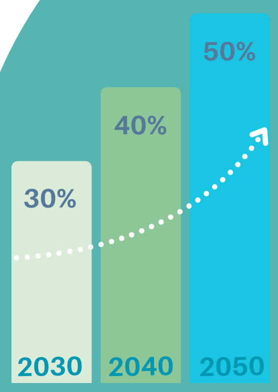
From EU Nature Restoration Regulation to effective implementation

A guideline for national and subnational policy makers

This Theory of Change is a guiding framework **rather than a prescriptive blueprint.** The pathways of change spanning national policy outcomes and activities for policymakers are highly **context specific.** Effective implementation requires **careful attention** to the specific legal-institutional, political, economic, socio-cultural, and environmental realities of each Member State.

Impact



EU-wide target: Restore degraded ecosystems, including wetlands

- 30% by 2030
- 40% by 2040
- 50% by 2050

Wetland-specific target: Restore and partially rewet drained agricultural peatlands

- 30% by 2030 (of which at least a quarter rewetted)
- 40% by 2040 (a third rewetted)
- 50% by 2050 (a third rewetted)

(sub)national policy outcomes

LEGAL MANDATE

POLITICAL WILL

PUBLIC SUPPORT

ECONOMIC VIABILITY

(sub)national policy outputs

Legal mandate

- Strong science-based and target-oriented policy framework
- Robust and institutionalized monitoring
- Coherence across policy fields
- Local policy alignment
- Enforcement mecha-nisms

Political will

- Long-term approach
- Participatory planning
- Integrated policy design
- Technical capacity building

Public support

- Public awareness raising
- Robust science and innovation supported by knowledge networks
- Fair and inclusive implementation

Economic viability

- Strategic financing and resource allocation
- Unlock economic potential through demonstration projects
- Cost-saving synergies
- Exploring innovation
- Phasing out harmful subsidies

Major risks and assumptions

- Party politics
- Harmful subsidies
- Social beliefs
- Cultural barriers
- Vested interests and industry lobby
- Land ownership
- Funding gaps

OUTCOMES

LEGAL MANDATE

Legal mandate: National and subnational governments have legally aligned with international legal frameworks, ensuring they are enforceable and provide clear mandates for implementation.

POLITICAL WILL

Political will: Strong political commitment at all levels of government has driven the development and implementation of wetland policies grounded in inclusive, transparent, and participatory decision-making. This political commitment is reflected in institutional capacity, including financial resources for effective and sustained restoration efforts.

PUBLIC SUPPORT

Public support: Widespread social acceptance and stakeholder collaboration mutually reinforce each other, fostering co-ownership of the wetland restoration agenda. By involving key stakeholders (landowners/land users) early in the process, this dynamic interaction builds long-term commitment to wetland restoration based on shared values grounded in science, equity, and local priorities.

ECONOMIC VIABILITY

Economic viability: Restoration efforts are financially sustainable and strategically funded, with harmful subsidies phased out and resources redirected toward effective, innovative solutions. By leveraging diverse public and private funding sources and demonstrating economic benefits, these initiatives deliver lasting environmental and socio-economic returns.

OUTPUTS

LEGAL MANDATE

Strong and target-based policy framework: Set binding and SMART national wetland restoration targets aligned with the Nature Restoration Regulation.

Robust and institutionalized monitoring: Set up robust national systems to monitor EU compliance, report annually on restored hectares, and adapt as needed.

Coherence across policies fields: Align restoration efforts with existing climate, biodiversity, agriculture, and water legislation to ensure policy coherence and effective cross-sectoral implementation.

Local policy alignment: Review and revise subnational wetland regulations and planning frameworks, including provincial and municipal land use plans and water basin management plans, to ensure full compliance with Nature Restoration Regulation.

Enforcement mechanisms: Enable the effective enforcement of and compliance with wetland restoration legislation, by building institutional capacity and enhancing inter-agency coordination.

POLITICAL WILL

Long-term approach: Co-develop a long-term national wetland restoration vision and strategy with clear milestones and accountability mechanisms, involving regional and local governments and key stakeholders.

Participatory planning: Co-develop national restoration plans with farmers, landowners, NGOs, and scientists, building on multi-actor wetland platforms.

Integrated policy design: Explore the synergies of wetland restoration with other policy fields, such as biodiversity, agriculture, and climate.

Technical capacity building: Strengthen institutional capacity by equipping all implementing actors with the resources, training, and coordination tools needed for effective, long-term wetland restoration.

PUBLIC SUPPORT

Public awareness raising: Launch targeted campaigns to raise awareness of wetlands' importance. Use media to share success stories and promote public understanding and support through education

Robust science and innovation supported by knowledge networks: Invest in wetland science, innovation, and context-specific restoration techniques. Strengthen knowledge networks, promote cross-disciplinary collaboration, and support knowledge brokers to ensure evidence-based information guides action at all levels.

Fair and inclusive implementation: Ensure wetland policies are developed and implemented with fair, inclusive participation from local stakeholders, namely municipalities, landowners, and communities. Support conflict resolution and foster local ownership to sustain restoration efforts.

ECONOMIC VIABILITY

Strategic financing and resource allocation: Secure sustained funding by leveraging co-financing from EU and private co-financing. Prioritize the allocation of financial and technical resources to areas of greatest need and impact, ensuring effective restoration.

Unlock economic potential through demonstration projects: Build on successful wetland restoration projects by showcasing their benefits for nature, economies, and culture. Scale up proven rewetting techniques that create green jobs, boost sustainable tourism, protect biodiversity, and strengthen agricultural resilience.

Cost-saving synergies: Assess wetland restoration's economic benefits by emphasizing cost savings from natural flood control, water purification, and climate regulation. Promote wetlands as win-win solutions that lower public infrastructure costs and generate positive spillovers.

Exploring innovation: Identify innovative approaches for wetland restoration, including new financing models, technologies, and partnerships. Focus on creating conditions that attract private investment and enable scalable solutions

Phasing out harmful subsidies: End with subsidies that incentivize land-use practices incompatible with restoration goals, especially those related to the EU Common Agricultural Policy.

Major risks and assumptions

- Party politics
- Harmful subsidies
- Social beliefs
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- Funding gaps