



ECOSYSTEM APPROACH FOR INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT OF WATER SOURCES AND BIODIVERSITY OF THE MIDDLE BRENTA AREA

LAYMAN'S REPORT
LIFE BRENTA 2030 PROJECT



LIFE BRENTA 2030: TAKING
CARE OF A RIVER, ITS
BIODIVERSITY, AND THE
PEOPLE WHO LIVE BY IT.

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Promoted by



The LIFE Brenta 2030 project (LIFE18 NAT/IT/000756) has received funding from the LIFE Nature and Biodiversity program. The program was established by the European Commission to support the development and implementation of EU environmental policy.

THE CONTEXT

Historical Background

The Brenta River has always been a crucial communication route, connecting the **Alps** with the **Adriatic Sea**, serving as a transit area for people and goods.

The river was already renowned in **prehistoric times** and became even more so during the **Roman Empire**. Several centuries later, the **Republic of Venice** harnessed its power to transport the logs needed for the construction of the wooden piles that still support the city today.



Piling Workers
Source: venicewiki.org

Natura 2000 Network



The **Middle Brenta area**, which extends for 70 km from Bassano del Grappa to Padua, is recognized at the European level and included in the **Natura 2000 Network** for its environmental and cultural significance, under the designation "**SAC/SPA IT3260018 Grave e Zone Umide della Brenta.**"

This area is a true natural oasis, featuring enchanting landscapes, a rich artistic heritage, and **numerous opportunities** for those who wish to explore it: fishing ponds, educational farms, agritourisms, historic villas and monasteries, an impressive number of riding stables for beautiful horseback rides, and the famous Brenta cycle path.

The Natura 2000 Network is a **system of protected areas within the European Union**, an ecological network established to ensure the preservation of natural habitats and species of flora and fauna that are threatened or rare at the EU level.

Natural heritage

The Brenta River environment includes riverbeds, floodplain areas, abandoned meanders, lacustrine steppes, and wetlands with reed beds and other riparian vegetation, resulting from past excavations.

This complex of habitats is important for rare and localized bird species, serving as a nesting and wintering site for many of them.

In this context, the Brenta River plays a crucial role as an **ecological corridor**, providing refuge for a multitude of animal species, thanks in part to the variety of environments that characterize it.

"Wetlands and watercourses are among the most vulnerable ecosystems, yet they are also essential reservoirs of biodiversity on a global scale. Through the project, site management has been optimized by updating databases on biodiversity and addressing the pressures threatening its conservation, as well as by assigning management responsibilities to a well-established local entity specializing in the provision of ecosystem services. Additionally, the rehabilitation of approximately 20 hectares of riparian habitat has been promoted through soil function restoration and the reintroduction of herbaceous, shrub, and tree species characteristic of these environments."



Tommaso Sitzia
Associate Professor
TESAF Department - University of Padua

THE PROJECT

The Middle Brenta area spans across **2 provinces** (Vicenza and Padua) and **16 municipalities** (Bassano Del Grappa, Nove, Cartigliano, Tezze Sul Brenta, Pozzoleone, Cittadella, Carmignano di Brenta, Fontaniva, Grantorto, Piazzola sul Brenta, San Giorgio in Bosco, Campo San Martino, Curtarolo, Limena, Vigodarzere, and Padua). Additionally, the aquifers of the Middle Brenta are of strategic regional importance for drinking water extraction, as the wells in Camazzole (Carmignano di Brenta, PD) supply potable water to over **1.5 million people** across the provinces of Vicenza, Padua, Venice, and Rovigo (approximately 30% of the regional population). In this context, the following issues have been identified as **threats to the conservation of the river ecosystem and its resources**.

Lack of effective and structured local governance

Due to the vast geographical extent and the multifunctionality of the ecosystem, the area has seen the involvement of numerous entities, each applying **practices and policies** that **often contradicted one another in the management of the land and resources**.

