

Habitat Network 'Grosse Labe' River Valley

– integrated local actions across administrative levels -



Photo 1: A delegation from the Fondazione Capellino is meeting with farmers, local experts and representatives of the participating landcare associations in the Grosse Labe valley (Photo credit: Bernd Bluemlein)



Name	Habitat Network 'Grosse Labe' river
Country	Germany
Biogeographical Region	Continental
Region	The Valley of the 'Grosse Labe' in the administrative districts of Lower Bavaria and the Upper Palatinate (Bavaria)
Landscape/ Eco system type/ protected area	A river floodplain dominated by grassland, with wide floodplains and remnants of riparian woodland and fens.
Size / Scope	A river course approximately 90 km long
Type of farm	Conventional & organic, grassland, and arable farming
Agricultural Use	Floodplain: mainly nature conservation grassland and farmed grassland, in parts grazed with livestock Adjacent farmland in the hilly countryside: fertile arable land intensive farming & special crops (e.g. asparagus)
Best practice/ main idea	Approach: from European strategy to local delivery • Building functional habitat networks based on Natura 2000 • Integrating stepping-stone habitats and ecological corridors beyond formal protection boundaries • Reducing landscape barriers • Aligning local actions across administrative levels within a coherent connectivity framework
Involved Stakeholders/ Partners	4 Landcare associations (LCAs), 12 local councils and towns, 4 districts, 2 administrative regions, farmers, various local associations and initiatives, and specialist authorities responsible

	for nature conservation, agriculture, water management, and regional development
Duration	In parts since 2000 and ongoing, project funding till 2027
Goals	• Improvement of ecological connectivity • Strengthen climate resilience • Measurable biodiversity improvement • Creation of socio-economic co-benefits
Activities	• Project management & public relations • Advising farmers, local authorities, and local associations • Establishing partnerships across district and regional boundaries & involving volunteers • Development of existing local quality labels for products with added value for climate protection and biodiversity.
Measures addressing water and/or soil management	• Improvement of watercourses and bank remodelling: improving structural and water dynamics • Optimization of water bodies: digging new ponds, restoring existing stillwater habitats • Improving the conservation of peatlands: creation of backwater ponds and diversion of water into the peatland • Re-wetting: removal of drainage systems, etc. • Expansion of extensive grazing with local farmers
Measures addressing biodiversity, climate	• Creation of species-rich wet grassland • Reintroduction projects for Swamp Grasshopper and European Tree Frog • Creation of new stepping-stone biotopes • Improvement of watercourses and bank remodelling & partial planting of trees and shrubs
Funding / Financing	• Foundation 'Fondazione Capellino' (Genoa, Italy) • Bavarian Nature Conservation Fund (Purchase of Land for conservation purposes) • Nature conservation funding from the Free State of Bavaria, Bavarian Water Management Authority • CAP measures (AECM), local municipalities and towns
Transferability	High replicability and scalability across regions & Member States
Tip / suggestion from the project	Strike a balance between productive land use, regional value creation, and the conservation of biodiversity, the climate, and ecosystem services.
Role of Landcare Associations (LCA)	Long experience in biodiversity measures and strong networks with farmers, local authorities & funding bodies
Further information	Biotope Network Grosse Laber
Contact information	Landcare Germany/DVL, info@dvl.org

'To be honest, without the conservation payments, there'd be no way grazing my Angus cows would be viable. It only works because of that support and the fact that I sell locally straight to my customers.'

Robert Christl, livestock farmer from Niederleierndorf

The 'Grosse Laber' river valley

'The "Grosse Laber" river meanders extensively but has also been artificially altered by the use of hydropower (mills) for hundreds of years and, more recently, by embankments in its lower reaches', explains **Julia Hagner**, Managing Director of the Landcare association LPV Straubing-Bogen. At the same time, the floodplain and surrounding countryside have been used for agriculture for thousands of years, which has helped shape the landscape. Nature conservation also plays an important role, as parts of the Laber floodplains are designated as Natura 2000 sites and provide valuable habitats for rare animal and plant species.



Photo 2: View of the Grosse Laber Valley with grazing water buffalo near Rottenburg/Laber, Landshut District (Photo credit: Karin Bluemlein)

The floodplain is mainly used for grassland, often on an extensive basis. Farmers receive EU-funded payments for nature conservation. In a few areas, the land is also used for grazing cattle, buffalo, and horses. For these Livestock-Farmers, funding from nature conservation schemes represents a significant source of income. The adjacent farmland in the hilly countryside is often farmed intensively due to its high fertility and, in some cases, is used for specialist crops (e.g.



asparagus). 'Erosion and soil runoff into watercourses is a problem,' says **Tobias Fuchs** from the Landcare association Regensburg.

