MERLiN

Bringing Europe's freshwaters back to life

Europe's environments are in an alarming state. Habitat destruction and biodiversity loss pose severe threats to human wellbeing and economic prosperity, and climate change is expected to further aggravate the situation. There is an urgent need to restore healthy, resilient ecosystems across the continent.

Funded by
the European Union

Creating blueprints for successful freshwater restoration

Ecosystem restoration – sometimes called 'rewilding' – is a hot topic globally. But there is a pressing need for best-practice guidance for restoring rivers, lakes and wetlands. Through engaging with 17 flagship restoration projects across Europe, MERLIN will generate blueprints for successful freshwater restoration. MERLIN is investing more than €10 million in these projects to explore social, economic and environmental factors that shape their success.

Showing how freshwater restoration ripples benefits across landscapes

MERLIN focuses on the potential of 'nature-based solutions' for freshwater restoration. These are approaches which aim to use natural processes to help tackle socio-environmental challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss and flooding. Nature-based solutions – such as restoring natural river courses, rewetting floodplains or removing dams – thus have the potential to benefit all our lives, supporting key environmental legislation such as the EU Green Deal.

Making an economic case for freshwater restoration

Freshwater restoration has the potential to foster significant economic opportunities: supporting green business, sustainable agriculture and expanded opportunities for recreation. MERLIN illustrates environmental value chains, and the costs and benefits of nature-based solutions for selected European regions. Further, MERLIN offers models for private investment into restoration alongside public funding, tailored to contexts specific for economic sectors and countries.

Ecosystem restoration is key to this process. Freshwaters have a vital role to play in restoring healthy ecosystems at the heart of our everyday lives. The restoration of European streams, rivers, peatlands and wetlands has a rich tradition and an extensive knowledge base. Freshwaters – from urban rivers to remote mountain lakes – are important demonstrators of the necessary change.

The MERLIN project supports transformative freshwater restoration, mainstreaming nature-based solutions to foster greener, more sustainable European societies and economies.

Mainstreaming freshwater restoration in everyday life

Naturally-flowing rivers, healthy lakes, flourishing wetlands and intact peatlands are all symbols of a greener, more sustainable society. MERLIN collaborates closely with local communities and key economic sectors such as agriculture, water supply, navigation and insurance to guide freshwater restoration across Europe. This process helps negotiate local trade-offs in implementing fresh-water restoration whilst highlighting its wide-ranging social, economic and environmental benefits.

Supporting freshwater restoration champions: both now and in the future

MERLIN is creating online tools to support environmental managers, scientists, policy makers, investors and activists in making freshwater restoration projects happen.
The MERLIN Marketplace connects restoration practitioners, offers restoration-related services, and brokers restoration financing.
The MERLIN Academy offers training, workshops and cutting-edge science to spread the word about bringing Europe's freshwaters back to life.

Fostering a European community of freshwater practice

MERLIN is a 'research and innovation action' funded under the European Commission's H2020 programme. The project is a collaboration between 45 European partners, including universities, research institutes, nature conservation organisations, and stakeholders from business, government, municipalities.

MERLIN is coordinated by University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany.

17 flagship restoration projects across Europe

- Peatlands and wetlands
- Small streams and basins
- Large transboundary rivers

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