



1. The improvement of Natura 2000 protected areas, in particular the situation of the target species: the bittern and the tree frog as well as habitat types such as wet and dry heathland, wet grassland and ponds.
2. The enhancement of the partnership between private and public landowners and organisations in the project area.
3. A sustainable regional development thanks to a progressive approach implementing a synergy between Ecology, Economy and Education.
4. An enhancement of the awareness of Natura 2000, the project area and its value, public-private partnerships among local stakeholders and the project itself among the general public.
5. An inspiration for other Natura 2000 projects thanks to a private-public partnership.
6. The promotion of rural activities.

## What does the project offer?



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### ■ In the project area

For the ecological restoration and conservation, the actions will be carried out in and around ponds, lakes, forests, heathlands and wet grasslands. The landscape will become more open. The area of 16,7 ha of new ponds will be created and the area of 140 ha of existing ponds will be improved. 6 km of the channel will be newly opened. More than 10 hectares of heathland will be created and 30 hectares of heathland will be improved. More than ten breeding couples of the Bittern will be added and there will be more than 1000 extra males of the European Tree Frog. A lot of the work will take place on private property. Any private property is not accessible without prior agreement of the landowner. Guided tours and visits in the project area will be organized during the project period and also after the end of the project. Notice boards will be displayed in the project area along the paths.

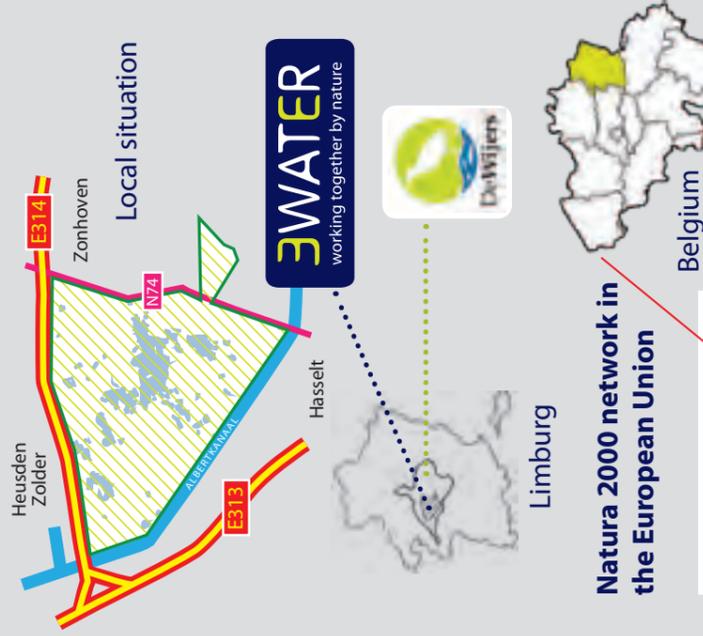
### ■ What is in it for visitors?

There will be a lot of improvements which will enable visitors to discover and enjoy more of the project area such as new touristic paths, a new car park, notice boards, viewpoints and web cameras. Two interactive exhibitions will be placed in the domain of Kiewit and Heidestrand. New trained guides will provide unique guided tours. But also the project website [www.3WATER.eu](http://www.3WATER.eu) is worth visiting!

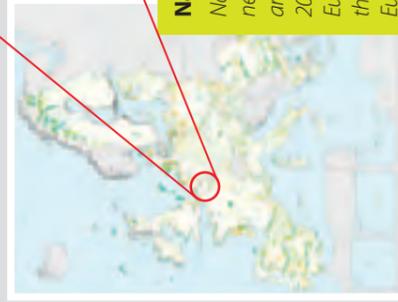
### ■ What is in it for the general public?

The project seeks to achieve a synergy between Ecology, Economy and Education and therefore it is aimed at society as a whole. Various activities are expected to involve the general public. This brochure is one dissemination tool amongst others including, the project website and newsletters, an annual information journal for the local and regional population, info meeting for the local population, exhibitions, publications, conferences, educational packages for secondary school and a video documentary (by the end of 2013).

## Where is the project 3WATER situated?



### Natura 2000 network in the European Union



**Natura 2000**  
Natura 2000 is a European network of nature protection areas. It covers more than 20 % of the EU territory. It is a European initiative to assure the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats.