This situation frequently led to land-use conflicts within the Natura 2000 site, which for a long time lacked a local managing authority and the necessary funding to support management efforts. Additionally, this has resulted in a **lack of natural heritage enhancement** and the inability to effectively implement certain environmental regulations in the area.

Progressive decline in groundwater levels

Over the years, the Middle Brenta area has experienced a steady **increase in the exploitation of water resources**, primarily due to water extraction activities for drinking, industrial, and agricultural purposes. Excessive groundwater extraction has led to a consequent **decline in groundwater levels** and the gradual **disappearance of highly natural ecosystems**.

In addition to human activities, the **current climate crisis** has further amplified the impacts on water resources and local ecosystems. Extreme weather events are becoming more frequent, coinciding with prolonged drought periods and intense, concentrated rainfall events.

Anthropogenic impacts and improper use of the area

The Middle Brenta area is characterized by **significant human presence** (settlements, intensive agriculture, industrial areas), which **directly impacts the environment**. In particular, **intensive farming** practices contribute to the ecological fragmentation of the territory, leading to a gradual loss of biodiversity. In addition to agriculture, **improper use of the area** also poses an environmental risk.

The lack of awareness and sensitivity toward the ecological value of the territory has led to harmful behaviors (widespread littering, ecosystem degradation, disregard for basic regulations, etc.) by the population, mostly local or associated with nearby tourism.

"Water basin management requires an integrated approach that creates synergies between resource management and its natural aspects, utilizing Nature-based Solutions and Green Infrastructure. For this reason, it is important to connect the institutions responsible for different water uses (civil society, local authorities, and businesses) to promote management approaches and interventions that can meet multiple needs: mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity conservation, and protection of water sources. Governance is of primary importance in creating strategic partnerships that can bring together skills and resources useful for basin management. LIFE Brenta 2030 is an excellent example of a project that has invested in a participatory governance strategy and integrated financing. This has made it a replicable and enduring project."



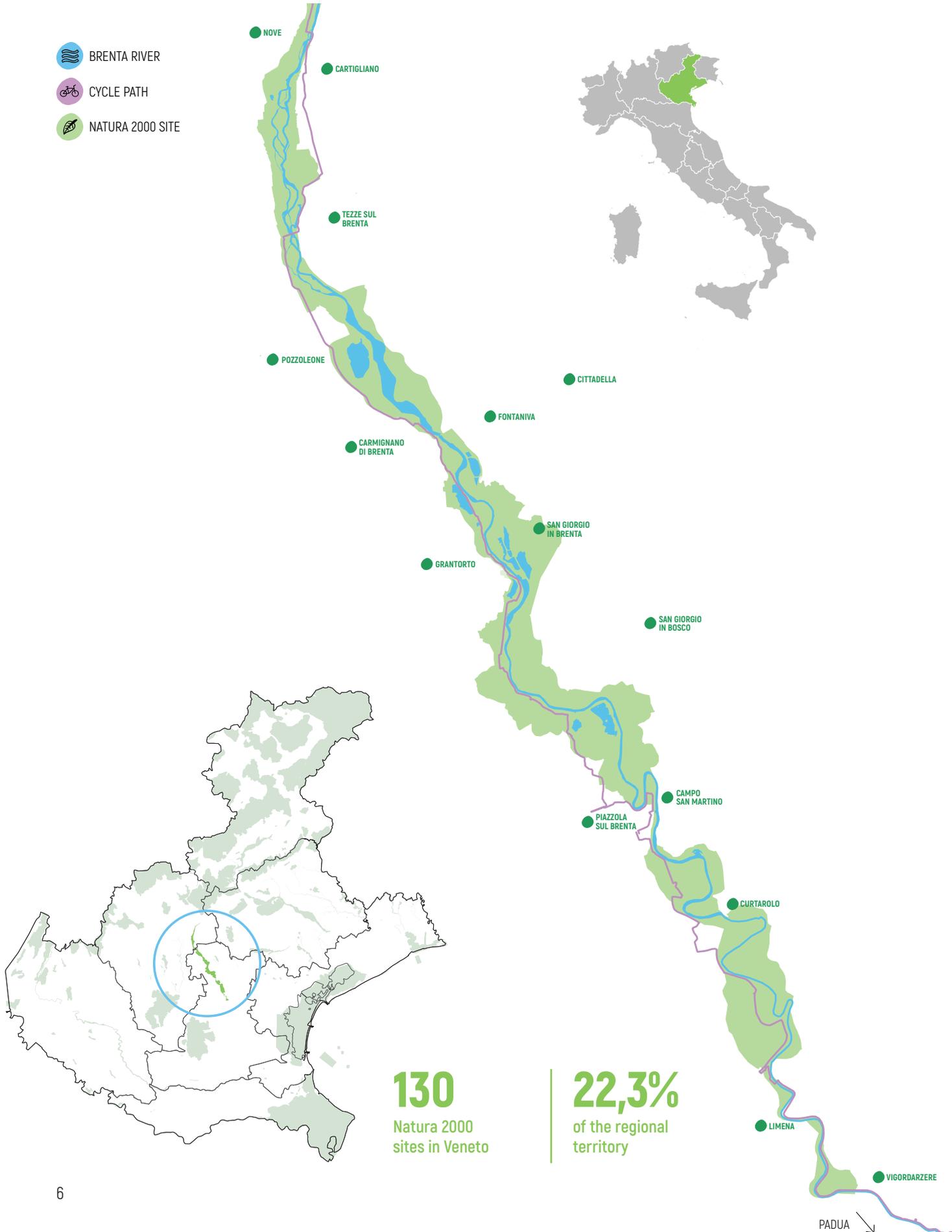
Alessandro Leonardi
CEO
Etifor | Valuing Nature



