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Wildlife Estates label: from ambition to action

Good policy needs to survive contact with reality

The stress test of the Nature Directives: next steps for wildlife management

ELO

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Editorial



Europe talks endlessly about innovation. But innovation that never reaches the field is not innovation. It is research without impact, investment without return, and ambition without results.

Recent crises—from Russia's war against Ukraine to disruption around the Strait of Hormuz—have exposed Europe's dependence on imported feed, fertilisers and other critical inputs. Food security is no longer simply an agricultural issue. It is about strategic autonomy, resilience and Europe's capacity to withstand crises.

Yet European farmers are being asked to deliver more with an ever-shrinking toolbox. New plant protection solutions, reproductive technologies, biological products and digital tools too often remain trapped for years in regulatory pipelines, while farmers elsewhere gain access to them. Europe cannot demand competitiveness and environmental performance while denying farmers the means to achieve them.

The problem is also institutional. Agriculture, industry, health and environment remain divided into policy silos, with nobody truly responsible for ensuring that innovation actually reaches the farm.

Europe therefore needs a Strategy for Critical Agricultural Technologies, connecting research, regulation and implementation.

The time for strategies without delivery is over. Europe cannot defend food security with innovation locked in laboratories, files and regulatory waiting rooms. Wake up to what is happening in our countryside. If innovation does not reach the farmer and work in the field, it is not innovation. It is European failure.

Thierry de l'ESCAILLE
ELO President

ELO
European Landowners' Organization

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Wildlife Estates label: from ambition to action



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The 2026 Wildlife EU Plenary Session and Farms and Estates Congress, held from 8–10 September in Northamptonshire, brought together landowners, farmers and environmental leaders from across the UK and Europe to explore how ambition for nature recovery can be translated into practical action on working estates.

Northamptonshire provided the setting for the 2026 EU Plenary Session back to back to the Wildlife Farms and Estates Congress, combining professional exchange with countryside visits, practical experience and informal discussion, the Congress explored how environmental ambition can be translated into measurable action while maintaining resilient and successful rural businesses.

The theme, 'from ambition to action,' reflected a central question running throughout the programme: how can working estates respond to growing environmental expectations while continuing to deliver productive and economically sustainable land management?



Courteenhall Estate

The Congress began with the Wildlife Estates Steering Committee meeting, where key operational challenges where discussed with head of the 19 EU delegations, followed by an evening dinner bringing delegates together. The programme moved into its main focus on Wednesday 9 September with the joint Congress and Wildlife Farms and Estates Symposium, 'Turning ambition into action.'

The opening contributions from Tom LEICESTER, Thierry de l'ESCAILLE and Amanda ANDERSON, Chair of Wildlife Farms & Estates England and Wales, President of ELO, and CEO of Wildlife Farms & Estates England and Wales, respectively, set the tone for the discussions. They highlighted the importance of reconnecting society with nature and recognising the knowledge, responsibility and commitment of those who actively manage the countryside. They stressed that environmental ambitions must be clearly understood by both society and policymakers, while remaining firmly rooted in the practical realities of working landscapes.

Amanda ANDERSON, specifically highlighted the role of businesses and land managers in delivering environmental objectives. Government agencies alone cannot deliver the scale of change required; land managers need credible, independent and flexible frameworks that can help define and demonstrate good practice.

This was illustrated by Ashley TAYLOR, Estate Director at Ford & Etal Estates, who discussed the estate's accreditation journey. The Wildlife Farms and Estates framework provides a structured way to recognise progress, encourage continuous improvement and demonstrate a clear environmental commitment.

The discussion then turned to the importance of evidence. Peter MOSS of Downforce Technologies examined the value of scientifically robust, locally relevant soil-health data in under-

standing soil resilience, carbon removals, land-use change, habitat connectivity and wider environmental performance. Reliable information is increasingly important as land managers seek to demonstrate the outcomes of environmental action.

