European Commission

The Nature Restoration Regulation

Environment

Manuscript completed in February 2025

1st edition

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2025

Print KH-01-25-017-EN-C ISBN 978-92-68-24165-3 doi:10.2779/9955253
PDF KH-01-25-017-EN-N ISBN 978-92-68-24164-6 doi:10.2779/5842922

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OVERALL OBJECTIVES

The EU Nature Restoration Regulation entered into force on 18 August 2024. It aims to restore a broad range of degraded ecosystems, habitats and species across the EU's land and seas.

The Regulation creates a common legal framework for their large-scale restoration, building upon and complementing existing EU legislation.

The Regulation has four overarching objectives:

- To ensure the long-term and sustained recovery of biodiversity and resilient ecosystems through the restoration of degraded ecosystems
- To contribute to achieving the EU's objectives concerning climate change mitigation and adaptation and land degradation neutrality
- To enhance food security
- To contribute to meeting international commitments

The overall objective at EU level is to put in place restoration measures on at least 20% of Europe's land and at least 20% of sea areas by 2030, and in all ecosystems in need of estoration by 2050.

LEGALLY BINDING RESTORATION TARGETS

To achieve its objectives, the Regulation sets out a series of legally binding targets and obligations that are to be met by each Member State. Having the same targets for all EU countries will ensure that restoration measures are undertaken on a sufficiently large scale to have a significant impact on Europe's biodiversity.

The restoration targets cover habitats already protected under existing EU legislation and in need of restoration, as well as other ecosystems, such as agricultural, urban and forest ecosystems that have been heavily degraded.

The restoration of such heavily degraded ecosystems is important as it will reduce the existing pressures on biodiversity, which will in turn ensure that they can once again deliver the full range of ecosystem services upon which our wellbeing and prosperity depend, including food security and climate change adaptation.

Several of the restoration targets are quantified with clearly defined milestones and deadlines, for example to improve 30% of habitat area not in good condition by 2030). This provides a common reference point against which to measure progress and impacts on biodiversity across all EU Member States.

For some habitats and ecosystems however, too little is known about their distribution and condition to be able to plan which restoration measures are required. One of the first objectives of the Nature Restoration Regulation is therefore to build up a solid knowledge base to fill gaps in data, in order to identify the areas in need of restoration.

TAKING A STRATEGIC APPROACH

In order to ensure that restoration measures are planned in a strategic manner, each Member State must prepare a national restoration plan using an agreed format developed for that purpose. The plan should contain detailed information on how the country intends to meet each of the restoration targets (e.g. areas targeted, type of measures, timetable, financing) up to 2032. It should also provide at least a strategic overview of the measures and actions planned to 2040 and 2050 as new data becomes available and in function of progress made.

A central feature of a national restoration plan is that it must clearly identify all possible synergies with other relevant EU policies and laws, for instance in relation to water policy, climate change and renewable energy, or in the context of agricultural, forestry, marine and fisheries policies. This will ensure the restoration measures are well coordinated and achieve significant gains not just for biodiversity but also for other major EU policy sectors, and for society as a whole.

Ensuring policy coherence is fundamental to the success of the Nature Restoration Regulation since many of the restoration actions cut across several policy sectors and build on existing legislation and strategies. One of the big challenges of the Regulation will be to create planning and implementation structures that make best use of potential synergies between these different policies and to generate coherent win-win solutions wherever possible.

Member States should also ensure that the preparation of the national restoration plan is open, transparent, inclusive, and that the public, including all relevant stakeholders, is given early and effective opportunities to participate in its preparation.




What does restoration mean in practice?

Restoration is a process aimed at assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged or destroyed. The types of restoration measures needed will necessarily vary from one ecosystem to another and in function of its current state of degradation, species composition and sensitivity to change.

In general, restoration can involve either passive or active measures. Passive restoration could, for instance, involve protecting an area from human pressures and allowing it to recover of its own accord. The act of removing the pressures and threats on the area can sometimes be enough on its own to enable the ecosystems, and their habitats and species, to recover naturally over time.

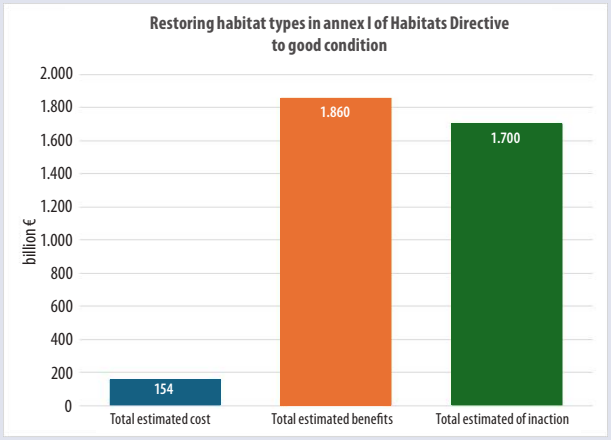
Active restoration is more often needed where the ecosystems have been heavily degraded or where regular management is needed (e.g. for semi-natural habitats like hay meadows). In addition to eliminating the source of degradation, active restoration will kick start the recovery process. This could, for instance, involve restoring hydrological conditions, removing invading scrub, adapting management and land use practices, or reconnecting a river with its surrounding floodplain.

In some cases, the habitat may not only need to be improved but also re-established, for instance in the case of areas that have been transformed into an different type of land use but where the process can still be reversed. This is especially important when the existing habitat or ecosystem is simply too small to be viable over the long term, where an important part of its original range has been lost, or where two areas can be reconnected to form a larger, more resilient, and robust whole.

The ultimate objective is the long-term and sustained recovery of biodiverse and resilient ecosystems and for habitats to reach good condition. Good condition is a general concept - just as if one were to restore the health of a person that has suffered illness or surgery. It simply means that all the elements that make an ecosystem function properly are restored to good working order, so allowing the ecosystem to reach its full potential both in terms of biodiversity and as regards the range of services it can offer society.

The cost and benefits of the nature restoration

The cost of restoring ecosystems will be significant considering the large areas over which restoration is needed. But the benefits are expected to be far greater. According to the impact assessment carried out for the preparation of the Nature Restoration Regulation, the monetary value of the benefits derived from restoration are likely to be average 8–10 times greater than the initial investment costs, and this is consistent across all types of ecosystems. The costs of not taking any action is also significantly higher. Another important consideration is that, typically, the cost of nature-based solutions is very often significantly lower than the cost of technical infrastructure solutions. For instance, reconnecting a river to its floodplains to absorb excess flood water is usually much cheaper than building a concrete storm basin further upstream.



Source: Impact assessment carried out for the preparation of the Nature Restoration Regulation: https://bit.ly/3WEtN4v

NATIONAL RESTORATION PLANS

Member States have until 1 September 2026 to prepare their draft national restoration plan. They must carry out the necessary preparatory work to help identify the most urgent restoration measures to be implemented by 2032, and to develop a strategic overview of additional measures and actions that will be required to achieve the overall restoration targets, at the latest by 2050.

