



INTERNATIONAL
LAND CONSERVATION
NETWORK

Belgium for Biodiversity makes space for private land protection in the European Union

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The Belgium strategic nature project, launched in early 2023, is tapping into private land conservation to further the goals of the European Union (EU) Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. The eight-year initiative—also called Belgium for Biodiversity (B4B)—is fueled by a 36,297,528 € budget and includes actions to ally private landowners with government to bolster the EU's approach to reaching biodiversity targets set in the European Green Deal. B4B is an EU LIFE project led by the Flemish government that brings together 15 partner organizations, including Eurosite—the European Land Conservation Network.

Belgium for Biodiversity is one block in a quilt of concrete actions and commitments the EU is rolling out as it strives to recover significant portions of Europe's biodiversity by the end of the decade. It is part of the implementation of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, which is the EU's proposal for international negotiations and the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. The government strategy is also part of the European Green Deal that aims to achieve climate neutrality in the EU by 2050.

The underlying goal of the 2030 strategy is to enlarge the EU's existing protected areas network, Natura 2000. According to its [website](#), Natura 2000 already protects over 18 percent of land area, and 8 percent of marine territory in the EU and is the largest coordinated network of protected areas in the world. The Birds Directive and the Habitat Directive are the two driving policies underlying Natura 2000. Article 8 of the Habitats Directive requires EU member states to set up priority action frameworks (PAF). These strategic, multiannual planning tools provide a comprehensive overview of the measures needed to implement the network in each country. In particular, nations need to specify financing needs for each measure and link them to corresponding EU funding programs. Strategic nature projects, like B4B, are one tool member states can leverage to implement PAFs.

Belgium for Biodiversity stands apart from the crowd even among other strategic nature projects, as it is unique in including private land conservation in its plan. It brings together stakeholders represented by the European Landowners' Organization (ELO) and Eurosite.

The project has four key aims. It works to protect biodiversity by contributing to a coherent and resilient trans-European nature network of strictly protected areas by 2031, including measures both inside and outside of Natura 2000; restore biodiversity by improving the conservation status of species and habitats; reduce the impact of environmental pressures; and enable transformative change.

The project emphasizes the integral role of private landowners in achieving national and international biodiversity commitments. In 2019, the European Commission announced the [European Green Deal](#), in which it aspired to make Europe the first climate neutral continent by 2050, reduce greenhouse gas

emissions by 55 percent over 1990 levels by 2030, and plant 3 billion trees across the EU by 2030. But those, and its many other goals are impossible for member states to achieve without the support of the private sector, as a large share of Natura 2000 sites are in private ownership.

Given private landowners' crucial role in largescale conservation, it is an outstanding achievement to include this critical stakeholder group in implementing the EU's biodiversity strategy. Doing so also further connects European countries and conservation networks through the partnership with the International Land Conservation Network.

Part of Eurosite's work through B4B will focus on promoting and implementing private land conservation tools, including conservation easements, across Belgium; hosting thematic networking events; and arranging cross-border knowledge exchanges. As a conservation landowners' coalition, ELO and Eurosite are actively reaching out and hoping to connect to other strategic nature projects to include the topic of private land conservation in other proposals.

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