That evidence also matters when considering whether nature can generate viable income. Kate RUSSELL of Tellus Natural Capital posed the question, 'Can nature really pay?' Emerging markets, including biodiversity net gain, nutrient neutrality, carbon and natural flood management, are creating new opportunities, but these depend on clear environmental objectives, sound evidence and credible business models. Combining different revenue streams may offer opportunities for estates seeking to integrate nature recovery into long-term business planning.

The afternoon brought theory and discussion into the landscape with a visit to Courteenhall Estate, hosted by Dr Johnny WAKE. The estate, which achieved Wildlife Farms and Estates accreditation at Level 2 in 2025, provided a practical example of how regenerative agriculture, integrated cattle and Higher-Tier stewardship can be incorporated into a working estate.

Courteenhall's approach extends beyond agricultural management. Environmental objectives sit alongside agricultural trials, community initiatives and diversification into renewables, commercial property and visitor-facing enterprises. Its experience demonstrates that nature recovery and economic activity do not necessarily have to compete; when integrated into long-term planning, they can reinforce one another and contribute to both environmental improvement and business resilience.

This combination of discussion and practical experience was one of the Congress's strengths. The Wildlife Estates label provides a framework through which land managers can demonstrate good practice, benchmark progress and continue improving their environmental performance, while also giving the rural sector a stronger voice in wider discussions about nature recovery.

As Dr. Jurgen TACK noted, Wildlife Estates has been recognising biodiversity improvements on private land for 20 years. Its growing network also provides a platform for land managers to contribute to wider European priorities, including the 30x30 target, carbon farming and emerging nature-credit markets.

The international dimension was particularly valuable. Estates operate within different landscapes, regulatory systems and national approaches, yet many face similar questions: how should environmental progress be measured, how can it be financed, and how can nature recovery be embedded within viable rural businesses? Sharing practical experience across borders can help provide answers.

The Congress concluded on the morning of Thursday 10 September with a visit, by kind invitation of Dr Alastair LEAKE, to the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust's Allerton Project, where delegates explored research into small game. The visit



Tom LEICESTER, President of Wildlife Farms & Estates

provided a fitting final perspective on the relationship between scientific research and practical land management, reinforcing the importance of evidence and knowledge in informing decisions on the ground.

Taken together, the three-day programme demonstrated that environmental ambition and commercial resilience can go hand in hand. Achieving that balance, however, requires more than broad commitments. It requires credible evidence, practical experience, clear priorities and frameworks that allow progress to be demonstrated and improved.

There is no single model for nature recovery. Every estate operates within its own landscape, business and community, and successful approaches will inevitably differ. What connects them is the need to integrate environmental management into the long-term management of the land.

For Wildlife Farms & Estates in England and Wales, the Congress provided an opportunity to demonstrate how a practical framework can help estates show progress, a particularly encouraging result since the Symposium is that a further 5,300 hectares of farms and estates have signed up, a very happy result and a clear indication of the growing interest in the Wildlife Estates Label.

From ambition to action means turning principles into measurable change, territories by territories, and across an increasingly connected European network.



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Good policy needs to survive contact with reality



Anne MARCHADIER
Business Development Director, ELO



Dr. Jurgen TACK
ELO Secretary-General

Innovators by Nature returns to Brussels for its second edition. What is the idea behind this event? Dialogue with Dr. Jurgen TACK, Secretary General of ELO, ahead of Innovators by Nature 2026

Jurgen Tack: Europe has no shortage of ambition. We have strategies for biodiversity, climate, agriculture, forests and rural areas. The real challenge is turning those ambitions into something that works on the ground.

That is where *Innovators by Nature* starts. Rather than treating implementation as the final stage of the discussion, we need to consider it from the beginning.

For landowners, farmers and foresters, this is also about resilience. How can we manage land sustainably while keeping businesses economically viable? How can we diversify income through tourism, ecosystem services, nature markets, bio-based activities or new technologies? And who are the entrepreneurs, investors and partners able to help make those ideas happen?