This preparatory work will include, amongst others, the mapping of areas that are not in good condition, the identification of areas to be targeted for restoration and the restoration measures needed, as well as a timetable for their implementation, the estimated financial needs and the means of intended financing. The plan should also describe how they will monitor and assess the effectiveness and impact of the restoration measures implemented.

The preparation of the plan will require intensive dialogue with other policy sectors in order to identify and capitalise on any potential synergies, especially in relation to climate change mitigation and adaptation, land degradation and disaster prevention. Additionally, it will give Member States time to consult and actively engage with the public, and all other stakeholders in the preparation of the plan.

The Commission then has six months to assess the plans and propose recommendations to ensure they adequately meet the targets and obligations set under the Regulation. The final national restoration plans should be submitted and published by Member States by September 2027. Thereafter the plans will need to be periodically reviewed in light of the monitoring results and progress made.

MONITORING

To measure the effectiveness of the restoration measures and their impacts on biodiversity, the Regulation sets out a series of monitoring requirements for each restoration target. This will ensure that progress can be assessed in a standardised way across all Member States and existing measures adapted if needed.

For some ecosystems, the monitoring obligations are built upon existing monitoring programmes (e.g. EU Copernicus satellite data), indicators (e.g. common bird indicator) and data sets (e.g. on EU protected habitat types).

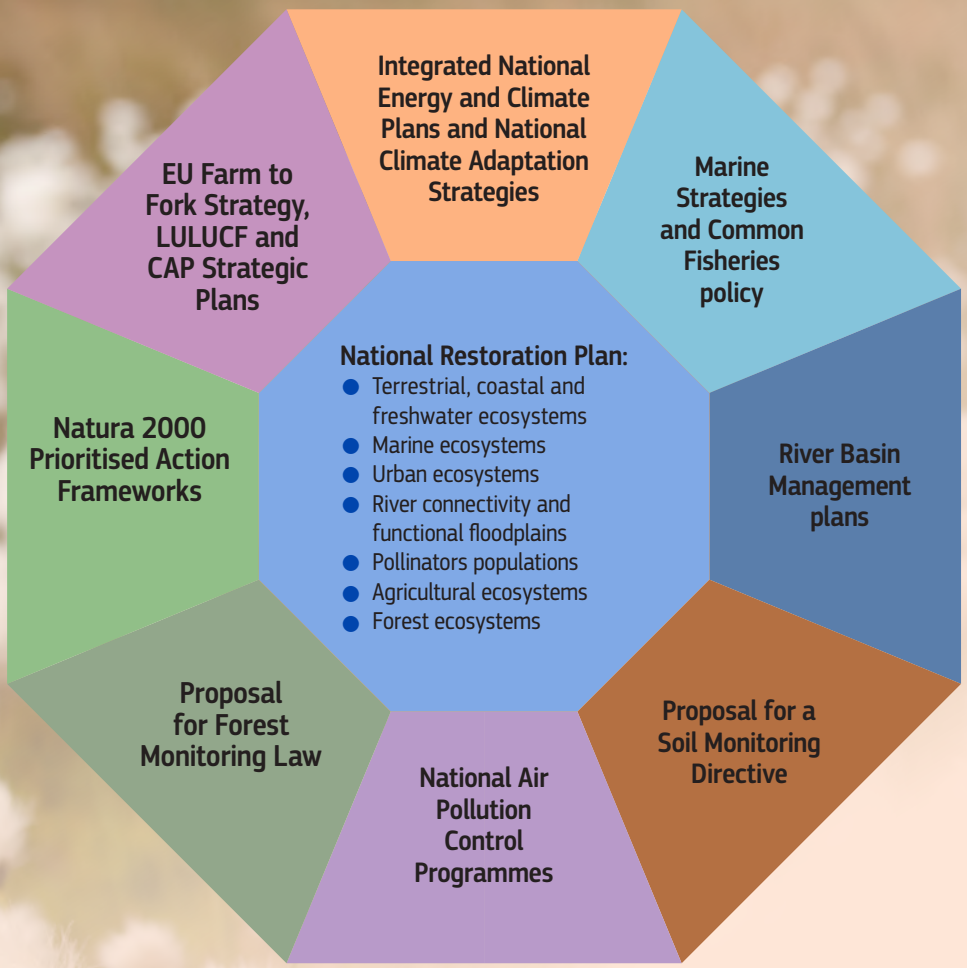
For others however, there is first a need to develop common EU wide monitoring methodologies to collect all the necessary data in order to assess the condition of the ecosystems and identify those areas where restoration is most needed (e.g. for pollinators).

Member States will also need to set the 'satisfactory levels' to be achieved for those indicators used to determine urban green space and urban tree canopy cover, pollinator populations, or for agricultural and forest ecosystems. The Commission will assist Member States in this process by establishing a guiding framework for determining 'satisfactory levels'.

This data collection and target-definition phase will necessarily take time to put in place and to yield results. While Member States are required to start restoration measures right away based on what they know, they must also make every effort to build up sufficient knowledge quickly to complete the picture and not delay the implementation of restoration measures.




Ensuring policy coherence through the Nature Restoration Plan



Restoring nature is essential not only to reverse biodiversity loss but also to increase the resilience of ecosystems and of our economies to the impacts of climate change.

Restoring Ecosystems to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss

Biodiversity loss and climate change are intrinsically linked and must be tackled together for their successful resolution. The more biodiverse and healthy the ecosystems are, the more resilient they will be to climate change and the more effective in preventing and reducing the risk of climate related disasters. The Nature Restoration Regulation will help to achieve both the EU's biodiversity and climate change objectives by ensuring that the two policies work hand in hand to the mutual benefit of each.

The EU's Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change already recognises biodiversity's central role in adapting Europe to climate change. It calls, amongst others, for science based, robust ecosystem restoration and management that help minimise risks, improve resilience and ensure a continued delivery of vital ecosystem services and features, such as water purification, crop pollination, flood protection, carbon storage and sequestration. Further, it advocates the large-scale implementation of nature-based solutions and ecosystem restoration to increase climate resilience, highlighting the fact that they are often cost effective, multipurpose, "no regret" solutions.

