE is the only EU fund that is fully dedicated to environmental projects. 1992 is also the year of approval of the Habitat Directive, for the identification and protection of sites hosting natural or semi-natural habitats and threatened, rare or endemic animal or plant species to be considered of Community interest.

For long-term maintenance of natural habitats and species of flora and fauna considered of Community interest, the Directive provides for the establishment of the Natura 2000 network, an ecological network of protected areas spread at EU level which includes also the sites identified under the Birds Directive for the conservation of numerous species of birds.

Natura 2000 now includes 18% of European territory and 6% of its seas, the largest network of protected areas in the world.



Photo Paolo Manzi



The GESTIRE project

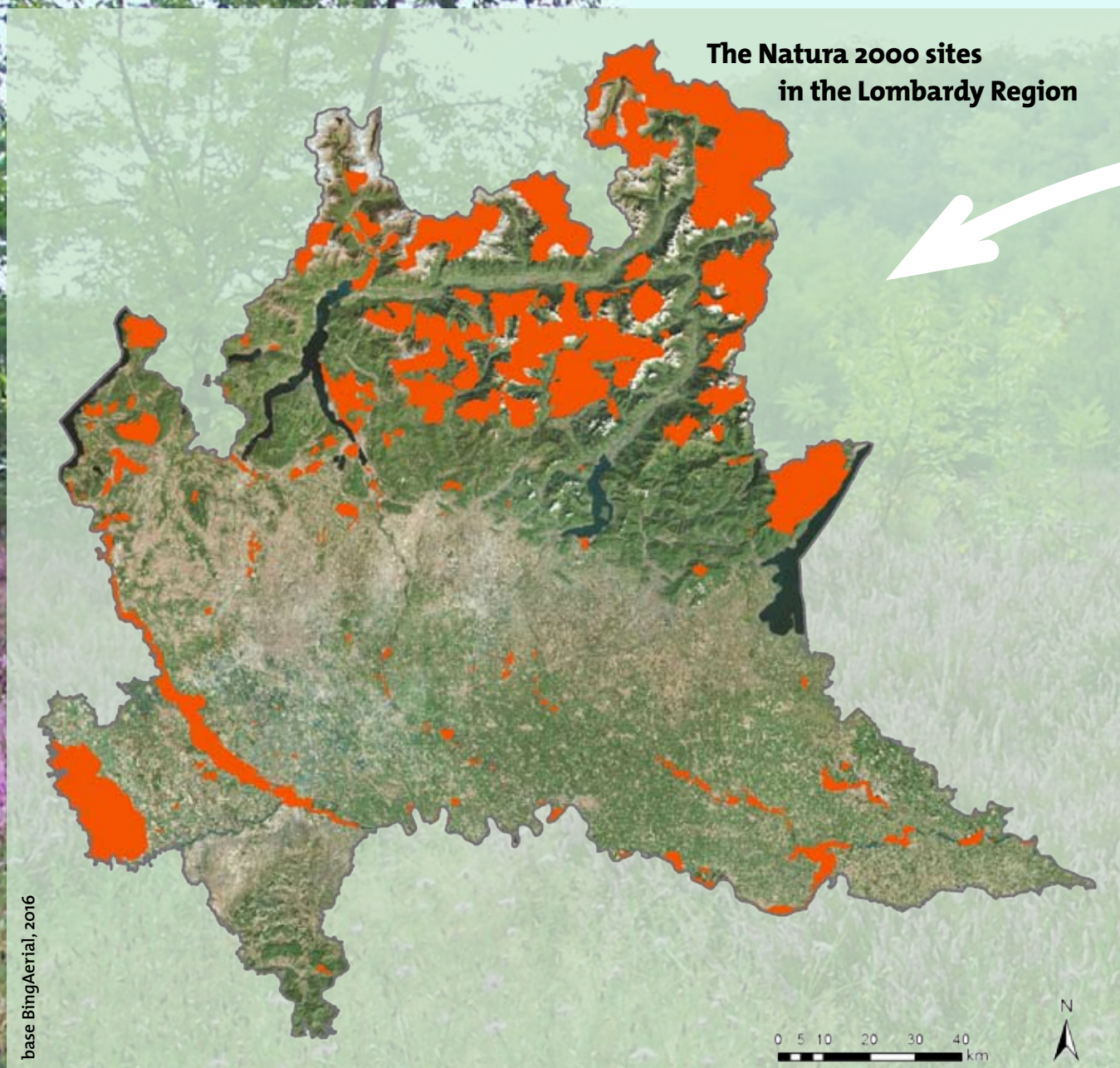
Among the initiatives that the European Commission supports more concretely with its funding, there are those that promote the integration of environmental concerns into other policies and those that contribute to an increased level of attention and awareness of citizens to the services provided by biodiversity.

