

ECOPAY Connect – Forest-habitat biodiversity payment scheme

Oglio Sud Regional Park, Italy

The case study is a unique and successful Payment for Biodiversity Conservation Scheme that brings together park authorities, timber industries, and poplar growers under the common framework of FSC® (Forest Stewardship Council) certification.

In Italy's Oglio Sud Regional Park, poplar farmers join forces to improve habitats of value to nature, society and the economy.



Setting the scene

Natural protected areas and the Regional Ecological Network are the main Green Infrastructure initiatives in the Lombardy region of Italy. The Oglio Sud Regional Park is located in Eastern Lombardy and represents a fundamental ecological corridor in a typical agricultural landscape. The area is mostly privately owned and, in addition to riparian forests and wetlands, has 1700 ha of poplar plantations, out of which only 25% are certified for responsible forest management under the FSC® standard. Since 2017, these farms are required to retain 10% of their land as a “representative area”, restoring close-to-nature ecosystems.

Objectives

- Finance the maintenance of natural protected areas in innovative ways
- Sustain and spread responsible forest management in the area, through FSC certification.

Challenges

- Face lack of public funding for protected areas
- Convince small-holders to convert to responsible management
- Land-use conflicts

Innovation mechanism

Following intermediation by Etifor, poplar farms and the Park Authority signed a 5-year agreement in which the farms committed to carrying out specific conservation interventions in natural areas owned by the Regional Park to fulfil the FSC requirement: all poplar plantations compensate their 10% by restoring the Park's land, instead of setting aside 10% of their productive land.

The scheme reduces management and certification costs and facilitates certification for traditional poplar farmers, while benefitting the natural environment of the Regional Park.

By joining the Lowland Forest Association, the Regional Park became the first park under FSC Group Certification.

Furthermore, the FSC® certified poplar plywood industries also wanted to contribute to providing this ecosystem service by sponsoring the Park so the benefits are increased.

Expected impacts

- ✓ Responsibly managed areas: at least 100 hectares converted to FSC responsible management by the end of the project
- ✓ Available funding for the Park: at least 40.000 € in kind or in cash

The bigger picture

We hope to create a model that could be replicated in similar areas. Spreading the certification mechanism could help increase economic, ecologic and social sustainability of forest management in a variety of situations.

Action

- ➔ Involve other certified poplar farmers to let them use the Park's area for the fulfilment of the standard.
- ➔ Spread the number of certified poplar farms in the area, converting traditional ones and improving the general environmental sustainability.

Contact giulia.amato@etifor.com