

LIFE+ Triple E project has been launched

ELO and its project partners (Agentschap voor Natuur en Bos, Ontwikkeling Vijvergebied Midden Limburg vzw, Regionaal Landschap Lage Kempen, Limburgs Landschap vzw, communities of Hasselt and Zonhoven. In collaboration with: Vlaamse Overheid, Limbourg province, community Heusden-Zolder, Vlaamse Landmaatschappij and Natuurpunt Limburg vzw) have launched a unique LIFE+ project.



The kick-off press conference took place on 26th March in Heusden-Zolder (Midden-Limburg, Belgium). This project aims at habitat improvement and protection of species of Community importance (e.g. oligotrophic pond ecosystems, dry and wet heathlands, tree frog and bittern). The project differs from most other nature projects, as it goes through an extensive private-public partnership and a close collaboration among all stakeholders involved in the area such as private landowners and their organisation, the Agency of Nature and Forestry together with local communities and regional organisations. As Thierry de l'ESCAILLE, Secretary General of European Landowners' Organization underlined during the press conference "even if the stakeholders involved in the project come

from different sectors, they have the same aim which is to protect local environment and to halt the biodiversity loss. This common vision is crucial, if the stakeholders want to succeed in communicating their points of view and collaborate in order to ensure a sustainable environmental protection." The importance of participation of local landowners was also mentioned by Robert FLIES, Advisor at DG Environment of the European Commission. He explained that "most of Natura 2000 sites are areas where people live and carry out economic activities. Sustainable economic development and environmental protection are interlinked. Therefore, the Natura 2000 implementation shall be assured with close collaboration with local stakeholders whose role is crucial, as they work on environmental

protection and management on everyday basis." As mentioned by the project coordinator Mr. Arne Vanden BOGAERDE the project pays a special attention to the synergy between Ecology, Education and Economy. Ms. Iris LAUWERT, representative of Ms. Joke SCHAUVLIEGE, Flemish Minister for the Environment, Nature and Culture, who also inaugurated the project, assessed, the project might become a best practice method how to establish involvement of private landowners in the Natura 2000 sites management.

■ Barbora BUCKOVA