

Declaration of the 15th European Conference on Ecological Restoration

Investment in nature restoration is more urgent than ever. Inaction comes at a high cost. Nature restoration is Europe's most cost-effective resilience strategy.

Brest, 28 August 2026

Gathered at the 15th European Conference on Ecological Restoration (SERE2026) in Brest, France, 650 participants from 52 countries called for urgent and decisive action on the interconnected climate and biodiversity crises. Restoring healthy ecosystems is essential to Europe's resilience, wellbeing and prosperity.

1. Put healthy and resilient ecosystems in the heart of climate action

Climate action must prioritise restoring ecosystem health and resilience. Healthy ecosystems help societies adapt to extreme weather, retain water, reduce erosion and fire risk, support food production and biodiversity, and contribute to climate mitigation.

The summer of 2026 again showed the scale of the risks Europe faces: successive heatwaves and droughts were associated with major human, ecological and economic impacts, including:

- more than 35,000 estimated excess deaths linked to heat stress;
- more than 634,000 hectares affected by wildfires, with major emissions, air-pollution and livelihood impacts;
- record-low water levels in major rivers, disrupting navigation and energy production;
- reduced agricultural production and irrigation constraints across large areas;
- record marine heat in the western Mediterranean; and
- severe disruption to labour productivity, tourism and ecosystem functioning.

Economic estimates put EU **losses from the 2026 heatwaves and droughts** at at least **€180 billion**. Climate projections also indicate a steep increase in future burned area under higher-emissions scenarios. **The costs of inaction - to people, health, the economy and nature - will continue to rise.**

2. National Restoration Plans must be science-based, sufficiently ambitious and cost-effective

The SER-Europe community **welcomes the first National Restoration Plans submitted by Member States under the EU Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR)**. These plans - and their assessment by the European Commission - will determine whether the Regulation translates into concrete, timely and adequately funded restoration across protected habitats, farmland, forests, cities, rivers and seas.

NRPs are a test of Europe's political ambition to address biodiversity loss and growing climate risks. **Nature restoration should be treated as an investment in resilience, not simply as a cost.**

- Member States should use NRPs as **strategic instruments** for full and effective implementation of the NRR, restoring biodiverse and resilient ecosystems while strengthening climate adaptation, food security and societal resilience.
- The European Commission should **rigorously assess** whether NRPs meet the Regulation's targets and reflect the best available scientific evidence. In particular, plans should:
 - identify sufficient areas for ecosystem re-establishment and ecological connectivity, especially in fragmented or degraded landscapes and seascapes;
 - support sustainable management of marine, forest and agricultural ecosystems;
 - address future climate extremes and other major pressures;
 - provide credible timelines and budgets for meeting NRR milestones;
 - integrate restoration with relevant EU and national policies, including water, air, soil, climate, agriculture, fisheries, transport, energy and defence; and
 - support commitments to protect at least 30% of land and sea for nature.

The SER-Europe network of scientists, practitioners and other professionals stands **ready to support Member States and the European Commission** with scientific knowledge and practical experience, guided by the *SER International Principles and Standards for Ecological Restoration*. We also call on social, economic and legal experts, educators and the wider scientific community to contribute to effective implementation of the plans with their knowledge and expertise.

3. Recognise nature restoration as an essential investment in Europe's resilience, prosperity and security

Member States and the European Commission must **secure adequate, sustained and accessible funding** for NRR implementation through the next Multiannual Financial Framework and national budgets. Nature restoration supports public health, food and water security, climate resilience, sustainable economic activity and societal

stability; it should therefore be **recognised as a strategic national and European investment priority.**

The European Commission has estimated NRR implementation costs at a minimum of €6–8.2 billion annually, while the EU Biodiversity Strategy envisages mobilising €20 billion per year for biodiversity. These sums are small compared with the economic losses caused by climate-related extremes.

- Establish a dedicated EU funding instrument for biodiversity protection and restoration in the next Multiannual Financial Framework, building on the role of the LIFE fund.
- Use the CAP 2028–2034 to support NRR delivery through EU-level environmental ring-fencing and ambitious, adequately funded agri-environmental measures, including measures for peatland restoration and sustainable livestock grazing.
- Identify, phase out or reform environmentally harmful subsidies and incentives. Agricultural support should reward environmental outcomes and maintain effective environmental conditionality.
- Align public spending with biodiversity and climate objectives, apply the polluter-pays principle through appropriate fiscal and regulatory measures, and use responsible private finance to complement - not replace - public investment.

4. Nature-based defence is proven effective and must be deployed and upscaled

Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine has caused devastating loss of life and extensive environmental damage, including soil degradation, destruction of ecosystems and the loss of years of scientific and conservation progress. **SERE2026 expresses steadfast support for the people of Ukraine** and its scientific community, and recognises that environmental warfare and ecocide undermine international law, security and human progress.

SERE2026 calls for nature-based defence and other science-based innovations to be integrated into security, resilience and reconstruction planning. Ecological restoration should be embedded in Ukraine's recovery, with habitats systematically monitored, safely demined where necessary, and restored through resilient, science-based approaches. The SERE community commits to contributing its technical and scientific expertise to this effort.

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