Along these lines the Commission approved in 2011 the co-financing of an innovative and remarkable project, GESTIRE. Since October 2012, GESTIRE has developed methods, measures and an integrated strategy, in line with the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020, for the restoration and maintenance in a favourable conservation status of sites, habitats and species, in a Region, Lombardy, particularly subject to strong human settlements and productive pressures.

The GESTIRE project had a duration of three years, a budget of 3,259,700 Euros and a Community contribution of 1,626,916 Euro (49,91%). In addition to the Lombardy Region, with the office responsible for the valorization of protected areas and biodiversity (Struttura Valorizzazione aree protette e Biodiversità), other public and private organizations with expertise in biodiversity have participated to GESTIRE: the Regional Agency for Agriculture and Forestry Services (Ente Regionale per i Servizi all'Agricoltura e alle Foreste, ERSAF), the Lombardy Foundation for the Environment (Fondazione Lombardia per l'Ambiente, FLA), the Italian League for the Protection of Birds (Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli, Lipu), the Tourist Center for students and youth (Centro Turistico Studentesco e Giovanile, CTS), Comunità Ambiente, a private company and the Cariplo Foundation (as a co-financer).



Photo Carlo Silva



The Natura 2000 network in Lombardy

Lombardy includes 242 Natura 2000 sites, equivalent to 15% of the entire regional territory, of which 193 are Sites of Community Importance (SCI) designated under the Habitats Directive, and 67 are Special Protection Areas for birds (SPAs), established under the Birds Directive. In 2015 forty-seven SCIs have been declared Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), which ensure the full implementation of specific site conservation measures.

The Natura 2000 sites in Lombardy include 61 species of Community interest (included in Annex II of the Habitats Directive) and as many as 87 species of birds (included in Annex I of the Birds Directive).

The Natura 2000 sites identified in Lombardy fall within two biogeographical regions (homogeneous territories in terms of vegetation, geology and climate), "Alpine" and "Continental". They include considerable territorial diversity resulting in a wide variety of natural landscapes, from the Alps to the Po Valley, with its large lakes and numerous rivers and the consequent presence of several habitats and species. In addition to the typical mountain forests, the Alpine region includes widespread natural and semi-natural grassland, while the most representative habitats of the Po Valley are oak-hornbeam forests, remnant of the ancient Po forests, together with what remains of wetlands, moors and riparian forests of the great rivers.



The PAFs

For the period 2014-2020 the European Commission has called on EU Member States to formulate Prioritised Action Frameworks (PAF), multi-annual management plans of the Natura 2000 network, together with their potential funding, with a vision of integration of economic resources, such as, for instance, LIFE, funding for rural development (EAFRD), for fisheries (EMFF), for research (Horizon 2020), for social issues (ESF) and national or private funds.

In Italy PAFs were drawn up by the Regions and some of these, such as Lombardy, have applied for and received funding from LIFE+ in order to produce a more detailed plan of actions and related funding sources. The PAF was one of the two main objectives of the GESTIRE project.

The GESTIRE project ended in late February 2016, obtaining all the results expected from the initial proposal. In particular, the Lombardy Region can now build on both a detailed planning document for its Natura 2000 network up to and beyond 2020, and on a precise description of the priority measures to be undertaken with the potential sources of funding in the same period (Priority Action Framework, PAF).

On the basis of the two documents, the Lombardy Region has decided to continue with a new project, co-funded by the European Union, the IP LIFE GESTIRE 2020, to implement the measures identified in the PAF and the planning document.

The Planning Document

The Planning document is one of the two main products of the GESTIRE project.

It is a report prepared on the basis of the results of all actions of the project to be used by regional officials and also by "non-experts", as a strategic base for the management of Natura 2000 in Lombardy.

The document consists of:

- an overall view of governance and regulatory framework (the managing bodies structure and summary of funding opportunities);
- an environmental framework (structure of the Natura 2000 network, sites, habitats, species, threats and pressures, and coherence with the Regional Ecological Network), the state of conservation of species and habitats (criteria, indicators, state of conservation status) and conservation measures grouped according to the two biogeographical regions.