THE NATURA 2000 NETWORK

The "Grave e Zone Umide della Brenta" Site

- BRENTA RIVER
- CYCLE PATH
- NATURA 2000 SITE



130
Natura 2000
sites in Veneto

22,3%
of the regional
territory



INTERVENTION AREAS



1

OASI DI CROSARA Nove (VI)

The history of the municipality of Nove is **closely linked to the Brenta River**: the town is situated on the river's alluvial fan at the border with Bassano del Grappa, and part of its territory, once the riverbed, was formed by stone deposits, floods – commonly known as “**brentane**” – and the acquisition of land resulting from the gradual diversion of the river itself. The current square of Nove and the eastern part of the town were once the river's bed and wide channel.

The Oasi di Crosara is located on the right bank of the Brenta River and corresponds to the river's floodplain area. It serves **recreational purposes** and is also home to numerous **wetland habitats** within the Natura 2000 site.



Marble trout



Common barbel



2

GIARETTA BASIN Carmignano di Brenta (PD)

The Giaretta Basin, also known as “**Busa de Giaretta**” or “**Lake of Camazzole**”, is a former quarry area of approximately 40 hectares located near the Brenta River. The area was decommissioned in the mid-1990s after the formation of a large and deep water body fed by the aquifer.

Today, it is a wetland habitat of great interest for various species of **migratory and resident birds**, including waders such as the common snipe, ruff, and greenshank, birds of prey like the osprey, and ducks such as the tufted duck and common pochard. Additionally, there are rarer and more sporadic **aquatic species**, such as the red-throated loon and red-necked grebe, as well as **nesting species** like the great crested grebe, coot, little grebe, and little bittern.



Black-crowned night heron



European bee-eater

Nove

1

Cartigliano

3

4

Tezze sul

2

Carmignano di

3

LE BASSE DEL BRENTA Cartigliano (VI)

The territory of Cartigliano was shaped by the numerous and devastating floods of the Brenta River. The first documented flood dates back to 589 AD, during the Lombard invasion: a tremendous **flood** caused by extraordinary rains struck the Italian peninsula, disrupting the course of several rivers, including the Brenta. The river overflowed and spread across the surrounding countryside, eventually settling into the riverbed that still contains it today. Even the course of the river changed; it previously flowed east of Cartigliano but has since shifted to the west.