The event is about connecting those worlds.



Why is that connection so important today?

JT: Because policy increasingly has very real consequences for people managing land. Once legislation leaves Brussels, practical questions appear: Who implements it? What does it cost? What incentives exist? What data or technology is needed? Is there a viable business model?

These are not secondary details. They determine whether a policy succeeds. Landowners, farmers and foresters have a very particular perspective because they are making decisions about land over decades, not over the length of a legislative cycle. They understand the complexity of combining food production, biodiversity, climate adaptation, forestry, water management and economic viability within the same landscape.

That experience needs to be part of the conversation much earlier.

Does innovation need more than data and technology?

JT: Absolutely. Europe should be ambitious about environmental outcomes, but we should avoid assuming that there is one prescribed route to achieve them everywhere. A farmer in Spain, a forest owner in Finland and a land manager in Belgium operate in completely different conditions.

What matters is giving people enough freedom to find solutions that work in their circumstances.

Innovation happens when there is space to adapt.

Where does business fit into that picture?

JT: It is essential. Nature-positive management cannot rely indefinitely on goodwill or public funding alone.

If we expect land managers to deliver biodiversity, carbon sequestration, water management or other ecosystem services, we also need credible economic models behind those outcomes.

That is why *Innovators by Nature* brings together land managers with entrepreneurs, investors, technology providers and financial actors. There are many promising ideas emerging around natural capital, biodiversity, sustainable agriculture and forestry. But an innovation only becomes meaningful when somebody can actually use it.

This event has the ability to create those critical connections.

What can policymakers gain from attending?

JT: They can identify the difference between a theoretical solution and an operational one.

A policy document can define an objective very clearly. A land manager will immediately ask: what does this mean for my farm, my forest, my investment decisions or my employees? What happens during a drought? What happens when various environmental objectives compete on the same hectare?

Those questions are not resistance to change. They are part of designing better policy.

That is why we need a stronger feedback loop between those writing legislation and those implementing it. Good policy should survive contact with reality.

Who should come to Innovators by Nature?

JT: Anyone interested in turning Europe's environmental and rural ambitions into practical results.

Of course, landowners, farmers and foresters. But also policymakers, entrepreneurs, researchers, investors, environmental organisations, technology companies and financial institutions.

The value comes from having these people in the same room. A landowner may discover a new source of income; an investor may find a solution with potential to scale. A policymaker may better understand where regulation helps — or unintentionally gets in the way.

That is why I see *Innovators by Nature* as more than a traditional conference. It is a marketplace for ideas, solutions and partnerships.

What would make the 2026 edition a success for you?

JT: If people leave with new partnerships, new ideas and a better understanding of what is happening outside their own sector, that is already a success.

Land managers should not feel that they are simply recipients of European policy. They are part of delivering Europe's objectives — and should help shape how those objectives are achieved.

There is great expertise, entrepreneurship and innovation in Europe's countryside that Brussels needs to hear. *Innovators by Nature* is about bringing the people that manage Europe's land and the businesses developing new solutions directly into the conversation so that ambition, innovation and legislation are connected to what can actually be achieved on the ground.

Register here:
elo.org/events/innovators-by-nature-2026/



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Dr. Jurgen TACK speaking at Innovators by Nature 2025

Lessons from Europe's forest owners on tackling a new wildfire reality



Ana ROCHA
Director of EU's Agri & Forestry-Related Policies, ELO

Europe's wildfires are no longer a threat confined to the south, nor confined to the summer season. The devastating fires of 2025, which were the worst year on record, were followed by another alarming year, with already 692 419 ha burnt as of 7 October 2026, emitting 30.12 Mt of CO2[1]. This represents almost twice the average for the same period over the previous 20 years[2].