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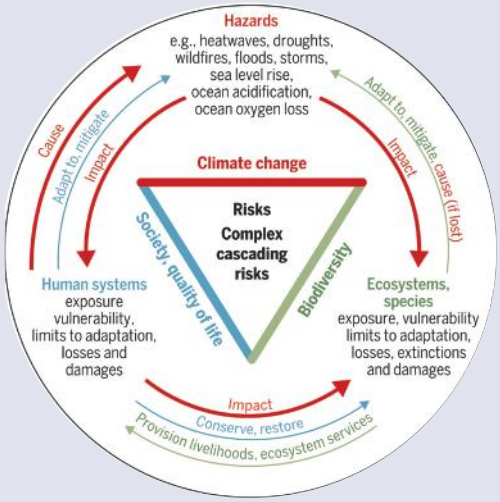


Credit schematic: S. LANGSDORF taken from H.-O. Pörtner *et al.*, Overcoming the coupled climate and biodiversity crises and their societal impacts.Science380,eabl4881(2023). DOI:10.1126/science.abl4881

REPORTING

Once the national restoration plans have been published, Member States will have to report regularly on progress made in their implementation.

Starting in June 2028 and at least every three years thereafter, Member States should report on progress made on certain elements of their national restoration plan (e.g. area restored for each ecosystem, number of river barriers removed, or additional trees planted). The European Environment Agency (EEA) will then analyse this data to assess national progress in reaching the targets and obligations of the Regulation.

In addition, starting in June 2031 and every six years thereafter, Member States should report more comprehensively on progress in implementing all aspects of their national restoration plans. They should also provide an overview of the monitoring results to see if the restoration measures are achieving the desired impact or if supplementary measures or adjustments need to be made to the plan.

The EEA will then aggregate the information from these six yearly reports in order to provide an EU wide overview of progress towards meeting the overall targets and obligations under the Regulation.

FINANCING

The financing of the Nature Restoration Regulation is expected to come from various sources, including different EU funding programmes, national budgets and private financing initiatives and investments.

As regards EU funding, there are already a wide range of possible sources of funding available under the current Multiannual Financial Framework (2021-2027), such as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF), The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Cohesion Fund, Horizon Europe or the LIFE programme.

Furthermore, the EU has made a political commitment to progressively increase the share of its annual spending for biodiversity objectives. This should increase from 7.5% of the total budget in 2024, to 10% in 2026 and in 2027 respectively (equivalent to 14 billion a year).

By 2025, the Commission will provide an overview of the financial resources available at Union level for implementing the Regulation as well as of the funding needs. This will make it possible to identify if there are any remaining funding gaps.




Contents of the national restoration plan

Key elements to be included in the plans for all targets:

- *A quantification of the **areas to be restored**, including indicative maps of potential areas to be restored, and the extent to which these will take place within Natura 2000 sites*
- *A description of the **restoration measures** to be implemented*
- *A description of measures taken to prevent **significant deterioration of habitat types***
- *A description of **indicators selected** for agricultural and forest ecosystems*
- *Justifications for any **exemptions** applied in accordance with the Regulation*
- *A description of **synergies and co-benefits** with other relevant EU policies*
- *An account of foreseeable **socio-economic impacts and estimated benefits** of implementing the restoration measures*
- *A description of the **public consultation process***
- *A **timetable** for implementation*
- *Estimated **financial needs**, including support for affected stakeholders*
- *A description of **monitoring** to be used to for assess their effectiveness of the restoration measures implemented*

Reporting requirements under the Nature Restoration Regulation

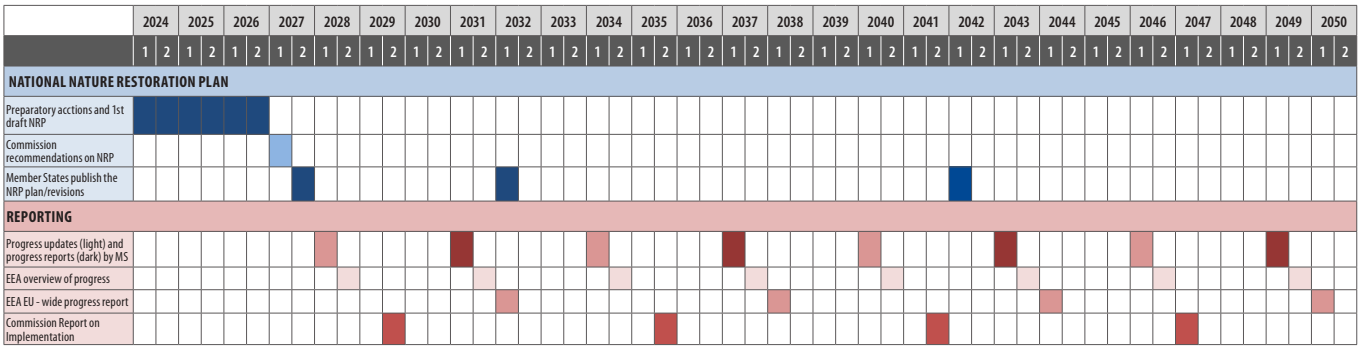
***Every three years**, Member States should report on:*

- *the area subject to restoration measures for each ecosystem,*
- *the extent of the areas where habitat types and habitats of species have significantly deteriorated and of the areas subject to compensatory measures (if relevant).*
- *the number of barriers removed along rivers,*
- *the number of additional trees planted in full respect of ecological principles.*

***Every six years**, Member States should report on:*

- *Progress in implementing the nature restoration plan, in putting in place the restoration measures and in meeting the targets and obligations for each ecosystem*
- *nformation on the location of the area where habitat types or habitats of species have significantly deteriorated and of the areas subject to compensatory measures together with a review of the effectiveness of the compensatory measures undertaken (if relevant)*
- *The results of the monitoring carried out in accordance with the Regulation*
- *The updated inventory of barriers Information on progress in meeting the financing needs of the Plan*

Key Dates for Nature Restoration Regulation



SPECIFIC RESTORATION TARGETS

UNDER THE NATURE RESTORATION REGULATION

1. TERRESTRIAL, COASTAL AND FRESHWATER ECOSYSTEMS
2. MARINE ECOSYSTEMS
3. RIVER CONNECTIVITY AND FUNCTIONAL FLOODPLAINS
4. POLLINATOR POPULATIONS
5. AGRICULTURAL ECOSYSTEMS
6. FOREST ECOSYSTEMS & PLANTING 3 BILLION TREES
7. URBAN ECOSYSTEMS

