

April 2025

ALIGNING EFFORTS ON THE EU ROAD TOWARDS HEALTHY WETLANDS

Upscaling wetland restoration in times of climate change

Restoring wetlands delivers vital ecosystem services and unlocks economic opportunities. If managed sustainably, European wetlands act as powerful carbon sinks, sequestering vast amounts of greenhouse gases. Large-scale restoration is essential to revive these ecosystems and restore their natural functions. A [REWET](#) analysis by IUCN NL highlights the need for clear regulatory frameworks and strategic alignment of restoration efforts across local, regional, and national levels to achieve the greatest impact. Effective restoration at the EU level requires strong coordination among Member States to upscale wetland recovery and climate resilience.

WETLANDS' CARBON POTENTIAL

More frequent and severe floods and droughts signal the urgent need for action to mitigate the impacts of climate change. Peatlands, mires, and other types of wetlands play a vital role in addressing the intertwined crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.

If managed effectively and sustainably, wetlands are important in mitigating the effects of extreme weather events such as droughts and flooding. They play a key role in reducing societal risk and long-term costs related to climate change.

However, poor management of wetlands can turn them into significant carbon emitters.

IMPLEMENTING EU LEGISLATION

The EU Nature Restoration Law (NRL) recognises wetlands as a cost-effective way to reduce land-use greenhouse gas emissions (GHG). Adequate implementation of the NRL by Member States will also greatly contribute to the objectives of other EU legislation. This includes the Water Framework Directive, Nature Directives, Climate Law and the upcoming Water Resilience Framework.

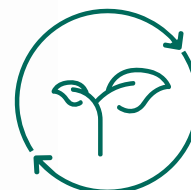
Effective implementation largely relies on the availability of financial support, the political landscape at national and local levels, and the active participation of landowners and land users. Communicating the huge public benefits versus the risk of inaction is also a success factor.



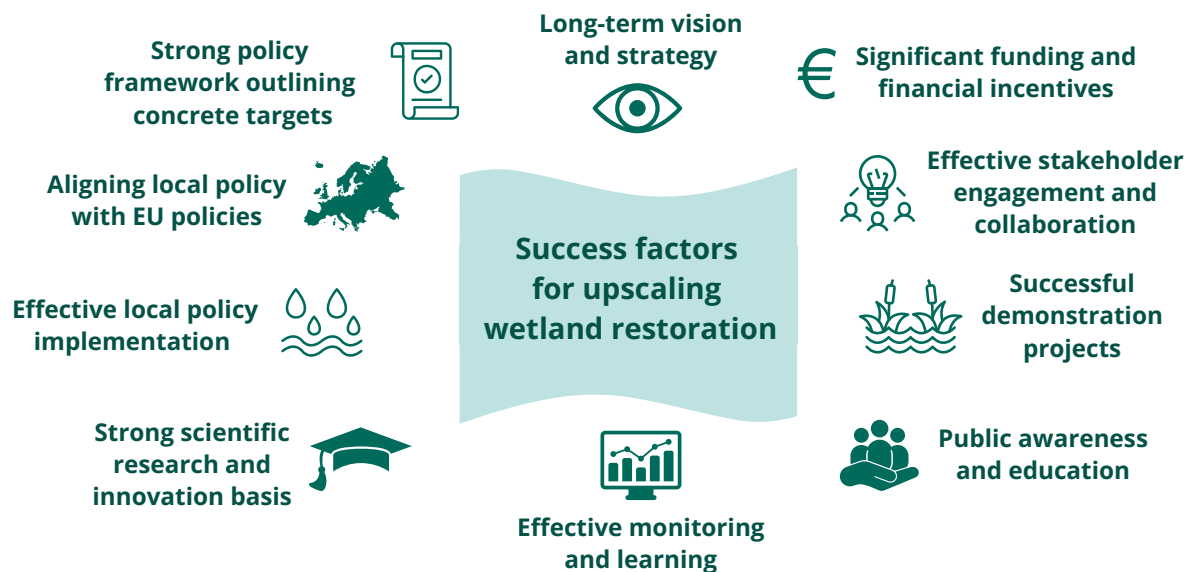
European wetlands
can store **3 to 8 years**
of EU GHG emissions.



80% of the EU
wetlands have been lost
in the last 100 years.



The NRL aims to restore
all ecosystems in poor
condition by **2050**.



SUCCESS FACTORS FOR UPSCALING

Upscaling wetland restoration is essential to achieve the NRL targets. In the figure above, different success factors needed for upscaling are outlined.

Three factors emphasise the need to align at different policy levels for successful implementation at the local level:

- Strong policy framework outlining concrete targets
- Aligning local policy with EU policies
- Effective local policy implementation.

RECOMMENDATION: ALIGNING EFFORTS

Currently, restoration efforts of EU Member States are often hindered by conflicting national, regional, and local interests, as well as regulatory barriers, funding shortages, and complex governance structures.

Wetland restoration efforts should therefore be strategically aligned at local, regional, and national levels. This includes collaborating at the river basin level.

Coordination among EU Member States is also necessary for effective restoration, supporting wetland recovery, and resilience at the EU level.

In addition, substantial financial support should be allocated for implementation, including funding from the EU Life programme, climate funds, as well as contributions from investors, national and subnational governments, and public-private partnerships.

ABOUT REWET

REWET (REstoration of WETlands to minimise emissions and maximise carbon uptake) is a laboratory for the restoration of wetlands at European scale. In the REWET project, funded by the European Union, NGOs, universities, companies, and institutions joined forces to study the full potential of wetland areas.

With information from seven open laboratories, we are developing a comprehensive understanding of how European wetlands can best contribute to climate mitigation and adaptation.

Would you like to learn more?

- [Visit the REWET website >>](#)
- [Or contact Caspar Verwer >>](#)