For forest owners and managers, this is a clear indication that Europe must move from reacting to disasters towards making prevention a permanent priority. This was a central lesson from an internal exchange held at the end of September, bringing together members of CEPF, Copa-Cogeca, ELO and EUSTAFOR, where prevention was anchored in active land management. Participants highlighted how declining agricultural and forestry activities are contributing to the accumulation of combustible material. Active forest management, extensive grazing, the maintenance of a mosaic landscape, firebreaks and, where appropriate, prescribed burning, reduce fuel loads and interrupt the spread of fire.

Despite differing national contexts, there was a clear message from countries with more experience: wildfires have evolved from a manageable forestry problem into a systemic social crisis. Therefore, both prevention and preparedness must match the changing risk.

Experiences shared across Europe underline the need for better emergency planning, accessible water supplies, early-warning systems, evacuation routes and training that consider an integrated landscape approach. While the level of preparedness varies, even countries that have invested heavily in their firefighting capacity still face enormous challenges, whether due to a summer-only firefighting model or one that does not properly connect the different firefighting needs. These models seem to no longer match the threat and should focus instead on stable, year-round professional capacity, with firefighting teams that include rapid intervention, population support and specialised forest-fire teams that prevent incidents from escalating. Experience shows that a small number of extreme fires can account for most of the burned area and damage.

Wildfires are more than ever a European problem and require a strong coordinated European response for both prevention and preparedness to avoid wildfires of such magnitude that generate their own fire-generated thunderstorm, leading to a feedback loop that makes the fire even more destructive. Joint training, interoperable equipment, real-time information sharing, pre-positioned resources and stronger cooperation are essential.

While firefighting capacity matters, it cannot substitute for prevention. Prevention is impossible without active management, and management is impossible without economically viable activities. European policies must recognise and reward these public services, which prevent land abandonment, without relying exclusively on an increasingly stretched Common Agricultural Policy.

The way forward is clear. Properly fund prevention and encourage active management, strengthen professional capacity, and coordinate across borders. Wildfires, particularly when frequent, threaten our ecosystems, rural livelihoods and entire communities. Europe must act now and not wait for the next catastrophe to make the case.

1 *https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/scientific-activities/natural-and-man-made-hazards/forest-fires/current-wildfire-situation-europe_en*

2 *https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/eu-approach-integrated-wildfire-risk-management*

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Taxing nature: why Europe's protected areas need a fairer deal





Eleonore RAYNAL-PEČENÝ
Communication officer, ELO

Maryam AHMED
Communication intern, ELO

Europe has pledged to protect 30% of its land by 2030, yet most undeveloped land is privately owned. A new summary note from the Fondation pour la Recherche sur la Biodiversité (FRB), coordinated and written by Guillaume SAINTENY and Louise DUPUIS, compares how 32 countries tax protected areas. The findings highlight wide gaps between countries and raise a question: who pays for conservation?

Private land at the heart of the 30% target

The heatwaves this summer showed that protected areas do more than shelter biodiversity: they also store carbon and act as cooling islands for nearby land. The 30% protection target, set in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the Kunming Global Biodiversity Framework, with one third strictly protected, will therefore rely heavily on private owners. Whether they accept protection depends in part on how it is taxed.

SAINTENY and DUPUIS review six taxes: land, income, inheritance, capital gains, property transfer and capital tax. Practices vary widely. The United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Belgium impose virtually no tax on protected areas, while other countries lack specific provisions. Of the 20 countries with favourable measures, 13 apply them to only one of the six taxes.

Rewarding stronger protection

Estonia and Flanders (Belgium) apply a sliding scale: the stricter the protection, the lower the tax.

In most countries tax relief comes through land and inheritance tax, which are due whether or not a site earns income. Yet the authors observe that productive farmland and forests are often taxed more lightly than protected areas. On the contrary, cultural heritage enjoys tailored tax regimes with no equivalent for natural heritage.

Natura 2000 sites illustrate the discrepancies. They fall under the same EU law, but some Member States exempt them from land tax or even inheritance tax. Others apply a reduced rate or standard taxes. In several countries, public access is a condition for tax relief, a requirement the note asks whether to relax.

