

Wetland restoration and water management

Rewilding
Europe
Capital



Rewilding Europe aims to create more space for wild nature in Europe, by allowing natural processes to shape our landscapes, promoting wildlife comeback and developing nature-based local economies. The organisation takes an entrepreneurial approach to conservation by helping to develop river restoration models that support, reinvigorate and conserve wild nature as ‘natural capital’ and contribute positively to the socio-economic environment of rural areas.

Rewilding Europe Capital provides loans to businesses in Europe that generate positive rewilding and environmental impact and are capable to increase natural dynamics of freshwater ecosystems (including rivers and streams, lakes, marshes etc) and improved water quality.

Rewilding Europe Capital – Wetland restoration and water management



Interest in wetlands and water management

Healthy water systems are the cornerstone of all rewilding initiatives. Being important habitats for thousands of species themselves, living rivers and wetlands function as migration routes for many others, and play a key role in the connectivity of European ecosystems. More natural freshwater systems can help solve water management problems, storing water in periods of heavy rainfall (thus avoiding flooding downstream) and delivering fresh water during times of extreme drought.

Regular flooding can naturally fertilise floodplains. Important spawning areas for fish, amphibians and other wildlife, these natural floodplains provide a sustainable food supply for fish-eating birds, fish and mammals, including man. Healthy lakes and marshes with reedbeds have an important filtering role for water, and also provide water retention functions, and carbon sequestration.

Giving space to river dynamics is a more sustainable way of enhancing flood protection than building dykes and other artificial waterways. Protection of natural vegetation on riverbanks and neighbouring mountain slopes prevents erosion of these areas, and the clogging of riverbeds and drinking water reservoirs through sedimentation. More natural areas will filter rain and surface water, providing nature, agriculture and drinking water companies with sufficient and high quality water.

The restructuring of hydropower installations (e.g. dams) at a catchment area-level can both sustain energy production and at the same time reduce negative impact of such installations, e.g. unimpeded natural water flows and fish migration. Dam removal at strategic sites can improve the balance between both energy production and restore ecosystems in a very effective way.

Qualifying wetland restoration activities

REC is looking to finance wetland-related activities capable of generating a commercial return that may include:

- **Rewilding of former polders:** To change from unsustainable farming to more productive aquatic ecosystems, that at the same time can play a role in flood management (especially in deltas);
- **Natural protection:** Cooperation in protecting natural vegetation on riverbanks and mountain slopes to avoid erosion of these areas and water management problems downstream;
- **Wildlife habitats:** Form habitats protecting wildlife, for example the colonisation of beaver in its natural river habitat, especially upstream where beaver dams can help to store and buffer water (upstream water retention) which flattens flood peaks; or the creation of natural marshes that provides breeding habitat for marshland birds, providing nature-tourism opportunities;
- **Natural breakwaters:** Stimulate the development of natural vegetation as a breakwater in front of dykes and dams, reducing the costs of management of such infrastructure;

- **Removal of (obsolete) dams:** Eliminating maintenance costs and restoring free flowing rivers with natural fish migration that provide new sources of income from wildlife tourism and (sustainable) fishing;
- **Drinking water:** Protecting sources of drinking water through the establishment of nature reserves is important for both conservation and supplies of high quality drinking water.

Finance conditions

REC issues finance loans on the following terms to businesses meeting the required investment and impact requirements:

Principal loan capital:	€25,000 to €600,000
Geographic focus:	EU-28 countries
Investment structure:	Debt only
Currency restrictions:	Euro (€) loans and repayments only
Loan terms:	6–8 years
Interest rate:	2.5%–6%

Wetland restoration impact indicators

- Extension of the area within the original floodplain with a natural flooding system;
- Extension of the river length without dams;
- Extension of the river length with natural erosion and sedimentation;
- Extension of natural marshlands;
- Extension of natural estuaries;
- Increased fish migration and water- and marshland bird populations.