1 Restoring terrestrial, coastal and freshwater ecosystems

TARGET 1

Coverage	Terrestrial Habitat types listed in Annex I of the Regulation, identical to terrestrial habitat types in Annex I of the Habitats Directive Terrestrial habitats of species listed in annex II, IV, V of the Habitats Directive and of all wild birds protected under the Birds Directive
Obligations	Member States shall: ● **Improve areas of habitat types** that are not in a good condition ● **Re-establish Annex I habitat types** in areas where they no longer occur ● **Restore areas of habitats of species** covered by the Nature Directives to ensure the long-term survival of the species In addition, Member States shall: ● Ensure that areas subject to restoration do not subsequently deteriorate once they have reached a good condition ● Endeavour to prevent areas of habitat types that are already in good condition or are needed to reach the targets from deteriorating significantly
Actions and targets	Member States shall put in place measures necessary to **improve to good condition areas of habitat types** listed in Annex I. Such restoration measures should be put in place on: ● at least 30% of the total area covered by all habitat types not in good condition as quantified in the Nature Restoration Plan, giving priority to measures in Natura 2000 sites by 2030 ● at least 60% of the total area of each group of habitat types not in good condition by 2040 ● at least 90% of the total area of each group of habitat types not in good condition by 2050 Member States shall **re-establish Annex I habitat types** in areas where they no longer occur. Such restoration measures should be put in place on: ● at least 30% of the additional surface needed **to reach the total favourable reference area** for each group of habitat type as quantified in the Nature Restoration Plan by 2030 ● at least 60% of the additional surface by 2040 ● at least 100% of the additional surface by 2050 Member States shall put in place **restoration measures to improve the quantity and quality of habitats of species** covered by Habitats and Birds Directives where this is needed to ensure the long-term survival of the species. Exceptions are possible under certain conditions
Regulation Articles	Articles 4, 6, 7, 20, Annex I

Re-enforcing existing EU nature legislation

According to the latest State of Nature Report (2020), significant areas of habitats and habitats of species protected under the Habitats and Birds Directives aren't in good condition or aren't providing sufficient quality of habitat for species, especially outside Natura 2000 areas. Sometimes also the available habitats are not big enough. All this is because too much of our valuable biodiversity-rich nature has already been destroyed or degraded over the years as a result of changing land uses, such as agricultural intensification, hydrological modifications, urbanisation and pollution.

A major concerted effort is therefore needed to restore significant parts of these areas back to good health across the EU, both within protected areas and across the wider countryside. The Nature Restoration Regulation provides the necessary legal framework for this to happen. It sets time bound targets for restoring habitat types and habitats of species protected under the Habitats and Birds Directives.

Improving terrestial habitat types not in good condition

The Habitats Directive protects 226 terrestrial habitats that are amongst the most biodiverse in the EU. Altogether, they cover around a quarter of the EU land area. These same habitats are targeted for restoration under the Nature Restoration Regulation (annex I), classed into 6 broad habitat groups.

Based on the data already available under the Habitats Directive, Member States will first need to map out areas harbouring these habitat types in their territory and assess their condition so they can identify those not in a good condition and in need of restoration. Where the condition of parts of the habitat area is still not known, Member States will need to urgently fill this important knowledge gap by 2040 at the latest (and for 90% of habitat area by 2030) so that more suitable areas can be selected for restoration as soon as possible thereafter.

Each Member State should then implement the restoration measures on a progressively greater area and within specific deadlines (30% by 2030, 60% by 2040, 90% by 2050), giving priority to areas within Natura 2000 until 2030. The habitat types have been grouped into six broad habitat groups to give Member States some flexibility in choosing, within each of these groups, which habitat types to restore in order to achieve the targets for 2040 and 2050.

Lower targets can be set where duly justified, for instance, for habitat types that are very common or widespread across the EU and where they cover more than 3% of a Member State's territory, provided this does not prevent the habitat from reaching a favourable conservation status at national biogeographical level.

Re-establishing terrestrial habitats

For certain habitat types, such as wetlands or certain grasslands that have suffered largescale losses, improving their condition in existing areas will not be enough on its own; there will also be a need to re-establish the habitat in areas where they are no longer present.

Member States will therefore need to firstly identify where such habitat types should be re-established beyond their existing distribution and then implement the necessary restoration measures progressively until they cover the entire **favourable reference area**. A lower target is possible for 2050 (but <90%) provided this has been justified.

Restoring habitats of protected species

In addition to restoring protected habitat types in their own right, there is also a need to consider restoring the habitats of species protected under the two nature Directives. This should be done in areas where the absence or poor quality of the habitat is a major threat or pressure on the species.

The overall objective is to **improve the quality and quantity** of these habitats– giving also attention to improving connectivity where relevant - until their quantity and quality is sufficient to ensure the long-term survival of the protected species.

What is good condition?

'Good condition' *means* ***a state where the key characteristics of the habitat type****, in particular its structure, functions and typical species or typical species composition* ***reflect the high level of ecological integrity, stability and resilience necessary to ensure its long-term maintenance*** *and thus contribute to reaching or maintaining favourable conservation status.*

What is a favourable reference area?

'Favourable reference area' *means the* ***total area of a habitat type*** *(current and additional areas) in a given biogeographical or marine region at national level that is* ***considered the minimum necessary to ensure the long-term viability of the habitat type*** *and its typical species or typical species composition, and all the significant ecological variations of that habitat type in its natural range.*

In many cases, Annex I habitat types are also the habitats of protected species and so the restoration measures undertaken for one will also help the other. Synergies with other targets under the regulation are also possible (eg floodplains, agricultural or forest ecosystems).

Non-deterioration requirements

In addition, the Nature Restoration Regulation requires Member States to ensure that newly restored areas do not subsequently deteriorate once they have reached a good condition. More generally, Member States must also endeavour to prevent the significant deterioration of areas where Annex I habitat types occur. This concerns both those in already good condition and those that still need to be restored to reach the targets.

Exceptions are however possible in duly justified cases, for example in the case of force majeure, unavoidable habitat transformations which are directly caused by climate change or if there is a need for a renewable energy plan or project of overriding public interest for which no less damaging alternative solutions are available.

Exceptions for renewable energy projects and national defence

The Nature Restoration Regulation aims to ensure a strong synergy between the EU's biodiversity and climate policies and help achieve their shared goals of reducing greenhouse gases emission and mitigating climate change. It is important therefore that the National Renewable Energy Plans and the Nature Restoration Plans are fully coherent with one another. Thus, according to Article 6 of the Regulation, plans or projects outside Natura 2000 needed for the production, storage and distribution of energy from renewable energy sources are assumed to be of ***overriding public interest.***

Similarly, plans and projects for the sole purpose of national defence are presumed to be of overriding public interest too (see Article 7). They may therefore be exempted from the requirement that no less damaging alternative solutions are available outside Natura 2000. However, inside Natura 2000 sites, only plans or projects fully complying with Article 6.3 and 6.4 of the Habitats Directive are possible.