France under the spotlight

France exempts Natura 2000 sites and certain wetlands from land tax for a renewable five years, subject to a management commitment. Since 2006, a three-quarters reduction in value applies for inheritance tax. The authors find that these measures merely align protected areas with production forests and farmland, although some protected areas earn nothing. France also applies the highest marginal income tax rate in Europe to natural areas and is one of only three countries taxing them on capital. Total tax can exceed 100% of income.



Image from Cholmondeley Castle Gardens in Chesire, England - Wildlife Estates label holder

What needs to change

The note recommends that the European Commission encourage Member States to adopt tax systems tailored to protected areas, starting with land and inheritance tax, then taxes on income. It also calls for reform of subsidies harmful to biodiversity when it is paid inside protected areas and asks whether owners should be compensated where protection ends productive use. For ELO members, the message is clear: if the 30% target is to be met, protection must be a viable choice for those who steward the land.

FRB
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Find out more here:
https://www.fondationbiodiversite.fr/ressource/faut-il-taxer-les-aires-protegees-et-comment-analyse-comparative-des-regimes-fiscaux-des-espaces-naturels-proteges-en-europe/

Recognising the value of soil health: a policy perspective from SoilValues

Healthy soils support food security, climate resilience and biodiversity, yet land managers too often bear the costs and risks of improving them while benefits extend across society. Two SoilValues policy briefs highlight why European policies must recognise the multiple values of soil health and design incentives that support farmers and long-term environmental outcomes.



Pietro TASCHINI
Project Officer, ELO

Recognising the multiple values of soil

SoilValues identifies six perspectives through which soil health creates value. The **productivist perspective** sees soil as productive capital that improves yields and reduces costs. **Ecosystem services** include benefits such as carbon sequestration and water regulation, while **resilience** highlights soil's role in protecting against environmental and economic shocks.

The other perspectives extend beyond immediate production. **Non-use value** concerns protecting soil for future generations and societal well-being; **intrinsic value** recognises soil's worth beyond its usefulness to humans; and the **social perspective** links soil health to inclusive governance, equity and innovation.

Each perspective requires different policy responses, from financial incentives and payments for ecosystem services to legal protection, education and community-led initiatives. No single instrument can address them all.



Balancing practices and results

SoilValues' analysis of policy incentives highlights the limitations of relying exclusively on either practice-based or outcome-based approaches. Practice-based incentives help farmers adopt sustainable methods but do not always demonstrate environmental impact. Outcome-based payments reward verified improvements, yet soil outcomes can be difficult to predict, costly to measure and influenced by factors beyond farmers' control.

Combining both approaches can address these limitations. Transitional subsidies and access to upfront capital can support initial adoption, while additional rewards linked to agreed outcomes encourage measurable improvements without placing all financial risks on farmers.

Towards more effective policies

SoilValues recommends offering farmers options suited to their experience and local conditions, while ensuring incentives do not reward practices without verifiable benefits. Other measures include improving access to finance, supporting risk-sharing mechanisms and strengthening local governance and peer learning.

The policy challenge is to align incentives with the diverse benefits healthy soils provide. A tailored approach can support farmers, improve the use of public resources and strengthen the long-term stewardship of Europe's soils.

More info: soilvalues.eu/scientific-papers-2



SoilValues
Funded by the European Union

The stress test of the Nature Directives: next steps for wildlife management





Delphine DUPEUX
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Trainee EU Biodiversity and Parliamentary Affairs, ELO

On 29 September 2026, ELO and the European Federation for Hunting and Conservation (FACE) organised a conference in the framework of the European Parliament's Biodiversity, Hunting and Countryside Intergroup. Hosted by MEP Juan Ignacio ZOIDO, the event brought together almost 200 participants. Representatives of the European Commission, Members of the European Parliament, the European Committee of the Regions and EUROPARC joined the discussion on whether the Directives continue to work for the people who live and work with nature every day.