The planning document presents a series of details on the Lombardy Natura 2000 network, illustrating objectives and strategies (general objective, strategic objectives, strategies and classes of actions), a scenario of the management of the Natura 2000 network after 2020, and a methodology for monitoring the implementation of the planning document (with identification of specific indicators).





The Priority Actions Framework (PAF)

The PAF of the Lombardy Region illustrates the multi-annual priority actions to be considered in planning the management of Natura 2000 and the financial resources needed.

The priorities identified by the Lombardy Region in the period 2014-2020 are:

- to improve governance and management models of Natura 2000 by increasing capacity building;
- to optimize the management models, harmonize the regulatory instruments and implement site and species specific surveillance models;
- to maintain and improve the conservation status of the Natura 2000 habitats and species through the implementation of the planned conservation measures;
- to implement the monitoring plan;
- to increase information and raise the awareness on the value /potential of Natura 2000 sites through innovative communication systems that ensure the effectiveness of the information transfer.





The analysis and planning work carried out

Collection of all documents for the management of Natura 2000 sites in the Lombardy Region

This activity has included the production of a report on the analysis of documents for the management of Natura 2000 sites of Lombardy.

A total of 422 documents were collected relating to the management of Natura 2000 at EU, national and regional level (both of the Lombardy Region and those of neighboring regions) and other documents of interests, such as on climate change.

Other products include:

- an on-line structured database for storing data contained in management plans and conservation measures;
- an archive of documents (MediaWiki) to allow online consultation of the collected material.

These products, in addition to being of immediate use, are designed also as tools available to management bodies and in particular to the Lombardy Region also after the conclusion of the project.

Study of best practices and habitats and species management measures carried out in other European regions

The activity involved the identification of five case studies of best practices in managing Natura 2000 in order to provide examples of solutions to problems widespread also in Lombardy that could be useful in the drafting of the regional network management strategy.

Following a thorough literature scoping study, the following case studies have been identified and expanded: alien species in East Anglia; high altitude environments in the Alps, Alpe Veglia and Alpe Devero; sensitive farming in aquatic environment; the LIFE "ECORICE" project for agricultural environments and the ALPINE SPACE "ECONNECT" project for forest environments.





Estimating the socio-economic value of the Natura 2000 network in Lombardy

This action had a very ambitious goal: the socio-economic evaluation of ecosystem services provided by the Natura 2000 network in Lombardy.

This is one of the first studies produced in Italy with this goal and a major result achieved is the development of a rigorous and complex methodology, that has already received several requests to be shared.

The methodology allowed to obtain, also through the benefits transfer method, estimates of "willingness to pay" for so-called "non-market"

services (eg. recreational) and value estimates for services "in the market" (eg. fodder, timber).

The willingness to pay was surveyed on a panel of 3,000 respondents on the potential services offered in two sample areas: the Lombardy Park of the Ticino and the Adamello Regional Park. This was followed by an extensive work of data processing and of scaling up the values obtained to the regional level, using an approach as rigorous as possible.

The interesting results obtained bode well for a greater consideration in the future of ecosystem services in the management of the Natura 2000 network and in the protection of the natural heritage of Lombardy.



Analysis of existing regulatory measures and updating proposals

The analysis of the legislation, resulting from a study of a combination of various sector-specific rules, has highlighted critical issues and possible implementation problems of the legislation on the Natura 2000 network at its different levels (EU, national and regional).

The analysis is the knowledge base that will allow, with the new GESTIRE 2020 project, to identify solutions to the problems detected in the current legislation.



Analysis of green jobs related to Natura 2000 and drawing up proposals to promote them

The analysis provides a quali-quantitative estimate of the jobs related to the conservation of nature in Lombardy.

In the Lombardy biosystem there are 13,143 active companies in the territory, while in terms of employment 36,630 people are working in the Natura 2000 areas, that is 1% of the Region and 5.8% of total employment in the same areas at the national level.

The study is based on a detailed analysis of lines of work and on a review of training and professional needs obtained also with a series of Focus Groups with companies located in Lombardy.

The study findings were used to provide guidance to the managing authorities of the European Social Fund of the Lombardy Region on training courses that should be funded to develop new professional skills needed for the management and promotion of Natura 2000 sites.