Therefore, the Landcare Associations have been working independently for years to prevent erosion and improve biodiversity and soil conditions in the valley with various measures in their areas along the river. In doing so, they draw on a variety of funding sources:

- CAP measures, i.e., agri-environmental and climate measures to farmers for extensive grassland management and grazing
- Nature conservation funding from the Free State of Bavaria via the 'Landscape Conservation and Nature Park Directive' (LNPR), partly from the EU Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)
- The "boden:ständig" initiative for soil and water protection is supported by the Bavarian Administration for Rural Development. This initiative is funded by the EU (through the EAFRD) and the Free State of Bavaria.
- Funding from the Bavarian Water Management Authority for the maintenance of small watercourses within the 'Guidelines for grants for water management projects' / *'Richtlinien für Zuwendungen zu wasserwirtschaftlichen Vorhaben (RzWas)'* – financed by the Free State of Bavaria and by the EU (through the EAFRD)
- Contributions from local municipalities and towns that are often members of the local Landcare Associations
- Land purchase grants from the Bavarian Nature Conservation Fund

When the Italian Nature Conservation Foundation 'Fondazione Capellino' approached Landcare Germany/Deutscher Verband für Landschaftspflege (DVL) - the umbrella organization for 200 regional Landcare associations in Germany in 2023 to initiate a project under the [EU Biodiversity Corridors \(EuroBIOCOR\)](#) initiative, Bernd Blümlein knew this was a great opportunity to consolidate the activities of the Landcare associations into a single approach. 'It is one of DVL's missions to support our Landcare Associations in their work on the ground, to coordinate their activities above administrative borders for bigger impact, and ultimately communicate their needs to politics and administration, so they can shape the framework conditions for upscaling these good practices to other regions in Germany', explains **Bernd Blümlein**, project leader at Landcare Germany. In addition to the costs of additional measures on the ground, the support provided by the Italian foundation also covers the necessary additional staff hours for the participating LPVs. The Landcare associations LPV VoeF Kelheim and LPV Regensburg were the first to join the project.

Creating ecological connectivity

Functional ecological connectivity is a precondition for achieving European biodiversity and climate targets. Protected areas themselves cannot deliver the required impact if they remain isolated within highly fragmented landscapes. Infrastructure, settlements, and land-use intensity continue to constrain species movement, genetic exchange, and ecosystem resilience. The long-term measures implemented in the Grosse Laber valley are gradually strengthening its role as a habitat-connecting corridor. In this way, the valley functions as an ecological link

to the Danube, which itself forms part of a transnational ecological corridor extending from Germany to the Black Sea.

The project thus creates new stepping-stone biotopes, including sowing with native seeds and installation of additional structural elements, e.g., dry-stone piles, trees, and hedges. The LCAs also improve watercourses and apply bank remodelling. They partially plant trees and shrubs to provide shade for the water, essential for various river dragonflies (i.e. *Calopteryx splendens*). 'We also implement reintroduction projects for the swamp grasshopper (*Stethophyma grossum*) and the European tree frog (*Hyla arborea*)', says **Helmut Naneder**, Deputy Managing Director of LPV Landshut. Activities include comprehensive planning and design of habitats, particularly spawning habitats, breeding and re-introduction, and monitoring.

Other measures focus on the expansion of extensive grazing in cooperation with local livestock farmers or the creation of species-rich wet grassland through sowing and transfer of mown material. 'Apart from the measures in the field, we support the further development of existing local quality labels for the marketing of products from the project area that have an added value for climate protection and biodiversity', concludes **Lucia Gruber** from the LPV Voef Kelheim.



Photo 3: A construction hoarding banner highlighting the importance of local 'Labertaler Weiderind' grazing for climate and nature conservation in the Grosser Laber valley (credit: Voef Kelheim)

Improving water bodies and water retention

'Although the focus of the project lies on biodiversity and climate, the measures have a strong impact on the soil health and water retention', explains **Tobias Fuchs**. Measures include, for instance, the improvement of watercourses and bank remodelling. By improving structural and water dynamics in the main river, water runs faster and silting of the gravel can be prevented.



Photos 4 & 5: Installation of a gravel spawning ground for various river fish species and measures to improve flow dynamics through the placement of boulders, root-stocks and logs (Photo credit: Tobias Fuchs)

Measures on the small tributaries and ditches shall help to prevent the influx of silt and soil from arable fields. Due to water retention in these small tributaries more water will infiltrate into the soil and ultimately the groundwater. This effect is also supported by optimizing water bodies by digging new ponds and restoring existing stillwater habitats.



Photo 7: A newly created, large-scale temporary shallow water body ('Seige') that improves water retention in the floodplain and is also of great value to biodiversity in the area (Photo credit: Tobias Fuchs)

Some areas around the Laber River are rich in organic soils—key for climate protection, and water retention. The Landcare Associations also work on improving the conservation of peatlands through the creation of backwater ponds and diversion of water into the peatlands. This is combined with re-wetting measures like the removal of drainage systems.



Photo 8: Draining water from a flooded ditch into the adjacent bog using a newly dug depression (Photo credit: Lucia Gruber)

Co-creation-based implementation model as key to success

‘In the project, we work with a co-creation-based implementation model.’, explains Bernd Blümlein. This means the Landcare Associations involve land users, municipalities and civil society at an early stage. In this way we can ensure high governance feasibility and social acceptance. For the implementation of the measures, we utilise a range of public and private funding sources. Working with these different stakeholders is possible due to the many years of experience and local networks of the Landcare Associations involved. ‘In this way they ensure clear ecological impact combined with socio-economic co-benefits.’

What are the prospects of the project?

The network of biotopes along the ‘Grosse Laber’ river will be significantly expanded. Since March 2026, two additional Landcare associations, LPV Landshut and LPV Straubing-Bogen have joined the ‘Grosse Laber Biotope Network’. The habitat corridor is now around 90 kilometres long and will not only improve biodiversity and the climate but also soil health, water quality, and water retention. A win-win. For the region and the European biodiversity network.

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Joint project by:



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**Co-funded by
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