While the speakers reaffirmed their support for the objectives of the Nature Directives, the discussion centred on the practical challenges of their implementation. From derogations that exist in law but are difficult to obtain in time, to situations where the recovery of protected species can create new challenges for land management, the debate highlighted the need to ensure that conservation rules remain workable on the ground. As Commissioner Jessika ROSWALL put it, "a wildlife policy is only durable if it can be implemented in the real world."

The stress test: where it stands

The event was organised in the light of the Commission's ongoing stress test of the Nature Directives, which asks whether they remain fit for purpose and where they can be simplified. As Andrea VETTORI, Head of Unit for Nature Conservation at DG Environment, explained, the exercise comes ten years after the last fitness check and covers three main areas drawn from stakeholder input: the appropriate assessment procedure under Article 6; policy coherence, stakeholder participation, funding and governance, including monitoring and reporting; and species protection, derogations and the adaptation of the annexes.

The public consultation drew 8,518 responses, roughly eight times the usual turnout for an environmental consultation. VETTORI stressed that it showed strong support for the Directives' objectives, but uneven and often heavy burdens in practice.

Solutions put forward by Member States and stakeholders include: greater flexibility for recurrent or low-risk activities, population-level approaches for conflict species such as the wolf, "one-stop-shop" permitting, standardised derogation procedures, and clearer guidance on derogation criteria and disturbance thresholds.

Andrea VETTORI, however, stressed that these proposals are not yet the view of the Commission itself, and that nothing has been decided: "All options are open: from changing the di-



From left to right: MEPs Christine SINGER, Juan Ignacio ZOIDO, Env Commissioner Jessika ROSWALL, Alex AGIUS SALIBA and Riho TERRAS



Christine SINGER

rectives, to changing the annexes, to non-regulatory actions." The results will feed into the stress-test study, and then the Commission's report, with an implementation dialogue with Commissioner ROSWALL planned for October.

Landowners and land managers as partners

In her keynote address, Commissioner ROSWALL stressed that nature conservation must be achieved together with the people living in rural areas: those who own and manage land, farm, work in forests, manage wildlife, hunt or conserve habitats.

The Commissioner also called for a lower administrative burden for farmers and landowners, noting that "a very large part of Europe's biodiversity exists on land that is privately managed. The people managing that land therefore cannot be an afterthought in nature policy. They must be partners".

ELO Secretary General Dr. Jurgen TACK highlighted how European and national rules can, in practice, make it extremely difficult to create or maintain firebreaks, potentially undermining the very conservation objectives they are intended to serve. The Commissioner agreed the challenges are linked, calling nature "not a nice-to-have" but "a necessity", and pointed to the Nature Restoration Regulation as a tool to invest in wildfire and drought prevention.

Making flexibilities usable

Following ROSWALL's speech, the various MEPs in attendance reinforced her call for partnership with the countryside, each stressing that the flexibility already built into the Directives must become usable in practice. Host Juan Ignacio ZOIDO (EPP, Spain) called for "concrete flexibility", clear tools for authorities and land managers, and simpler, faster procedures, which in his view do not constitute a step back for conservation, but are a requirement to ensure it. Christine SINGER (Renew Europe, Germany) made a similar case for recovered species, such as otters and cormorants, and insisted that "a protection status cannot be set in stone forever". Alex AGIUS SALIBA (S&D, Malta) urged "concrete and intelligent derogations" based on "data rather than fear of litigation". He also underlined that the Birds Directive's provision for the judicious use of certain birds protects regional hunting traditions, and must be honoured in practice, not only in the text.

