



EU LIFE Programme Announces a Platform Meeting in Estonia

Volunteering for Nature Conservation

Tartu – 19th to 21st September 2018

Volunteering for nature conservation or wildlife volunteering covers various activities designed to manage and restore habitats and species and to raise awareness of the importance of biodiversity. These activities range widely—from practical restoration works such as planting, removal of vegetation, fighting alien species, or setting up structures important for biodiversity, to citizen science—reporting of nature observations or monitoring species. The experience of volunteering can help people learn new skills, become socially integrated and be part of a larger community, and contribute to a better future. Understanding volunteer motivations for participating in nature conservation programs is an important element in the design and provision of programs intended to harness the increasingly important talents and labour that volunteers bring to conservation programs.

Mobilising volunteers helps protect nature in numerous ways. It reduces the costs of organisations that protect nature, enables activities that would otherwise not be possible, and involves society, which leads to greater public awareness of, trust in, and ownership of the process.

The EU has recognised the value of volunteers for the protection of the environment, in particular volunteers' roles in managing the Natura 2000 network, and the EU has included this aspect in the EU 'Action Plan for Nature, People and the Economy' (Action 15).

Volunteers play a crucial role in the success of the LIFE programme. LIFE Nature and Biodiversity projects in particular have benefited from the ability of nature conservation NGOs to leverage their networks of volunteers.

Estonia is one of the EU countries that have a strong volunteering culture and the concept of conservation volunteering has been around for decades. The host project, LIFE Mires Estonia (LIFE14 NAT/EE/000126), is coordinated by the NGO Estonian Fund for Nature. The overall aim of the project is to secure a favourable conservation status of wetlands. One of the activities planned to achieve this goal involves about 500 volunteers in volunteers' camps.

The main objective of this LIFE Platform meeting is to share experience between LIFE projects and to identify what is most important for increasing the impact of volunteers in nature conservation.

The three-day event will include plenary sessions, thematic workshops and a poster session presenting and discussing projects' experience from several EU countries. Invited experts will present experience from other programs that involve volunteers and offer experience on organising volunteers' work and attracting and motivating volunteers. Social aspects of volunteering will be explored and linkages made with other policy areas.

It will provide excellent opportunities for networking and feature the possibility to work as a volunteer for a day helping to build dams in a mire.



The Platform Meeting is coordinated by the Neemo external monitoring team on behalf of the European Commission Directorate General Environment (Nature Protection Unit and LIFE Unit) and the European Agency for Small and Medium Enterprises (LIFE & CIP Eco-innovation Unit)