Le Basse del Brenta is a natural area characterized by a mix of hay meadows, hedges, ditches, and wetlands that provide habitats for biodiversity. A recent discovery in this area is the presence of the **Lataste's frog**.



Lataste's frog



Great crested newt

4

PARCO DELL'AMICIZIA Tezze sul Brenta (VI)

Among the municipal parks in the Vicenza area, Parco dell'Amicizia in Tezze sul Brenta is one of the largest, covering over **25,000 square meters** of the Brenta River floodplain.

This green area provides **recreational services** to the community and contributes to the **conservation of local biodiversity**. The park is known for its rich flora, which includes many native species of trees and plants, both planted and naturally growing along the banks of the Brenta River.



Eurasian bittern



Little egret

OBJECTIVES

The LIFE Brenta 2030 project, “**Promotion of good governance and innovative financing schemes for biodiversity and water conservation of Brenta River**” was launched in 2019 with the aim of addressing the critical issues threatening the conservation of the river ecosystem and its resources in four strategic intervention areas.

The project is part of the broader **Parco Fiume Brenta initiative**, a participatory public/private governance process established in 2017 to improve land management, enhance biodiversity, and preserve the river's water resources. The project was co-financed by the **European Union's LIFE Program** and involved **seven partners**: ETRA, Etifor, Consiglio di Bacino Brenta, TESAF Department of the University of Padua, Veneto Acque, Veneto Agricoltura, and the Municipality of Carmignano di Brenta.



By focusing on the management synergies between the water service and the Natura 2000 Network, the project aimed to **improve and integrate land management** to protect water resources and conserve the biodiversity of the “Grave e Zone Umide della Brenta” site.

In particular, the project addressed the identified issues through three specific objectives:

- 1. Strengthen the local governance system and the economic sustainability of management;**
- 2. Increase the area and ecosystem services of the Brenta's multifunctional areas;**
- 3. Mitigate anthropogenic impacts.**

2,6 mln

€ co-financed at 60% by the European Union

70

km, the length of the Middle Brenta area

1,5 mln

people supplied with water drawn from the Middle Brenta

13

sponsors

7

partner companies

31

supporters



WHERE DOES THE WATER WE DRINK EVERY DAY COME FROM?

RESULTS

New governance model for integrated land management



To improve the governance of the protected area of the Middle Brenta, an **institutional process** was initiated in 2020 aimed at creating a shared vision and identifying a local manager for the area.

With the involvement of all local authorities (15 riverside municipalities), the project partners, and the Veneto Region, a governance model was developed that led to the identification of the **Consiglio di Bacino Brenta (CBB)** as the **new manager** of the Natura 2000 site. The CBB, a second-level local entity that includes all local authorities in the area, took on a key role after contributing to the revision of the regional law LR 24/2012, which concerns the management of Natura 2000 sites.

This legislative amendment, supported by collaboration with the Regional Parks and Biodiversity Strategy Unit of the Veneto Region, led to the delegation of management of the "Grave e Zone Umide della Brenta" site from the Region to the CBB, formalized by Regional Resolution No. 965 on 31/07/2023.

The LIFE Brenta 2030 project promoted a **participatory approach** that not only improved local governance but also achieved a significant institutional outcome for the strategic, integrated, and effective management of the resources and territory of the Middle Brenta.



DO YOU WANT TO PROTECT
THE WATER RESOURCES YOU
MANAGE?

The path to establish a local managing authority for the Natura 2000 site



2019

Start of the LIFE Brenta 2030 project

2020

Strategic commitment of the 15 riverside municipalities to the LIFE Brenta 2030 project.

Beginning of the participatory local governance process and creation of a shared vision.

2021

Amendment of Regional Law 24/2012 and expansion of the entities eligible to manage Natura 2000 sites.

2022

Nomination of the Consiglio di Bacino Brenta as the managing authority.

Initiation of the approval process.

2023

Regional government resolution: delegation of the management of the Natura 2000 site to the Consiglio di Bacino Brenta.