Panel recap

The panel discussion, moderated by Hilde EGGERMONT, Administrator-General of the Research Institute for Nature and Forest (INBO), brought out diverging views. For Alberto ARROYO SCHNELL, Director of the EUROPARC Federation, the Directives work but have never had the resources to back them up. He warned that reopening Article 6 would undermine the legal certainty businesses rely on, while acknowledging land users and landowners as "fundamental to nature conservation". He also questioned whether ten years since the last fitness check was long enough, noting that early findings were not far from its conclusions, and said he did not want his generation "to be remembered as the ones who were discussing how to make nature conservation more flexible". For Csaba BORBOLY, Member of the Committee of the Regions and Vice-President of Harghita County Council in Romania, some of the Directives' successes have also created problems: "When a population becomes strong, the management system must adapt." In Harghita, bear emergency alerts have doubled in a year, and an official who authorised the removal of a bear from school grounds faced three years of investigation. "The legal risk of action stays with the official. The safety risk of delay stays with the people." The stress test, he said, must ask not whether derogations exist, but whether they can be used in time.

What comes next?

Closing the event, MEP Juan Ignacio ZOIDO brought the debate back to central concerns for those working on the ground: landowners and managers "need predictable rules, legal certainty, and incentives that recognise their effort and the value of their tradition." ELO will continue to follow the process closely and stress that Europe's conservation ambitions must go hand in hand with workable rules and recognition of those who deliver nature conservation on the ground. Because, as the Commissioner's remarks made clear, lasting progress depends on treating land managers as partners in conservation, not as an afterthought.

"Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside" Intergroup

ELO European Landowners' Organization

FACE

Digital tools to boost agroforestry



Beatrice CROCE
Project and Policy Officer - Biodiversity and Carbon Credits, ELO

After four years of collaboration, the European project DigitAF concluded in June 2026, delivering a valuable portfolio of digital tools, scientific knowledge and policy recommendations to support agroforestry across Europe.

Funded by the European Commission, DigitAF brought together multiple partners and established six Living Labs to explore how digital technologies, open data and stakeholder cooperation can accelerate agroforestry adoption.
By integrating trees and shrubs with crops or livestock, agroforestry can enhance biodiversity, improve soil health, support carbon sequestration and strengthen climate resilience. However, economic uncertainty, technical complexity and administrative barriers continue to limit its wider adoption.
DigitAF addressed these challenges by developing solutions for three stakeholder groups: policy actors, practitioners and beneficiaries of agroforestry products and services.

For policy actors: strengthening agroforestry policies

DigitAF analysed European and national policies to identify regulatory barriers, improve monitoring and strengthen incentives for agroforestry adoption.

Through its policy briefings, the project examined key EU frameworks, including the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the Carbon Removals and Carbon Farming Certification Framework (CRCF), the Nature Restoration Regulation and LULUCF, identifying regulatory challenges and opportunities to better support agroforestry implementation.

A key project output, *Deliverable 1.5, Policies and MRV Models for Carbon Farming in the Voluntary and Statutory Sectors*, examined voluntary carbon markets, certification standards, national registries and potential Agricultural Emissions Trading System models. It highlighted the importance of credible, cost effective Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV) methods and opportunities to integrate carbon and biodiversity finance.

More info here https://zenodo.org/records/19373429

For practitioners: supporting practical decisions

For farmers, landowners and advisors, DigitAF developed, improved and tested digital tools supporting agroforestry planning and management.

These include AgroforesTreeAdvice for tree species selection, FarmSAFE and INTACT for financial assessment, alongside tools for system design, climate adaptation and long term performance modelling.

Through the six Living Labs, practitioners contributed to identifying needs, testing solutions and improving their usability, ensuring that scientific knowledge could be translated into practical support for farm-level decisions.

For beneficiaries: recognising agroforestry benefits

For businesses, buyers, consumers and other value chain stakeholders, DigitAF explored tools to measure, verify and communicate agroforestry's environmental benefits.

The project developed and tested approaches to assess biodiversity, soil health and carbon sequestration, including a Biodiversity Gain Estimator designed to estimate biodiversity improvements associated with agroforestry systems. It also investigated certification, branding and business models to strengthen recognition of agroforestry products and ecosystem services.

A European Agroforestry Map was developed to connect farmers, tree nurseries, advisors, contractors and researchers, facilitating cooperation and access to services.