2 Restoring marine ecosystems

TARGET 2

Coverage	Marine habitats listed in Annex II of the Regulation, classified into 7 groups (using EUNIS classification of habitat types and indicating corresponding marine habitat types listed in Annex I of the Habitats Directive) Marine habitats of species listed in ● Annex III of the Regulation, ● Annex II, IV and V of the Habitats Directive, and ● covered by the Birds Directive
Obligations	Member States shall: ● **Improve areas of marine habitat types** that are not in good condition ● **Re-establish marine habitat types** in areas where they no longer occur ● **Restore areas of habitats of marine species** covered by the Nature Directives or Annex III of the Regulation where this is needed to ensure the longer-term survival of the species In addition, Member States shall: ● Ensure that areas subject to restoration do not subsequently deteriorate once they have reached a good condition ● Endeavour to prevent areas of habitat types that are already in good condition or needed to reach the targets deteriorating significantly.
Actions and targets	Member States shall put in place restoration measures necessary to **improve to good condition** areas of marine habitat types listed in Annex II. Such restoration measures should be put in place on: ● at least 30% of the total area covered by habitats in groups 1-6 not in good condition as quantified in the national restoration plan by 2030 ● at least 60% the total area of habitats in groups 1-6 not in good condition by 2040, and 90% by 2050 ● a percentage (to be determined) of the total area covered by habitats in group 7 not in good condition by 2050, and on two thirds of that percentage by 2040 Member States shall **re-establish marine habitat types (groups 1–6)** in areas where they no longer occur. Such restoration measures should be put in place on: ● at least 30% of the additional surface needed to reach the total favourable reference area for each group of habitat type as quantified in the national restoration plan by 2030 ● at least 60% of the additional surface by 2040 ● at least 100% of the additional surface by 2050 Member States shall put in place restoration measures to i**mprove the quantity and quality of habitats of marine species** covered by the Regulation, and to enhance connectivity, where this is needed to ensure the long-term survival of the species. Exceptions are possible under certain conditions
Regulation Articles	Article 5, 6, 7, 18; Annex II, III

Re-enforcing existing EU legislation

The Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) already provides a legal framework for Member States to achieve good environmental status in the marine environment. The Birds and Habitats Directives protect certain marine habitat types and species, but stronger action is required to restore marine ecosystems, particularly those with significant carbon storage capacity or serving as vital fish spawning and nursery areas. The Nature Restoration Regulation therefore targets 233 marine habitat types that are in need of restoration (Annex II). All these marine habitat types are also covered by obligations under the Habitats Directive and the MSFD. In Annex II, they are classified using EUNIS habitat classification system and sorted into seven habitat groups and per marine region.

Habitat groups in Annex II of the Nature Restoration Regulation	Number of habitat types
Group 1: Seagrass beds	25
Group 2: Macroalgal forests	35
Group 3: Shellfish beds	25
Group 4: Maerl beds	8
Group 5: Sponge, coral and coralligenous beds	54
Group 6: Vents and seeps	6
Group 7: Soft sediments (not deeper than 1000m)	80
Total	233

As even less is known about the distribution and condition of marine habitats than on land, it will be important to build up a solid scientific knowledge base upon which to determine their restoration needs. Thus, in the case of marine habitats in groups 1–6, Member States must ensure their condition is known for 50% of the total area covered by these habitats by 2030, and for all areas by 2040.

More time is given for habitats in group 7 as they cover large areas of the seabed and are difficult to survey. Member States have until 2040 to determine the condition of 50% of the total area of habitats in group 7 which is still unknown, and until 2050 to know the condition for all areas.

The necessary restoration measures should be implemented to improve to good condition the area of habitats which are in bad condition, on a progressively greater percentage of that area and within specific deadlines (2030, 2040, 2050).

Marine habitats in groups 1–6 will also need to be re-established in areas where they are no longer present and to reach their favourable reference area. In this case, Member States should first identify where such habitat types should be re-established and then progressively restore them until they cover the entire favourable reference area (on 30% by 2030, 60% by 2040, 100% by 2050). Habitats in Group 7 are not covered by this obligation.

Restoring marine habitats of species

In addition to restoring marine habitats in their own right, there is also a need to restore the marine habitats of certain species. This includes species already protected under the Habitats and Birds Directives (such as marine mammals, sea turtles and seabirds) as well as 22 other marine species (e.g. sharks and rays) listed in Annex III of the Regulation.

The overall objective is to improve the quality and quantity of their habitats – giving special attention to improving connectivity where relevant– and until their quality is sufficient to ensure the long-term survival of the species.

Non deterioration requirements

As with terrestrial habitats, the Nature Restoration Regulation also requires Member States to ensure that areas subject to restoration measures show improvement and do not subsequently deteriorate once they have reached a good condition. In addition, Member States must endeavour to prevent the significant deterioration of areas where Annex II habitat types occur. This concerns both those in already good condition and those that still need to be restored to reach the targets.

Exceptions are however possible in duly justified cases, for example in the case of force majeure, unavoidable habitat transformations which are directly caused by climate change or if there is a need for a renewable energy plan or project of overriding public interest for which no less damaging alternative solutions are available.

Using tools from the Common Fisheries Policy

Where the restoration of marine habitats requires the regulation of fishing activities, the rules of the EU's Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) apply. To implement restoration measures, Member States must make full use of the tools provided in the CFP. While in some cases and under certain conditions Member States are empowered to take the necessary fisheries management measures, they will often need to be agreed with other Member States in the context of so-called regionalisation and presented to the commission as "joint recommendations" to be adopted as EU law.

When preparing national restoration plans, Member States must, considering the deadlines provided for in Article 5 of the Regulation, initiate in a timely manner consultations with other Member States affected by these measures to enable timely agreement on and submission of any joint recommendations. For that purpose, Member States must also include in the national restoration plan the estimated timing of the consultation and of the submission of the joint recommendations. Member States must submit the joint recommendations on the conservation measures necessary to contribute to meeting the targets set in Article 5 of the Regulation at the latest 18 months before the respective deadline.

3 Restoring river connectivity and the natural functions of foodplains

TARGET 4

Coverage	Rivers, lakes and related floodplains (including freshwater habitats and habitats of species protected under the Nature Directives)
Obligations	Member States shall contribute to: ● restoring to good condition areas of habitat types and habitats of species protected under the Nature Directives ● restoring 25 000 km of rivers into free-flowing rivers in the EU by 2030
Actions and targets	Member States shall: ● make an inventory of artificial barriers to the connectivity of surface waters and identify barriers to be removed ● remove barriers by 2030, 2040 or 2050 according to their National Restoration Plan, giving priority to obsolete barriers ● implement complementary measures to improve the natural functions of the related floodplains by 2050 ● ensure that, once restored, the natural connectivity of rivers and the natural functions of related flood plains is maintained
Regulation Articles	Article 4, 9

Commitments under the EU's biodiversity Strategy

The Water Framework Directive provides a legal framework for safeguarding all of Europe's inland, transitional and coastal surface waters as well as groundwater. The ultimate objective is to achieve good status (both chemical and ecological) in all water bodies by 2027.

While some progress has been made to achieving good status (both chemical and ecological) in all water bodies, the current status of many water bodies indicates that much still needs to be done to meeting the overall objective by 2027. Moreover, the conservation status of many freshwater habitats and species protected under the Nature Directives remains poor.

