



INTERNATIONAL  
LAND CONSERVATION  
NETWORK

## NEWS FROM OUR PARTNERS

# International cohort explores wetland restoration first-hand at a LIFE ENPLC training in Belgium

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There is no successful nature conservation without the participation of private landowners. Cooperation among all stakeholders is key. That is why there is the LIFE European Network for Private Land Conservation (LIFE ENPLC) project, which organizes training courses for landowners, community members, and conservationists to learn from each other. These training courses illustrate how nature conservation non-governmental organizations (NGOs), individual private landowners, and communities can cooperate locally to protect nature.



*Participants look at spring flowing into a river that occasionally threatens a private estate. Credit: Valérie Vandenabeele*

On March 8, *Natuurpunt* hosted a wetlands-focused conservation training that convened an international learning cohort in Aalst, Belgium. The training was the third in a series of classes led by Eurosite and attracted 19 participants from Belgium, France, and the Netherlands. Participants hailed from diverse backgrounds, representing private landowners, nature specialists, governments, nature NGOs, and businesspeople.

The training started with an introduction to wetland conservation projects where the involved stakeholders shared their views with short presentations, opening the discussion to exchange ideas and network during lunch. In the afternoon, the participants took a field trip to see the wetland in Aalst that

is currently under construction. The site visit led to lively discussions and illustrated the need for cooperation among a diverse set of actors to enable conservation and restoration projects.



*Castle Schotte threatens to flood. Heavy pumps have to be used to remove the water. Credit: Koen Baten*

In this case, three main players came together to facilitate the wetland restoration. Conservationist representatives from *Natuurpunt*—which is responsible for implementing the conservation measures on the ground—worked closely with a landowner whose castle was at risk of flooding and a community representative from the city of Aalst.

Each stakeholder has much to gain from the restoration. When finished, the project aims to prevent flooding of the landowner's land. The restored habitat will also provide a cooling effect and healthy air for the city of Aalst and otherwise improve the local environment by delivering essential water retention in hot summers; creating valuable habitats for local biodiversity; and, when successfully rewetted, playing a crucial role in the community's fight against climate warming.

The first two trainings in the series focused on pollinators in the Netherlands and Economic incentives for private land conservation in Romania. The final course in this series will be hosted later this year in partnership with the Nature Conservancy and will focus on fire management in Spain.

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