

## BELGIUM

### Restoring, preserving and enhancing biodiversity

#### Location

municipality of Waimes

#### Programming period

2014 – 2020

#### Priority

P4 - Restoring, Preserving  
and Enhancing Ecosystems

#### Measure

M7 – Basic services and  
village renewal in rural areas

#### Funding (EUR)

Total budget 34 626  
EAFRD 13 850  
National/regional 20 775

#### Project duration

2016 – 2017

#### Project promoter

Municipality of Waimes

#### Contact

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#### Website

[www.waimes.be/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/L-Europe-investit-dans-la-zone-rurale.pdf](http://www.waimes.be/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/L-Europe-investit-dans-la-zone-rurale.pdf)

In favour of biodiversity, a municipality decided to remove spruce trees growing on municipal soil and to rehabilitate broadleaved trees that were originally growing in these areas.

### Summary

The woodlands of the municipality of Waimes are bordering the Hautes Fagnes natural reserve, registered as Natura 2000 areas. The project allows the municipality to exploit spruce trees growing on municipal soil and, in parallel, to rehabilitate the natural habitat for broadleaved trees (*Quercus Robur*) that were originally growing in these areas.



To achieve this, a 10 years agreement was signed with the Department of Nature and Forestry of the Walloon Government (DNF) for restoring around 20 hectares of hardwood trees and including them to the natural reserve.

### Results

Nearly 20 ha of municipal soil will be included in the Hautes Fagnes Natural Reserve by 2027.

The softwood sales represent stable revenues for the municipality and the restoration strand adds value for hiking tourism in the natural reserve.

### Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ Peatland and drainage create challenging conditions for growing spruce trees and this type of forestry activity is slowly decreasing in terms of economic outputs. The municipality is investing in new hardwood areas for attracting more sustainable tourism development in the future.

### Context

The high Hautes-Fagnes Plateau, located in the northeast of the Ardennes, consists of acidic and nutrient-poor soils developed on old sediments; it is a region of great ecological value. These habitats are often in a degraded state, mainly as the result of drainage, widespread spruce plantation and the abandonment of traditional agricultural and pastoral use. Most areas of special interest are recognized as nature reserves and are also protected as biogenetic reserves.

The woodlands of the municipality of Waimes are bordering the Hautes Fagnes natural reserve and are registered as Natura 2000 areas. They include a large wetland area made of peat soil covered by spruce plantations. The presence of spruce trees in these peat zones leads to increased drying by simple evapotranspiration and contributes to biodiversity loss.

Between 2007 and 2011, an ambitious LIFE+ project was carried out in the Hautes Fagnes area. The municipality of Waimes was involved in the project, whereby 61 hectares out of the 494 ha covered by Natura 2000 were subject to a long-term convention, and another 50 ha of spruce trees were deforested with compensation fees.

The overall assessment of the needs for the Rural Development Programme in Wallonia region which was completed in 2013, indicated that there are some delays in the implementation of Natura 2000 and underlined the continuous biodiversity loss in some of the protected areas.

### Objectives

The objective of this project is to replace spruce trees with hardwood species that are more suitable for the environment of the area's, such as black alder, birch tree and beech, thus helping to expand the natural reserve and tackle the loss of biodiversity in compliance with Natura 2000 objectives.

### Activities

In 2014, the municipality of Waimes reviewed its Land Use Plan. The new strategy includes the possibility to exploit spruce trees growing on municipal soil and, in parallel, to

rehabilitate the natural habitat for broadleaved trees that were originally growing in these areas. This double-sided operation is encapsulated into a longer-term strategy to abandon spruce trees growing over a 10 years period, to restore biodiversity and expand the environmental quality by transferring these plots to the Hautes Fagnes natural reserve.

The project is taking stock from a LIFE+ 5 years experiment and is closely supported by the Department of Nature and Forestry of the Walloon Government (DNF).

The first strand of the project is consisting in cutting or crushing natural spruce regeneration with a brush cutter or a chainsaw on 16.74 ha of peat soil. This manual activity should be finalized by the end of 2018 and complemented by another project for installing a protective fence and birch trees sowing.

The second strand is focusing on the restoration of 2.2 Ha of oak trees (*Quercus Robur*) on a soil superficially covered with peat. Similarly to the previous, manual cut with a brushcutter or a chainsaw is necessary to eliminate natural spruce regeneration. A protective fence will be then installed around the plot and the plantation of 100 oak trees per hectare can be made, complemented by birch trees sowing.

### Main results

This is a long-term project covering a wide natural area where the municipality of Waimes and the Walloon government engage into a partnership agreement over a 10 years period.

In total, nearly 20 ha of municipal soil will be included in the Hautes Fagnes Natural Reserve by 2027.

The softwood sales represent stable revenues for the municipality and the restoration strand adds value for hiking tourism in the natural reserve.

### Key lessons

Peatland and drainage create challenging conditions for growing spruce trees and this type of forestry activity is slowly decreasing in terms of economic outputs. The municipality is investing in new hardwood areas for attracting more sustainable tourism development in the future.

#### Additional sources of information

[www.waimes.be/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/LEurope-investit-dans-la-zone-rurale.pdf](http://www.waimes.be/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/LEurope-investit-dans-la-zone-rurale.pdf)

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