Greater efforts are therefore needed to restore Europe's freshwater ecosystems and the natural functions of rivers. The Biodiversity Strategy to 2030 calls on Member States to step up the implementation of existing legislation and commits the EU to restore at least 25 000 km of rivers to a free-flowing state by 2030, primarily through the removal of obsolete barriers and the restoration of floodplains and wetlands.

Removing obsolete barriers

The Nature Restoration Regulation provides the necessary legal framework to meet these commitments. Specifically, it requires all Member States to remove a number of artificial barriers along their rivers by 2030. In this way every country makes a contribution towards achieving the overall EU objective of restoring 25,000 km of free-flowing rivers. The first task is for Member States make an inventory of all artificial barriers that are present along their rivers and to identify those that should be removed, taking into account their socio-economic function. Priority should be given to removing obsolete barriers that are no longer in use. All barriers thus identified should then be progressively removed by 2030.

Restoring natural floodplains

In parallel, Member States should complement the removal of barriers with measures to improve the natural functions of the related floodplains. This will contribute, amongst others, to the restoration of freshwater habitats and habitats of species protected under the EU Nature Directives for which Article 4 of the Regulation sets legally binding targets within agreed deadlines. It will also contribute to achieving the wider objectives of the Water Framework Directive.

EU Guidance on identifying barriers

The Commission has developed, in close consultation with authorities in the Member States as well as with EU level stakeholders, guidance to assist the Member States in identifying (primarily obsolete) barriers that are feasible to remove, with a view to re-establishing the natural functions of a river system and restoring free flowing rivers.

The guidance also provides an overview of possible funding sources and highlights a number of on-going initiatives across the EU that are removing barriers and restoring free flowing rivers in a strategic manner along certain stretches of rivers.

https://bit.ly/4fyEixN

4 Restoring pollinator populations

TARGET 5

Coverage	All wild pollinating insects
Obligations and targets	Member States shall **improve pollinator diversity and reverse the decline of pollinator populations** by 2030 Thereafter, Member States shall **achieve an increasing trend of pollinator populations** until satisfactory levels are achieved
Actions	Member States shall: ● progressively implement appropriate and effective measures that have been identified in the National Restoration Plan ● monitor pollinator diversity and pollinator populations annually using a standardised methodology established by the Commission by August 2025.
Regulation Articles	Article 10

Addressing the decline of pollinators

Pollinators are key indicators of the health of ecosystems and are vital for agricultural production and food security. The EU Biodiversity Strategy made a commitment to reverse the decline of pollinators by 2030. This led to the publication of an EU Pollinators Initiative which was subsequently revised in 2023. The resulting 'New Deal for Pollinators 'sets out an ambitious framework for coordinated action to tackle the major causes of pollinator decline, as well as improve knowledge and mobilise all actors across society.

Improving the knowledge base

The Nature Restoration Regulation will be central to achieving the objectives of both the EU Biodiversity Strategy and the revised EU Pollinators Initiative. It sets a legal obligation on Member States to put in place in a timely manner appropriate and effective measures to improve pollinator diversity and reverse the decline of pollinators at the latest by 2030. Thereafter, Member States must continue to restore areas to achieve an increasing trend of pollinator populations, until satisfactory levels are achieved.

As the knowledge of pollinators is still hindered by critical knowledge gaps, one of the first actions will be for the Commission to establish, by August 2025, a science-based method for monitoring pollinator diversity and pollinator populations across the EU. This will provide a standardized approach for collecting annual data on the abundance and diversity of pollinator species across ecosystems and for monitoring the effectiveness of the restoration measures undertaken by Member States.

Achieving a satisfactory level

Member States must set a value for what is considered a 'satisfactory level' by 2030. To assist them in this task, the Commission will prepare a guiding framework for determining such levels by December 2028. As the restoration of pollinator populations cuts across many different policy sectors, the Commission and the relevant EU agencies, in particular the European Environment Agency, the European Food Safety Authority and the European Chemicals Agency will set up a dedicated task force to coordinate their activities and share relevant information and expertise with Member States.

Towards an EU Pollinator monitoring framework

The Commission has launched a number of initiatives to support the monitoring and assessment framework for the restoration of pollinator populations:

- *The STING project brought experts together to develop methodological proposals for an EU pollinator monitoring scheme and indicators.*
- *The SPRING project tested the STING proposals across Member States, bringing invaluable experience and know-how from the field.*
- *ORBIT and TAXOFLY projects aim to centralise all information on pollinator species and help to develop tools for their identification.*
- *EPIC-Bee, EPIC-Fly and EPIC-Butterfly projects will train new pollinator taxonomists to ensure that experienced survey experts are carrying out the pollinator monitoring work.*
- *The EMBAL initiative on European Monitoring of Biodiversity in Agricultural Landscapes will provide information on the state of pollinator habitats in agricultural landscapes.*
- *The INSIGNIA initiative will gather information on pollutants in the environment, such as pesticides, heavy metals or air pollutants, which harm pollinators.*

https://bit.ly/40X9t19

Restoring agricultural ecosystems

TARGET 6

Coverage	All types of agricultural ecosystems (e.g. arable land, grassland, permanent crops, agri-forestry),including those that are not agricultural habitats and habitats of species protected under the Nature Directives
Obligations and targets	Member States shall: ● **Enhance biodiversity** in agricultural ecosystems ● **Put in place measures to achieve an increasing trend** at national level **of at least two of the three following indicators** for agricultural ecosystems until satisfactory levels are reached: ○ Grassland butterfly index ○ Stock of organic carbon in cropland mineral soils ○ Share of agricultural land with high-diversity landscape features ● **Put in place measures to achieve a measured increase in common farmland bird index** at national level (indexed in September 2025 at 100): ○ For Member States with historically more depleted populations of farmland birds the targets are: 110 by 2030, 120 by 2040 and 130 by 2050 ○ For Member States with historically less depleted populations of farmland birds the targets are: 105 by 2030, 110 by 2040 and 115 by 205 ● **Put in place measures to restore organic soils in agricultural use** constituting drained peatlands on: ○ 30% of such areas by 2030 (of which at least quarter is rewetted) ○ 40% of such areas by 2040 (of which at least third is rewetted) ○ 50% of such areas by 2050 (of which at least third is rewetted
Actions	Member States shall progressively implement the restoration measures that have been identified in their National Restoration Plan
Regulation Articles	Article 11, Annex IV, V

Enhancing biodiversity in agricultural ecosystems

The combined effects of agricultural intensification and the abandonment of extensive farming practices has had a major impact on Europe's biodiversity. As a result, more than half of Europe's farmland bird species have disappeared over the last 50 years and a significant proportion of Europe's valuable semi-natural grasslands have been lost.

Yet, biodiverse agricultural systems are essential to providing safe, sustainable, nutritious and affordable food. Not only are they more resilient to climate change and other environmental risks, but they also increase Europe's food security. In addition, they can create new jobs in rural areas, in particular jobs linked to organic farming, rural tourism and recreation.