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For general tourist information, please, contact the various tourist services in the region. An overview is available on the project website [www.3WATER.eu](http://www.3WATER.eu) under the heading 'Links'.

## Actions !

### In a nutshell

The 3WATER project contributes to the implementation of Natura 2000, a European network of protected areas. The aim of this network is to assure the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats while maintaining human activities.

The 3WATER project aims to restore and conserve specific habitat types and species of Community importance in the core of the Natura 2000 area in Midden Limburg in Belgium. The project specifically targets the following species: Bittern and Tree frog.

This project is unique, as it involves a cooperation between private and public landowners who work together to achieve the project objectives.

Thanks to an innovative approach, special attention is given to the synergy between Ecology (nature), Education (together) and Economy (work). This balanced approach is a sustainable basis for further development and prosperity of the area.

The project is thus a model for other Natura 2000 areas in the European Union. The 3WATER project started in January 2010 and will finish in December 2013. An amount of 2,7 million will be invested. Fifty per cent is co-funded by the LIFE+ programme. More information about the project and an overview of all planned activities and events is available on the project website:

[www.3WATER.eu](http://www.3WATER.eu)

### DE PARTNERS

#### IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS



#### IN COOPERATION WITH



#### FINANCIAL SUPPORT



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This project is supported by the European Commission Directorate General Environment under the LIFE+ Nature programme (Grant-Agreement N° LIFE08 NAT/B/0000036).



## 1. NATURE

Nature is one of the three central themes of the project 3WATER. Thanks to various actions in the project area, the state of the nature should improve. But what nature are we speaking about? What does the improvement mean? What is the aim of all these activities? In the project area situated in the core of the pond area De Wijers, the efforts are being made to improve the current state of the target species – Bittern and European tree frog and expand their population.

The project area is the last one in Flanders where these species can still be found in a healthy state. Therefore, the wet and dry heathland will also be restored.

The European Union wants that the habitats necessary for the survival of these species are rehabilitated. For the Bittern, it is necessary to restore a more open landscape by removing scrub and trees on the pond dikes, to restore the large mesotrophic ponds, to extend and improve the reed beds and fish availability, to clean water and to create predator free breeding opportunities.

For the European tree frog, aquatic reproduction habitats consisting of shallow, sunny and fish free ponds will be restored. There will be wet grassland with some scrub and bushes near the ponds. For the restoration of wet and dry heathland, it is important to ensure that they will stay open and have enough light and warm. The leaf fall will have to be kept to a minimum.

The project is not only about the bittern and the tree frog. If the conditions of these species are improved, it will also have a positive impact on other species such as the little Bittern, the Great Reed Warbler and the Porcelain Grouse. The species depend on their environment, if you improve their environment, the state of species will improve too. Rare species are generally more vulnerable and more demanding on the quality of their environment. In conclusion, both man and nature will benefit from the improvement of this habitat.

## Natura 2000

Natura 2000 is a European network of protected sites in the European Union. There are more than 27.000 sites and they cover more than 20 % of the European area. The objective of Natura 2000 network is the preservation of the most endangered habitats and species of Community interest to ensure their survival. The Member States of the European Union consider these sites as European natural heritage and agreed to try to save them for future generations.

The legal basis of Natura 2000 network is made of two directives: the Birds directive from 1979 and the Habitats directive from 1992. The appropriate measures have to be taken in these protected areas to maintain or to restore habitats and species in a favourable conservation status. Human activities are allowed in these areas to the extent that they do not have a significant negative impact on the favourable conservation status of the target species or habitats.

# Working Together by Nature

**3WATER**  
working together by nature

[www.3WATER.eu](http://www.3WATER.eu)

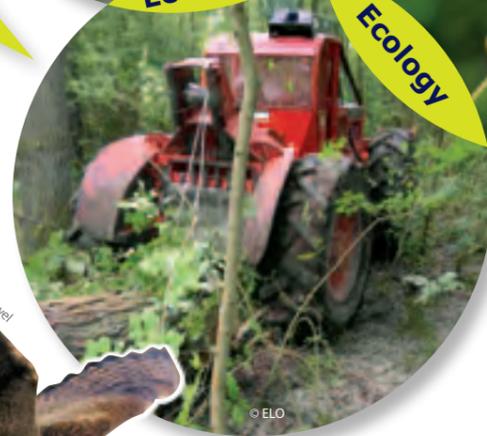


The Tree frog, *Hyla arborea*

Education

Economy

Ecology



The Bittern, *Botaurus stellaris*

## 2. TOGETHER

Cooperation is a basis of the 3WATER project. Private and public landowners and supporting organisations join forces to enhance the value and the strengths of the project area. The project is unique, as private-public partnerships do not seem to be always easy. The reasons include often ostensibly divergent interests, historical conflicts, a lack of good communication and working structure and avoidance of additional burdens and responsibilities.