A lasting digital legacy: the DigitAF virtual space

One of DigitAF's main achievements is its Agroforestry Virtual Space, an open digital environment bringing together tools, datasets, code, publications, policy outputs and educational resources.

Built around the FAIR principles of making resources Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable, the platform supports knowledge exchange, collaboration and future innovation.

The project's tools, policy briefings and results can be explored through the DigitAF Virtual Space and the DigitAF website.

More information digitaf.eu/virtual-space



GWCT- The Allerton Project- The United Kingdom

The mathematics of stewardship: rewiring how we value Europe's forests



Ena Enia GAVARE
Latvian Forest Owners' Association

Landowners are shifting from pure volume-driven extraction toward a resilient, long-term vision of land stewardship. This change is happening on the ground. The ecological mechanisms and carbon dynamics of permanent forest land in Estonia and the wider boreal region differ vastly from those in Central or Southern Europe.

Populist conservation policies fail to capture these distinct realities. Responsible land management demands precise, data-driven logic rather than one-size-fits-all sentiment. Continuous cover forestry requires adequate sunlight for understory to thrive. A profound challenge in the boreal region, where Norway spruce and Scots pine dominate, is that it receives only 6 to 7 hours of daylight in November and as little as 15 to 25 hours of direct sunshine throughout December.

Rethinking the value of action vs. inaction

Environmental legislation has long operated on a precautionary principle that prioritizes a single ecosystem service, such as maintaining untouched buffer zones. This can inadvertently degrade the rest of the ecosystem. Research models from the Latvian State Forest Institute (Silava) demonstrate that no single ecosystem service is inherently superior in hemiboreal forests. Management decisions must be based on the aggregate value of all services combined. Researcher Raitis RIEKSTS-RIEKSTIŅŠ emphasizes that forestry interventions cannot be judged by their immediate observable aftermath, but through a strict long-term temporal frame.



RiForMa project team showing a riperian site for landowners, october 2026.

Riparian grey alder stands provide a prime example. Precautionary laws frequently restrict intervention to prevent immediate soil disturbance. However, long-term modeling reveals that as these stands exceed 25 to 30 years of age, they decay and collapse. The resulting leaching of accumulated nitrogen and sediments into rivers drives severe eutrophication. What appears to be nature protection today becomes an ecological liability tomorrow.

A calculated felling today to remove decaying alders and establish climate-resilient mixed broadleaves may disrupt the site momentarily, but it maximizes the ecosystem's ability to filter water and support biodiversity over the coming decades.

Operationalizing ecology: the forestry ERP

Giving landowners the tools to apply this logic across millions of hectares is the next challenge. Rural forest managers are incorporating long-term ecological logic directly into digital infrastructure.

These models are being integrated into Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) environments like MS Forest in Estonia or LVMGeo in Latvia. Utilizing European Space Agency (ESA) satellite data, LiDAR, and machine learning, these systems automatically map and quantify ecological values. For Estonian forest owners, digital ecosystems embed the methodologies demanded by the EU Nature Restoration Law directly into daily operations. Modern forest management plans will display both traditional timber metrics and the real-time ecological health of the stand, simulating the 30-year aggregate ecosystem impact of planned activity.

Combining long-term ecological logic with remote sensing empowers landowners to secure their land's long-term interests.





Celebrating those protecting Europe's pollinators

Across Europe, farmers, researchers, innovators and communities are developing practical solutions to protect pollinators and strengthen biodiversity.

This year, the European Bee Award received 52 applications from across Europe, highlighting the creativity, expertise and commitment already at work on the ground.

On **2 December 2026**, we will come together at the European Parliament in Brussels to celebrate the 2026 winners and recognise the people behind these inspiring initiatives.

Organised by ELO and John Deere, and hosted by MEP Paulo do Nascimento Cabral, the ceremony will take place from 18:00 to 20:00 and include a cocktail reception, offering guests the opportunity to meet the winners and network with fellow participants.

More information:
elo.org/events/european-bee-award-ceremony-2026/