Both the EU Biodiversity Strategy and the EU Farm to Fork Strategy commit the EU to enhancing biodiversity in agricultural systems while supporting farmers during their transition towards more sustainable practices. The Nature Restoration Regulation provides a legal framework for achieving this, while taking into account the social and economic needs of rural areas and the need to ensure sustainable agricultural production in the EU.

Indicators of farmland biodiversity

In the absence of a common method for assessing the condition of agricultural ecosystems that would allow specific restoration targets to be set, the Nature Restoration Regulation sets instead a general obligation to improve biodiversity in agricultural ecosystems and to measure the fulfilment of that obligation on the basis of a selection of indicators. As the farmland bird index is a well-established key indicator of the health of agricultural ecosystems, it is an obvious first choice. The Nature Restoration Regulation therefore sets timebound targets for the recovery of farmland birds in each country. The target is set higher for Member States with historically more depleted populations of farmland birds than those with less depleted populations.

Other already established biodiversity indicators include the grassland butterfly index, the stock of organic carbon in cropland mineral soils or the share of agricultural land with high diversity landscape features. For these indicators, it is left up to each Member State to choose at least two which they consider most appropriate as an indicator for biodiversity in their agricultural ecosystems. Once selected they must then set benchmarks for what is considered a 'satisfactory level' in each case. To assist them in this task, the Commission will prepare by December 2028 a guiding framework on how to define 'satisfactory levels'.

Member States will need to progressively implement the restoration measures proposed in their National Restoration Plan until satisfactory levels are reached.

Restoring organic soils in agricultural use

The Nature Restoration Regulation also gives special attention to restoring drained peatlands that are in agricultural use as this will not only achieve significant biodiversity benefits, but will also generate an important reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to a more diverse agricultural landscape.

Drained peatlands make up only 3% of the EU's Utilised Agricultural Area but are responsible for a quarter of the greenhouse gas emissions from the EU's agricultural sector. Their restoration will not only reduce the oxidation of the existing carbon stock but also increase the potential for carbon sequestration. In addition, it will improve soil conditions, leading to a more fertile agro-ecosystem harbouring a richer biodiversity.

Under the LULUCF Regulation data is collected on the extent of organic soils and on their ability to remove greenhouse gasses. The Directive on soil monitoring, once adopted, will also help to put in place a coherent monitoring framework for soils across the EU and establish suitable indicators to monitor progress.

Building on this, the Nature Restoration Regulation sets time bound targets for Member States to restore drained peatlands in agricultural use but leaves the choice of measures up to each Member States. This can range from converting cropland to permanent grasslands, shifting to extensive grazing or fallowing, reducing drainage, or rewetting of the land.

Whatever measures are used, at least 30% of such areas should be restored by 2030 (of which a quarter should be rewetted). This increases to 40% by 2040 and 50% by 2050 (of which a third should be rewetted in both cases).

To offer Member States some flexibility in achieving this target, the Regulation allows Member States to also include the restoration of drained peatlands used for peat extraction and, to a lesser extent, drained peatlands under other land uses. Additionally, the targets can be reduced if such rewetting is likely to have significant negative impacts on infrastructure, buildings, climate adaptation or other public interest.

Supporting farmers through the CAP

The obligations under the Nature Restoration Regulation must be met by the Member States and do not imply an obligation for farmers or private landowners. Rather, it will be for each Member State to provide farmers with attractive incentives to voluntarily carry out measures to enhance biodiversity on their farmland so that they can contribute actively to achieving the restoration targets.

The CAP already provides Member States with a wide selection of possible interventions that can be used to support restoration measures in agricultural areas, including:

- eco-schemes (for instance to dedicate a greater share of land to restoring and maintaining high diversity landscape features),
- dedicated agri-environment schemes to support extensive nature friendly farming practices,
- non productive investments, for instance to restore overgrown grassland areas through scrub removal and then to re-introduce extensive farming practices that will maintain in, or restore the habitats to, good condition.

The use of such CAP interventions should be recorded in the National Restoration Plan to ensure greater policy coherence.

High diversity landscape features

In the EU, there are large areas under intensive agricultural production where nature has almost disappeared. Recognising this, the EU Biodiversity Strategy commits to bring back at least 10% of agricultural area under high diversity landscape features by 2030. This will not only offer much needed space for wild plants and animals, including pollinators, but also provide many other ecosystem services. Such landscape features could include, for example, buffer strips, rotational or non-rotational fallow land, hedgerows, trees or groups of trees, field margins, ditches, streams or small wetlands as well as terraces, cairns, stonewalls. To help implement this commitment, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) offers Member States several possibilities to support farmers who wish to establish and maintain landscape features on their land (e.g. dedicated eco-schemes, agri-environmental interventions or non-productive investments).

For more information: https://bit.ly/4ezLWGJ

6 Restoring forest ecosystems & planting 3 billion trees

TARGET 7

Coverage	All types of forest ecosystems including those beyond forest habitats and habitats of species protected under the Nature Directives
Obligations and targets	Member States shall: ● **Enhance biodiversity** in forest ecosystems ● **Achieve an increasing trend** at national level **of the common forest bird index** measured from the period August 2024 to December 2030 and every six years thereafter until satisfactory levels are reached. ● **Achieve an increasing trend** at national level **of at least six of the seven following indicators for forest ecosystems** measured from the period August 2024 to December 2030 and every six years thereafter until satisfactory levels are reached: ○ Standing deadwood ○ Lying deadwood ○ Share of forest with uneven aged structure ○ Forest connectivity ○ Stock of organic carbon ○ Share of forests dominated by native tree species ○ Tree species diversity ● Contribute to the **planting of at least three billion additional trees by 2030** at union level in full respect of ecological principles
Actions	Member States shall progressively implement the necessary restoration measures identified in their National Restoration Plan
Regulation Articles	Article 12, 13, Annex VI

Enhancing biodiversity in forest ecosystems

Forests and other wooded land cover over 43,5% of the EU's land. They are not only hugely important for biodiversity but also provide society with a wide range of vital ecosystem services such as clean air and water or erosion control in addition to a steady supply of wood products. They are also a major ally in adapting to climate change because of their immense capacity to store carbon and regulate the local climate.

Building on the EU Biodiversity Strategy, the EU Forest Strategy sets out a vision to improve the quality and quantity of EU forests, while at the same time strengthening their protection, restoration and resilience. The overall aim is help combat climate change, reverse biodiversity loss and provide resilient multifunctional forest ecosystems that are less vulnerable to droughts and forest fires.

The Nature Restoration Regulation provides a legal framework for putting in place appropriate restoration measures to restore degraded forest ecosystems that go beyond the restoration of forest habitats protected under the Habitats Directive (as covered by Article 4 of the Regulation).