Development of management measures for sites without a Management Plan and of measures to connect the sites of the network

To complete the conservation measures for the protection of all Natura 2000 sites of Lombardy, the Region started an extensive participatory and diversified process with the managing bodies of the sites without approved Management Plans (67 sites with on-going drafting of plans and 29 sites without plans and/or conservation measures).

The working group has provided support sheets, proposals and scientific advice in relation to pressures and threats and appropriate conservation measures for habitats and species of Community interest occurring in the concerned sites. The managing bodies have cooperated providing their own expertise and local knowledge ensuring a site-specific protection. At the same time, new measures to improve the ecological connection between Natura 2000 sites have been identified.

The Regional Government has then approved a Single Planning Document, containing more than 5,000 site-specific measures and rules for the protection of the entire Regional Ecological Network.




Drawing up a financing plan for the management of the Natura 2000 network in Lombardy for the 2014-2020 period

The financial plan consists of two reports based on the analysis of costs incurred and funds used, a guide to future funding and a GIS providing an overall view of all the elements that characterize the network: sites, habitats, agricultural companies, access to funding, etc.

The guide to financing was the basis for the creation of a dedicated website (www.finanziamenti-naturachevale.it) that allows to identify, in a simple and intuitive way, all the funding available for specific actions.

An additional important result of the GESTIRE project, obtained with a coordinated effort with other regional Departments, was the inclusion in the 2014-2020 Rural Development Program of sub-measure 12.1 "compensatory payments for agricultural Natura 2000 areas" (specifically dedicated to the financing of Natura 2000).



Scientific monitoring program of the network

The monitoring program concerns more than 50 habitats and about 200 wild species of Community interest present in Lombardy for which field protocols have been developed defining time, place and methods for monitoring. The proposed protocols are based on selected indicators to assess the trends of the conservation status of species and habitats in the Region.

The methods proposed were tested through specific field activities, an activity that also helped to increase the information on the distribution of species on a regional scale.

The priority areas for the monitoring of species, both within and outside the Natura 2000 sites, were defined on the base of the available data and of distribution models specifically developed to identify the most important areas.

Finally, an estimate of the annual costs and possible funding for monitoring activities and an indication of the priorities of specific sites for the monitoring of habitats and species were drawn.

The importance of consultation and engagement



The Natura 2000 Group

One of the possible problems in the management of Natura 2000 network is the lack of information exchange within the regional administration with the consequent risk that the different Directorates operating in different sectors may implement spatial management policies in opposition to each other.

The Natura 2000 Group set up during the project has been a consultation committee for all the activities carried out within the project and the means through which the various directorates of the Lombardy Region, concerned by Natura 2000, have interacted and cooperated.

The Group included the representatives of the various regional directorates operating within the Natura 2000 sites (such as agriculture, culture, infrastructure and mobility, tourism and services, etc.) and associated beneficiaries experts.



Public consultation and stakeholders engagement

A series of 67 meetings completed during the project has represented the first opportunity in the Lombardy Region to initiate a systematic, participated and structured pattern of engagement with the different stakeholders involved in the Natura 2000 network in various ways (management bodies, associations, teachers, supervisors, private sector etc.).

Thanks to a program of meetings on various topics (impact assessment, water resources, capacity building, legislation, financial aspects, sanctions and inspections, etc.) the action has registered a larger number of participants than expected and opened up important opportunities for the follow up after the end of the project.

The meetings with stakeholders has produced also a number of suggestions for the revision of the regional legislation on Natura 2000 and for the use of information and proposals discussed in the various meetings with proposals of new management tools, both practical tools (eg. computerized system for the publication of studies for Appropriate Assessment) and suggestions to reorganize the "management bodies of Natura 2000 network system".



The main achievements of the GESTIRE project

At the conclusion of the GESTIRE project, the Lombardy Region has acquired a number of professional skills and information useful for future management of the European ecological network Natura 2000 in its territory and in particular:

- acquiring experience in promoting engagement in the protection of the Natura 2000 network by regional directors responsible for different policy areas;
- acquiring experience in the design of integrated projects;
- obtaining an opinion of experts and stakeholders on the main objectives for the Natura 2000 network that could be achieved by 2020;
- obtaining an accurate assessment of the costs incurred in the past for the management of the regional network Natura 2000 and a forecast of those to be incurred from now to 2020;
- defining a methodology for calculating the value of ecosystem services related to the Regional Natura 2000 network;
- obtaining an assessment of the financial resources necessary for monitoring the flora and fauna of the Region until 2020;
- obtaining an assessment of the financial resources necessary for citizens' communication and involvement activities until 2020;
- obtaining an evaluation of the potential financial funding sources from the European, public and private funds to be used until 2020 for the Regional Natura 2000 network;
- obtaining an accurate assessment of current and future costs for the creation of new "green jobs" related to the regional Natura 2000 network;
- obtaining an assessment of the rules, regulations and legislation impact on the management of the regional Natura 2000 network.