2024

Conclusion of the LIFE Brenta 2030 project and new roles for local authorities.

From regulators of the Integrated Water Service to guardians of nature: the mayors' choice.

"I am pleased to acknowledge the outcome of this participatory process, which has led to the delegation of management to the CBB as the managing authority. The maturity of the administrators and the constructive dialogue allowed us to overcome parochialism and fragmented visions that were not conducive to unified management of the site. I am especially proud to highlight that we unanimously succeeded in avoiding the creation of a new, separate overarching entity, which would have been yet another superstructure with additional costs. Instead, the experience and vision of the optimal territorial area now extend to biodiversity protection in an innovative synergy."



Luca Pierobon
President
Consiglio di Bacino Brenta

Innovative funding system for biodiversity and water resource conservation

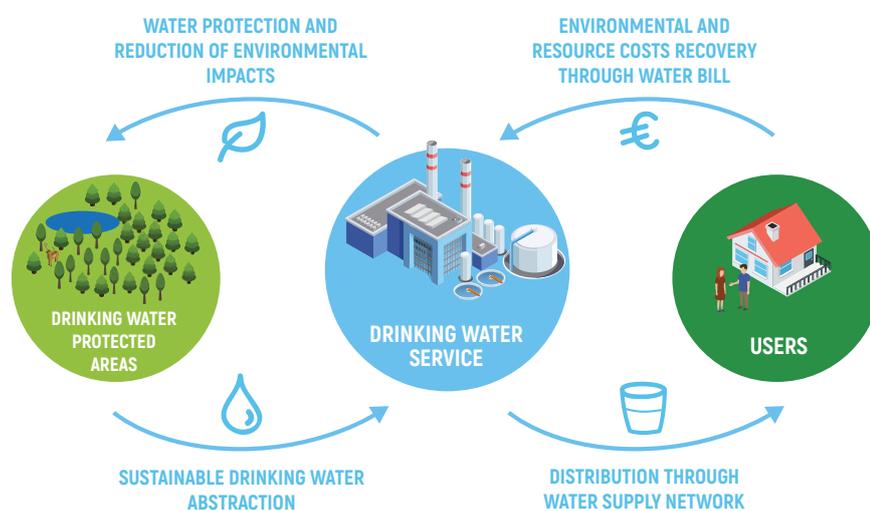


In the context of the current climate crisis, the proper management of natural resources takes on strategic importance from an adaptation perspective.

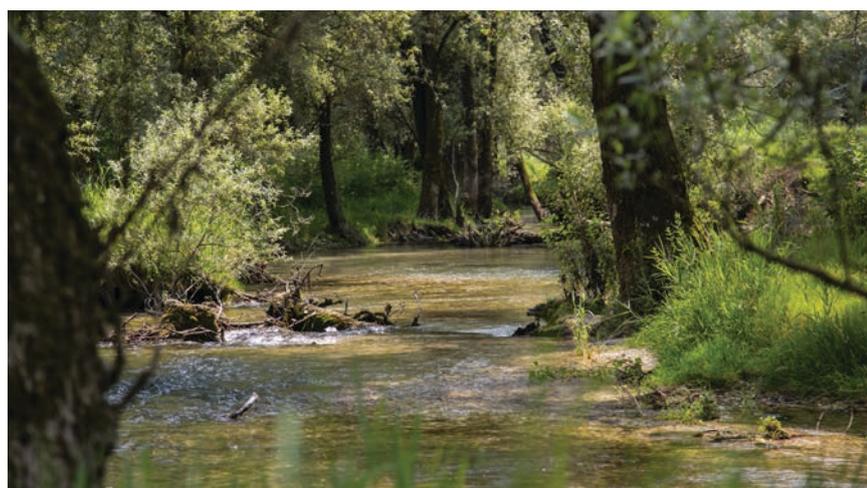
For this reason, in the potable water sector, it is necessary to reassess how the Integrated Water Service interacts with the territory and to fully apply the European principles of full cost recovery and the polluter/user pays principle by recognizing the so-called Environmental and Resource Costs (ERC) in the tariff structure. This represents a political, cultural, and technical shift that involves revising tariff components and raising awareness among citizens.