Forest biodiversity indicators

In the absence of a common method for assessing the condition of forest ecosystems that would allow specific restoration targets to be set, the Nature Restoration Regulation sets instead a general obligation to improve biodiversity in forest ecosystems and to measure the fulfilment of that obligation on the basis of a selection of indicators.

As the forest bird index is a well-known and widely recognised key indicator of the health of forest ecosystems, it is an obvious first choice. But other indicators also exist to monitor the health of a forest ecosystem. This can include, for instance, the amount of standing or lying deadwood, the stock of organic carbon of the share of forest with an uneven aged structure and a prominence of diverse native species.

Seven such indicators are listed in the Nature Restoration Regulation (and described further in Annex VI) but it is left up to each Member State to decide which six they consider are most appropriate to use for improving and monitoring in their forests.

Proposal for a New Forest Monitoring law

In November 2023, the Commission made a proposal for a Forest monitoring law that aims to plug existing gaps in the information currently available on European Forests. It aims to create a comprehensive forest knowledge base to enable Member States, as well as forest owners and forest managers to improve their response to growing pressures on forest and to strengthen forest resilience.

https://bit.ly/30fNZFd

Once the indicators have been selected, Member States must by 2030, set a a satisfactory level for each indicator, based on a guiding framework prepared by the Commission, if available. They will need to progressively implement the restoration measures identified in their National Restoration Plan until satisfactory levels are reached

Planting 3 billion trees

When identifying the restoration measures to be implemented under their National Restoration Plans, Member States should also aim to contribute to the commitment made under the EU Biodiversity and Forest Strategies to plant at least three billion additional trees by 2030 across the EU.

This should be done in full respect of ecological principles, for instance by ensuring species diversity and age -structure diversity, prioritising native tree species (except in special circumstances) and enhancing habitat conditions to improve their resilience to climate change. The planting of additional trees should also help increase ecological connectivity.

Supporting foresters and forest owners

The obligations under the Restoration Regulation are to be met by the Member States and does not imply an obligation for foresters or private landowners. Rather, it will be for each Member State to provide foresters with attractive incentives to voluntarily carry out measures to enhance biodiversity in their forests so that they are able to contribute actively to achieving the restoration targets.

The CAP already offers Member States with a wide selection of possible interventions that can be used to support restoration measures in forest areas, for instance through the use of dedicated agri-environment schemes or non-productive investments schemes. Such CAP interventions should also be recorded in the National Restoration Plan to ensure greater policy coherence.

EC guidance on forest management

In 2023, the Commission published a series of practical guidance documents to support the objectives of both the EU forest and biodiversity strategies. They cover the following issues:

- *Guidance on defining, mapping, monitoring and strictly protecting primary and old growth forests in the EU*
- *Guidance on closer to nature forest management*
- *Guidance on the Development of Public and Private Payment Schemes for Forest Ecosystem Services*
- *Guidelines on biodiversity-friendly afforestation, reforestation and tree planting*

All are available from https://bit.ly/4fR414a

Closer-to-nature forest management toolbox

Closer-to-nature forest management serves as an accelerator for biodiversity restoration, biodiversity conservation and forest resilience to climate change based on two main objectives: increasing structural complexity and promoting natural forest dynamics.

Different types of interventions throughout the forest management cycle can help to achieve these objectives. They are often mutually complementary, but their frequency and intensity will depend on the local context. Closer-to-nature forest management can involve the following types of interventions:

- Promoting natural tree regeneration
- Ensuring respectful harvest conditions
- Minimizing other management interventions
- Preserving and restoring forest soils and water sources
- Optimizing deadwood retention
- Setting areas aside
- Protecting specific species on site
- Managing ungulate species at natural carrying capacity
- Taking a scale specific approach

7 Restoring urban ecosystems

TARGET 3

Coverage	Cities, towns and suburbs, including at least their urban centres, urban clusters
Obligations and targets	Member States shall ensure that there is: ● **No net loss of urban green space** at national level by 2030 ● **No net loss of urban tree canopy cover** in urban ecosystems by 2030 Member States shall achieve: ● **An increasing trend of total urban green space** at national level from 2031 onwards, until a satisfactory level is reached. ● **An increasing trend of urban tree canopy cover** in each urban ecosystem area, until a satisfactory level is reached
Actions	Member States shall progressively implement the necessary restoration measures identified in the Nature Restoration Plan.
Regulation Articles	Article 8

The importance of urban ecosystems

Urban ecosystems represent a significant, and ever growing, proportion of the land surface of the Union. This is also where the majority of Europeans live. People are often surprised to discover that urban ecosystems provide very important habitats for biodiversity, for instance for pollinator and bird species.

But this is not all, urban green spaces also provide a whole range of other vital ecosystem services for society. In particular, they help to cool the air, control flood waters and absorb greenhouse gases, as well as filter water and air. On top of that, they offer much sought-after areas for recreation, physical exercise or mental relaxation.

Restoring degraded urban ecosystems

To continue to ensure the health of Europe's urban ecosystems, the Nature Restoration Regulation requires Member States to ensure that, by 2030, there is no net loss in the total national area of urban green space and of urban tree canopy cover as compared to 2024. Member States may however exclude from this obligation any cities, towns and suburbs whose urban centres and clusters contain more than 45% of green space and 10% of tree canopy cover.

From 2030 onwards, without exemptions, Member States should aim to actively increase the total urban green space at national level and the tree canopy cover in each urban ecosystem area until a **satisfactory level** is reached.

To achieve these targets, Member States will first need to map their urban ecosystems in their cities, towns and suburbs by 2026, using, for instance, Copernicus satellite data on green space and tree canopy cover, and then identify areas where restoration measures should be implemented. Restoration measures, such as green roofs and green walls, can also be integrated into the design of buildings or into urban planning documents to help create additional green infrastructures.

Achieving a satisfactory level

Member States must set benchmarks for what is considered a 'satisfactory level' of green space and tree cover by 2030, for all their cities and towns and suburbs, consulting widely and using the latest scientific evidence available. To assist them in this task, the Commission will prepare a guiding framework on how to define 'satisfactory levels' by December 2028.

Thereafter, Member States will need to monitor the increasing trend in total national area of urban green space and of urban tree canopy in each individual urban ecosystem area every 6 years until a satisfactory level is reached.

EU Guidance on Urban Nature plans

Urban Nature Plans serve as an overarching framework articulating, formalising, and showcasing a city's commitment to promoting and protecting biodiversity and urban greening. In 2021, the EU published a guidance document to help cities prepare their Urban Nature Plans. This is further supported by a practical Urban Nature Plan toolkit.

More information available on the EU Urban Nature Platform https://bit.ly/48VByYE

For further Information go to:

https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/nature-restoration-law_en

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Design: NatureBureau, United Kingdom. www.naturebureau.co.uk

KH-01-25-017-EN-N

Publications Office
of the European Union

ISBN 978-92-68-24164-6