Joint Press Release

Wetland experts come together at the SERE Conference in Estonia

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Members of ALFAwetlands, RESTORE4Cs, REWET, and WET HORIZONS gather outside the SERE 2024 conference

Four EU-funded projects on wetland restoration jointly presented at and attended the 14th European Conference on Ecological Restoration (SERE 2024) in Tartu, Estonia. Their activities at the conference highlight the importance of collaboration in restoring and preserving Europe's wetlands.

The SERE 2024 conference brought together experts working in science, policy, and restoring ecosystems.

Wetlands were one of the ecosystems the conference addressed. These areas have experienced significant loss over the past few decades – approximately 35% of wetlands in Europe have been lost since 1970.

The four wetlands projects ALFAwetlands, RESTORE4Cs, REWET and WET HORIZONS held a joint session and discussed issues at their joint booth. SERE 2024 is the first time, when the projects coordinators have met in person.

"It has been especially rewarding to finally meet sister project coordinators in person after so many virtual meetings," says Liisa Ukonmaanaho from the Natural Resources Institute Finland (LUKE) and the project coordinator of ALFAwetlands.



SERE 2024 took place in Tartu, Estonia from 26th to 30th of August

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"Additionally, it has been inspiring to see such strong participants' interest in wetland restoration, alongside other restoration initiatives, biodiversity and climate change-related topics," continues Liisa Ukonmaanaho.

This year's conference put a special emphasis on restoration within the context of the EU Nature Restoration law, which was approved earlier this year. The law cites specific goals for restoring peatlands, a type of wetland, due to the large contribution of degraded peatlands towards Europe's carbon emissions.

"Our presence at SERE 2024 underscores the importance of collaborative efforts in addressing climate change and biodiversity loss through nature-based solutions," says Vanessa Ferreira de Almeida from IDENER and the project coordinator of REWET.

The four projects cover different aspects of wetland restoration and study a variety of wetland types across Europe, to provide both general and individualised data based on a wetland's region.

Together the projects share the collective goals of filling in knowledge gaps and creating decision support tools for policy makers.





The four project joined forces to co-chair and present session 3.1 at SERE 2024

The projects' research, methodologies, and outcomes were featured in session 3.1, "Restoration of wetlands: Pathways, trade-offs and co-benefits." on Tuesday, August 27th. The two-part session was co-chaired by the respective project coordinators.

"Co-organising a session dedicated to science-based knowledge to support European wetlands' restoration and meeting in person at the SERE 2024 conference was a great opportunity to strengthen our cross-project collaboration," says Ana Lillebø from the University of Aveiro and the project coordinator for RESTORE4Cs.

The first half of the session was led by the coordinators of ALFAwetlands, Ukonmaanaho, and WET HORIZONS, Shubiao Wu from Aarhus University. The goal of ALFAwetlands is to improve the geospatial knowledge base of wetlands, evaluate the pathways of wetland restoration that incorporate a co-creation process, and provide information and indicators for sustainability which maximise the benefits of restoration. WET HORIZONS' approach is to fill in knowledge gaps about restoration including biodiversity, greenhouse gas emissions, and socioeconomic impacts, to produce data that informs tools for decision-makers.

The coordinators of REWET, Ferreira de Almeida, and RESTORE4Cs, Lillebø, led the second half of the session. REWET studies terrestrial wetlands to determine how the restoration and management

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of wetlands can be optimised to maximise their carbon uptake while in balance with type-specific natural processes and biodiversity. RESTORE4Cs focuses on coastal wetlands and aims to evaluate the effect of restoration actions on wetlands' ability to mitigate climate change and provide various ecosystem services.

The SERE 2024 conference included further moments of collaboration between the projects such as a joint booth, led by RESTORE4CS and ALFAwetlands.

As part of the same call number, the projects have previously participated in collaborative efforts, exchanging research and communication activities on awareness days such as World Water Week. The coordinators hope the connections forged during this meeting will strengthen their collaboration going forward.



Project members met at the shared booth, led by ALFAwetlands and RESTORE4Cs, for a joint moment

"It was great to meet everyone in person and discuss new ideas and potential collaborations at SERE 2024. This experience reinforces our collective efforts, which will only grow stronger in the future of wetland restoration," says Wu, the project coordinator from WET HORIZONS.

The conference's diverse attendance additionally highlighted the importance of collaboration beyond wetland researchers – to stakeholders and other scientists.

"I looked forward to discussing our innovative approaches, gaining insights from fellow experts, and forging new collaborations that will strengthen our collective efforts to restore Europe's peatland ecosystems," says Rana Parvez, the lead scientist and an ALFAwetlands project researcher.

Lisa Wiatschka, from Bax and a REWET consortium member explains, "Innovation in this field hinges on the collaboration of diverse stakeholders, from scientists to policymakers, businesses to local communities. By shifting perspectives and fostering cooperation, we can develop sustainable solutions that deliver long-term benefits for both people and nature."

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