As part of the LIFE Brenta 2030 project, the integration of this new type of cost into the tariff was tested on a basin-wide scale; the initial test was positively received by the Regulatory Authority for Energy, Networks, and Environment (ARERA) and serves as a **pioneering case** for other basins interested in developing this mechanism.

In the Strategic Plan of the Consiglio di Bacino Brenta, **1 million euros have been allocated for environmental mitigation interventions**, which, in the coming years, will aim to reduce and compensate for the impacts of the Integrated Water Service within protected areas, thus benefiting water resources and biodiversity.



The integrated water service: an example of circular economy



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO PRESERVE RIVER HABITATS?

Environmental restoration and planting work

Wow

In the 4 intervention sites (Carmignano di Brenta, Cartigliano, Nove, and Tezze sul Brenta), **restoration and creation of new habitats** were carried out. These interventions included soil movement, the planting of **9,500 forest seedlings** (both trees and shrubs) and **33,565 seedlings of hygrophilous herbaceous species**, as well as **11,788 mesophilic flowering herbaceous plants**, all specially produced by the Veneto Agricoltura nursery.

Overall, **11.5 hectares of alluvial forest** (habitat 91E0*) were rehabilitated and restored, and **14.3 hectares of wet, dry** (habitat 6210), and **poor grasslands** (habitat 6510) were improved. Additionally, **1 km of hedgerows** was restored, and **9 new wetland areas** were created.

These interventions were also made possible thanks to the contributions of local citizens and businesses that chose to support the project through the website www.wownature.eu.

9.500

new forest seedlings

33.565

hygrophilous herbaceous seedlings

11.788

new mesophilic herbaceous plants

11,5 ha

of alluvial forest rehabilitated

14,3 ha

of wet, dry, and poor grasslands improved

9

new wetland areas created



Environmental surveillance and waste collection service



Through the LIFE Brenta 2030 project, Etra initiated a specific **environmental surveillance, monitoring, and waste collection service** for the Middle Brenta river corridor. Using an electric vehicle, operators patrolled the riverside area and the main recreational sites within the Natura 2000 site to **report** any critical situations, **address** issues, and **collect** abandoned waste.

This initiative is an excellent example of how coordination among the riverside municipalities can lead to better, more efficient, and safer management of a shared resource.

85 t
of waste collected

335
truckloads of waste

214
issues resolved



Infrastructure for reducing the impact of recreational use



To reduce the impact of recreational use, **improvements were made to 2 km of paths** through the installation of fences and walkways. Additionally, **integrated signage** was implemented along the entire river course, thereby enhancing accessibility and safety for visitors.



Environmental education and awareness



Environmental education is a fundamental tool for raising awareness among citizens and communities, providing them with the means to understand the surrounding environment and build a more sustainable future. Over the years, we have promoted **awareness campaigns** aimed at the local population through various activities that have helped people better understand the natural environment of the Middle Brenta and the relationship between the environment and drinking water.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

A program designed for schools in the riverside municipalities, organized by Etra Academy, to teach children about the importance of biodiversity and the water in their river.

AWARENESS EVENTS AND WASTE COLLECTION IN THE AREA

Targeted at schools in the riverside municipalities that hosted educational activities, as well as associations and citizens. In 2023, we also participated in the global initiative *Home River Bioblitz*, a global citizen science event dedicated to local rivers.

SEMINARS AND FIELD VISITS FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Focused on specific environmental topics for graduate students at the University of Padua enrolled in courses on protected area management, forest and rural economy and policy, hydrogeology, and related fields.

TRAINING COURSE FOR MUNICIPALITIES AND ASSOCIATIONS OF THE BRENTA AREA

Targeted at municipal technicians, environmental and ecology assessors, local authorities, and environmental and civil society associations, with the aim of deepening their understanding of the natural, managerial, and economic aspects of the Natura 2000 site.