GESTIRE 2020

Based on the critical issues identified with the GESTIRE project, such as:

- the number and variability of the management bodies of the regional Natura 2000 network;
- the implementation of national and regional policies that not always implement the principles of the Habitats and Birds Directives;
- a widespread lack of expertise of those who are responsible with the European ecological network, including the staff of the management bodies of the sites;
- a lack of knowledge and awareness of the citizens on the Natura 2000 network;
- difficulties in contrasting human-driven threats to habitats and species conservation;

The Lombardy Region has decided to finance a second phase of the project, co-financed by the European Union, the IP LIFE GESTIRE 2020, designed to solve these critical issues and aimed at building an integrated management system that ensures the achievement of the conservation objectives of the Habitats and Birds Directives, also in terms of economic and technical management sustainability.

To achieve the goal of integration of the regional Natura 2000 network management, the LIFE IP GESTIRE 2020 (LIFE14 IPE IT 018) is aimed at testing a project management structure to be used in the European ecological network management structure, with the engagement of all subjects, both internal and external to the Region, in the decision making process related to the management of Natura 2000. Started in January 2016, the integrated project will last until December 2023, with a total cost of over 17 million euro.

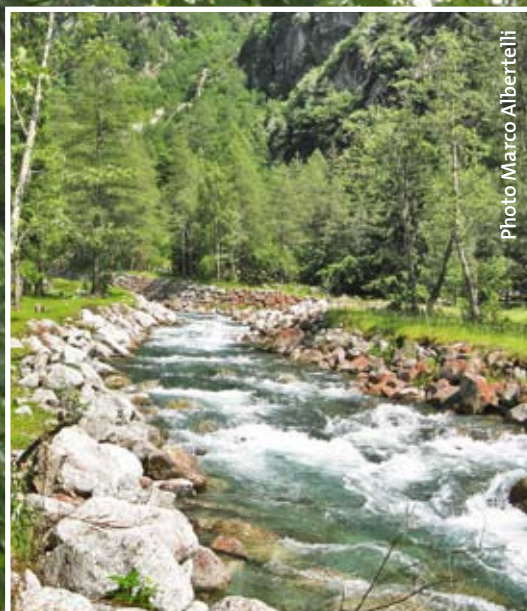


Photo Marco Albertelli



Photo Carlo Silva

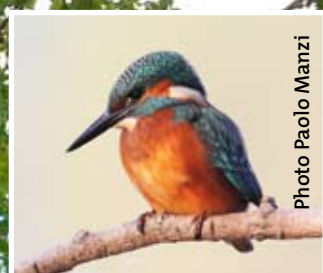


Photo Paolo Manzi

Partner

Lombardy Region Office for the valorization of protected areas and biodiversity, coordinating beneficiary of the GESTIRE project, coordinates the regional Natura 2000 network, taking care of the promotion and verification of conservation and management measures of sites.

CTS (Tourist Center for students and youth) is a no profit environmental association. It operates for nature conservation, sustainable tourism, environmental education and information.

Comunità Ambiente is a company with a long experience in the environmental sector with particular reference to the conservation of nature and to the process of creation of the Natura 2000 network.

ERSAF (Regional Agency for Agricultural and Forestry Services) carries out technical and promotional activities in the field of agriculture, forest and rural development in the Lombardy Region. It directly manages 15 Natura 2000 Sites, 6 natural reserves and 20 regional forests.

FLA (Foundation of Lombardy for the Environment) carries out research, education and information activities that mainly concern the study and protection of biodiversity and protected areas.

Lipu (Italian League for Bird Protection) is a no-profit environmental association for the conservation of biodiversity and of birds species and for promotion of ecological culture. Italian partner of Birdlife International, it promotes projects, activities, educational and raise awareness campaigns.

Cariplo Foundation project's co-financer, is a banking foundation, active in the areas of scientific research, art, culture, environment and social services.

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