Looking for a synergy between various interests is a continuous learning process. Therefore, education is the key. Once a balance is achieved, the doors open to a local and sustainable cooperation. Only together is it possible to go further.

Not only do the private and public landowners and environmental organisations work together, there is also a strong integration between the three pillars of the society: Economy, Environment and Education.

This is the triple E approach! This approach ensures that civil society will work sustainably in the long-term.

## De Wijers

De Wijers is home to many people, but it is also a habitat of many rare species. De Wijers means much more than an old word for a pond for fish breeding.

The first ponds date back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. They were created by peat and iron mining. Fish farming has been strongly promoted thanks to the influence of old monasteries, especially the abbey of Herkenrode. For centuries, ponds were created to become a network of interconnected pools – de Wijers. The project LIFE + 3WATER is situated in the heart of this pond area. De Wijers cover the municipalities of Diepenbeek, Genk, Hasselt, Heusden-Zolder, Houthalen, Lummen and Zonhoven. It is home to vast biodiversity and important cultural and natural heritage.

Moreover, de Wijers is a tourist and recreational region and there is a strong socio-economic and social dynamism.

## 3. WORK

The third main element of the project is the work. Concrete restoration works in the project area will include ecological restoration and conservation, improvement of facilities for recreation and tourism infrastructure. The project aims also at a better synergy between ecological and economic activities such as tourism, fishery, agriculture and forestry.

Several studies will be undertaken in the context of the project: concerning the evolution of target species and habitat types in the future (1) suitable management to improve the water quality in the project area (2), possibilities to improve communication and education in the project area.

Work is interlinked with the economy in the project. The project aims to achieve a balance between incomes and expenditures for the project area. Nature and forest management cost money. A concrete and detailed management plan will be developed for the project area to ensure the valorisation of natural heritage, so that society can benefit from it. New insights will open thanks to the economic valorisation of local ecosystem services.

Thanks to the close cooperation with the project De Wijers, it will contribute to regional development.

## Nature pays back - ecosystem services!

*Ecosystem is an interaction between plants, animals and their environment.*

### What services does nature offer?

*A lot of people think that nature and forest management cost a lot of money and do not offer enough in return. However, studies and practical examples show that nature offers a lot of services to people and to the society as a whole. Today the ecosystem services start to be taken more seriously into account.*

### What services?

*Nearly everybody likes relaxing or doing sports in the countryside. Direct contact with nature is virtuous, relaxing and invigorating. It also helps people to stay fit. Nature provides also important raw materials such as wood, fish, game species, herbs and biomass. Moreover, nature plays an important regulatory role in terms of pest and diseases, soil erosion and soil fertility, water and air purification, pollination of horticultural and agricultural crop, carbon sequestration, climate regulation and mitigation of the extreme weather conditions. Nature also assures genetic diversity and offers a lot of other important services such as inspiration and innovation. Not only for media and art (painting, photography, video) but also for new technologies, medical and cosmetic products.*

### The economic value of nature.

*Despite some minor improvements and the positive trends in awareness, the extinction of species continues at a shocking pace. Nature is under serious pressure. If one must choose between nature, agriculture or construction site, nature has lost in advance. If the state of nature gets worse, the quality of its services is also worse. Research shows that if ecosystem services are to be replaced by human-made technologies, it will cost much more. Nature is the best deal! For example: the New York City purifies its wastewater through a nature reserve instead of a treatment plant and thus saves 5.6 billion dollars.*

*The economic damages caused by the floods in Flanders cost much more than to build natural water buffer areas.*

*The value of pollination by insects in agriculture and horticulture in Europe is estimated at 15 billion Euros. A man made technology which could replace it is still unimaginable and priceless. If pollinating insects especially bees disappeared, it would lead to an economic and social catastrophe. This proves that it is high time to appreciate ecosystem services but also to think of their value when making choices.*