8.000

students
involved

468

school
interventions

2.450

citizens
involved

29

ecological
days

15

municipalities with
integrated signage

6

university
seminars



HOW CAN YOU TAKE
CARE OF THE RIVERS
IN OUR AREA?

Biodiversity and water monitoring



The LIFE Brenta 2030 project carried out **biodiversity monitoring** (habitats and species within the Natura 2000 site) and **water resource monitoring**, expanding the existing monitoring network around the Camazzole wells and integrating it with new analytical parameters.

For the monitoring of habitats and species, an integrated approach was adopted, involving numerous **field surveys** across various taxonomic groups. This monitoring allowed for the assessment of the performance of the ecological restoration interventions planned by the project, as well as updating knowledge on the conservation status of habitats and species, which was summarized in an updated version of the standard data form. The field monitoring was further enhanced by an **aerial "Lidar" survey**, which provided a high-definition orthophoto of the entire Natura 2000 site.

Regarding water resources, knowledge of the system was improved through the implementation of two specific monitoring measures: a quantitative and a qualitative one.

Quantitative monitoring involved periodic chemical-physical measurements (flow rate, groundwater levels, river levels, basic chemistry) to **assess the quantitative state** of the resource. The monitoring period coincided with two particularly dry years (2022 and 2023), providing valuable information for managing climate change impacts.

Qualitative monitoring was developed using a risk-based approach: starting with the identification of pressure sources for the area of interest, hazards to ecosystems and water resources were identified. Based on this information, a targeted analytical monitoring program was implemented, introducing new parameters beyond those in existing monitoring plans.

Using data from the quantitative and qualitative monitoring, combined with stratigraphic data and field surveys, a **3D model** of the aquifer was also developed.

Online resources for the Parco Fiume Brenta community



The website **www.parcofiumebrenta.it** is a valuable resource for anyone interested in exploring the LIFE Brenta 2030 project and discovering the various aspects of the Middle Brenta area. The site offers an intuitive user interface, making it easy to navigate through a variety of **educational content**, enriched with a regularly updated **news section** and an option to subscribe to a quarterly **newsletter dedicated** to the latest updates and progress of the project.

In addition to regular updates, the site serves as a **hub of resources and tools useful** for both citizens and local administrations. Among its most notable features is an **interactive map** of the Brenta, allowing users to explore the hidden treasures and natural beauty of this rich territory.

For **local administrations**, the site offers a dedicated page that includes a form for requesting assistance in organizing ecological events, thus facilitating community involvement in sustainable initiatives. Additionally, a rich resource section provides access to **online training courses, thematic webinars, detailed project progress reports, and a wide range of publications**. These resources are designed to enhance users' knowledge, providing educational and informational tools that support continuous learning and direct action for environmental conservation.

Alongside the website, we have also developed a **Facebook page** over the years that has engaged a large community of citizens who are interested in and attentive to the project's themes. This page has become a reference point not only for project updates but also as a collector of all news and events related to natural conservation in the area. Within the Facebook page and the **YouTube playlist** dedicated to the project, numerous videos are available, created to raise public awareness on various environmental topics.

6.200
people in the online
FB community

1.700
newsletter
subscribers

100
media
appearances



SUMMARY OF IMPACTS

Data updated as of March 31, 2024



MANAGEMENT IMPROVEMENTS

- 1 integrated governance system for the Middle Brenta area
- 1 online training course on Natura 2000 and water protection areas
- 1 Decision Support System (DSS) for calculating Environmental and Resource Costs (ERC) and producing intervention scenarios



ENVIRONMENTAL FUND

- Application of Environmental and Resource Costs (ERC) in the tariff system of the Integrated Water Service: the first case at the national level
- €1M for environmental mitigation interventions already included in the Strategic Plan



ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS

- 25.8 hectares of habitats improved and restored in the riverside area
- 54,853 plantings, including forest trees and shrubs, hygrophilous herbaceous species, and mesophilic flowering herbaceous plants
- 9 new wetlands created



SUPPORT FOR FARMERS

- Involvement of 60 farmers
- Facilitated access to €2.5 million in funding to improve land use sustainability
- 40.6 hectares of areas converted to more sustainable use



MONITORING

- 1 3D model of the Middle Brenta aquifer
- 1 HD orthophoto of the Natura 2000 site
- Updated standard data form for the Natura 2000 site



ENVIRONMENTAL SURVEILLANCE AND WASTE COLLECTION

- 85 tons of waste collected
- 216 reports of special waste
- 214 reports resolved



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

- 468 classroom interventions on water and biodiversity topics
- 4 editions of the "Parco Fiume Brenta" contest organized by Etra Academy
- 16 classes participated in the contest with projects on the Brenta
- Approximately 8,000 students from primary and secondary schools in the riverside municipalities involved
- 6 seminars for university classes, with 120 students involved
- 2,450 people involved in 29 ecological and environmental awareness days
- Integrated signage for the 15 municipalities of the Middle Brenta



COMMUNICATION

- 6,200 people in the online Facebook community
- 1,700 contacts in the newsletter database
- 100 media appearances

FUTURE SCENARIO

The Parco Fiume Brenta initiative is the result of a territorial alliance built through the LIFE Brenta 2030 project and, earlier, the Brenta 2030 Operational Group (co-financed by the Veneto Rural Development Program 2014-2020). This collaboration will not end with the conclusion of the project; instead, it will continue, with its scope of action defined by the **After-LIFE Plan** signed by all partners of LIFE Brenta 2030.

The significant effort to secure complementary funding has allowed the launch of several important and far-reaching projects to ensure the continuation of the project's core actions.

InnWater

Funding: €2.8 million (€0.5 million for the Brenta)

Duration: 2023-2026

A Horizon Europe project aimed at promoting innovations in water service governance; the Middle Brenta is one of five case studies at the European level.

NatConnect2030

Funding: €46 million (€0.7 million for the Brenta)

Duration: 2024-2032

A LIFE Strategic Project for Nature, aimed at achieving the biodiversity conservation objectives outlined in the Habitat Directive through the development of policies and management actions for the Natura 2000 Network. In the Natura 2000 site of the Middle Brenta, ecological restoration and connectivity restoration interventions will be carried out over a total area of 37 hectares.

WasteReduce

Funding: €1.6 million (€0.5 million for the Brenta)

Duration: 2024-2026

An Interreg Italy-Croatia project aimed at developing a strategy to prevent, reduce, and manage the presence of waste within protected areas and Natura 2000 sites. The "Grave e Zone Umide della Brenta" site is the only Italian case study in the project.

ETRA - THE FIRST MULTIUTILITY TOWARD THE NATURE POSITIVE GOAL

Thanks to the growth achieved through the LIFE Brenta 2030 project and in line with the latest regulations on ESG reporting and sustainability, as well as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, in 2024 and 2025, Etra will work to define a group strategy and policy for its three main sectors (water, waste, energy), integrating it with the pillars of the Sustainability Plan and the impact reporting related to the Benefit Corporation. This will involve setting clear objectives for reducing and neutralizing impacts on water, biodiversity, and climate, with the goal of contributing to a Nature Positive economy by 2030.



Parco
fiume
Brenta
LIFE
2014

Insieme per il futuro del Brenta



Project
LIFE Brenta 2030



Con il contributo dello strumento finanziario LIFE dell'Unione Europea LIFE18-NAT_IT_000756

Project Action

E1: Development of Communication and Dissemination Tools

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Comune di Cittadella



Comune di Curtarolo



Comune di Fontaniva



Comune di Grantorto



Comune di Limena



Comune di Nove



Comune di Piazzola sul Brenta



Comune di Pozzoleone



Comune di San Giorgio in Bosco



Comune di Tezze sul Brenta



Comune di Vigodarzere





www.parcofiumebrenta.it

