



WORK PACKAGE 4: ENABLE GOVERNANCE
FOR TRANSFORMATION

BEYOND TARGETS: HOW VALUES CAN UNLOCK STAKEHOLDER SUPPORT FOR PEATLAND RESTORATION IN THE EU

RAINFOREST POLICY BRIEF
AUGUST 2025



Prepared By
Christopher Wong

wong@iiasa.ac.at

horizon.eu/wp4.html



This project is funded by the European Union's
Horizon Europe research and innovation programme
under grant agreement no. 101081744.

The Importance of Peatland Restoration

Europe's peatlands are critical for climate mitigation and biodiversity as the world's most effective terrestrial carbon stores and as habitats and shelters for many endemic and migratory species. But, traditionally, the management of peatlands has focused on economic activities that produce financial returns such as crop production, livestock grazing and peat cutting for fuel that degrade peatlands. These activities negatively impact other benefits that can be derived from well-functioning peatlands such as carbon storage and sequestering, biodiversity protection, water and flood management and cultural and recreational activities. For example, the drainage and conversion of peatlands to agriculture transforms them into net sources of GHG emissions[1]. Currently in the EU, agriculture on drained peatlands accounts for the majority of the ≈ 220 Mt CO₂eq per year emitted ($\approx 5\%$ of total EU emissions) but could under modelled protection and restoration scenarios become a carbon sink[2][3].

In response to the growing awareness of the benefits of well-functioning peatlands, there have been increased efforts to restore peatlands, such as those part of the EU LIFE Programme, and the inclusion of peatland restoration targets in key EU regulations, such as the highly contested EU Nature Restoration Law and the Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) 2 as part of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2023-2027. While these policies signal a strong commitment, a significant implementation deficit persists.

Understanding Values in Peatland Restoration

The majority of previous policy analysis has focused on institutional barriers to implementation; including fragmented policy frameworks, a lack of long-term and diversified funding, and insufficient technical and institutional capacity. But there also needs to be an understanding of the values and worldviews held by stakeholders for peatland restoration, especially in agricultural landscapes, as nature conservation and restoration policy exists at a nexus of political, economic and social debates over land and resource use and the allocation of the derived benefits. In order to tailor policy interventions so that they are consistent and coherent to the range of worldviews that exist.

In the IPBES (2022) Assessment Report on the Diverse Values and Valuation of Nature, values and worldviews are identified as “deep leverage points” that increase the effectiveness and stability of policy interventions because they impact policy acceptability through their adherence to stakeholder worldviews and values [4]. A key development to the utilisation of worldviews as a leverage point to improve the viability of policy pathways is the understanding of the importance of justice preferences because the perceived fairness of policies is key to their acceptability. During this research project, we identified the most common valuations of nature and justice preferences around peatland restoration at the EU, national and subnational levels through stakeholder interviews, document reviews and workshops to produce a set of value coherent pathways for peatland restoration.

Three Competing Pathways for Peatland Restoration



Peatland Preservation and Protection

The Peatland Preservation and Protection pathway is based on stakeholders, such as conservation NGOs, that had high instrumental valuation of nature in the form of meeting environmental objectives such as carbon sequestration and increasing biodiversity. This pathway has limited belief in the autonomy of nature as the restoration of peatlands required human intervention in the form of water table management and reintroduction of previously endemic species.

The procedural justice preferences in this pathway were inclined towards expert opinion and a top down regulatory approaches to promote change and so the policy preferences were towards greater regulatory protection of intact peatland to stop any further degradation and loss of ecosystem services and towards traditional conservation methods such as protected areas to create wet wilderness.

The policy preferences for implementing this pathway were through the establishment of mandatory targets in environmental laws such as the EU Nature

Restoration Law, the prohibition of peat extracted products for horticulture and the removal of subsidies in CAP payments to reduce viability of agriculture on drained peatlands.



Market Creation for Peatland Ecosystem Services

The market creation for peatland ecosystem services pathway is based on stakeholders, such as landowner lobbies, that have a high instrumental valuation of nature in the form of commercial value extraction. The justice preferences associated with this pathway include procedural justice preferences towards market mechanisms and recognitional justice preferences towards ownership and sovereign land rights.

The policy preferences for this pathway is for market creation for payments for ecosystem services from intact or rewetted peatlands, e.g. carbon credits, on a voluntary basis with no set targets for rewetting of peatlands. This would be facilitated by EU funding through investment funds such as NCFF and ACEM. It was also accompanied by preferences towards EU policy to focus on research and information campaigns around best practice so producers and consumers could make informed decisions around peatland carbon credits with clear rules on additionality, quantification, (hydrological) monitoring, auditing etc.



Peatland Stewardship

This pathway focuses on stakeholders, such as smallholders and family farmers, that highly regard the importance of local culture in the valuation of peatland as central to more sustainable land uses and is critical of purely instrumental valuations and was accompanied with low regard for the autonomy of nature, preferring managed landscapes. The justice preferences in this pathway tend towards high levels of participation in decision making with local people and high levels of concern for local development and the protection of vulnerable groups.

The policy preferences for this pathway are for the protection of peatlands through wet agricultural methods, such as the cultivation of blueberries, with protections for local communities through schemes such as minimum incomes for farmers and farm workers.

Recommendations

- **EU policies should support all value systems and cater to different justice preferences.**

Currently, the EU is perceived to be focused on the Peatland Preservation and Protection pathway, with limited regard for the diverse usages and importance of peatlands across Europe, especially

with regard to the targets set in the Nature Restoration Law. To increase support for peatland restoration it is necessary to diversify the policy mix to target those beyond this value group to those that have greater interests in commercial and cultural values, such as highlighting the EU's Nature Credits framework alongside other more regulatory approaches such as the NRL.

- **EU policies and strategies should be aware of terminology that has negative connotations or limited cognizance.**

The usage of terms such as “rewetting” can create concerns within local communities for fear of flooding and limiting access to land. More neutral terms, such as water table management, can be preferable because of the preferences for managed landscapes held by local groups. There are, also, issues around using terms, like “paludiculture” because there is limited awareness of these terms so extending more commonly used terms with examples, such as “wet agriculture e.g. blueberry cultivation”, can lead to more positive responses.

- **The EU should increase awareness and knowledge of peatland restoration measures.**

Additional support for local initiatives that spread knowledge and awareness of peatland restoration measures within local contexts are necessary to allay fears held about “rewetting”, e.g. via demonstration sites. This would support stakeholders with preferences towards more voluntary and local decision making and for those that have preferences for managed landscapes which is common among the farming community.

REFERENCES

- [1] Hemes, K. S., Chamberlain, S. D., Eichelmann, E., Anthony, T., Valach, A., Kasak, K., ... & Baldocchi, D. D. (2019). Assessing the carbon and climate benefit of restoring degraded agricultural peat soils to managed wetlands. *Agricultural and Forest Meteorology*, 268, 202-214.
- [2] Humpenöder, F., Karstens, K., Lotze-Campen, H., Leifeld, J., Menichetti, L., Barthelmes, A., & Popp, A. (2020). Peatland protection and restoration are key for climate change mitigation. *Environmental Research Letters*, 15(10), 104093.
- [3] Günther A, Barthelmes A, Huth V, Joosten H, Jurasinski G, Koebisch F and Couwenberg J (2020). Prompt rewetting of drained peatlands reduces climate warming despite methane emissions *Nat. Commun.* 11 1–5.
- [4] IPBES. (2022). Methodological assessment of the diverse values and valuation of nature of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.6522522>.

ABOUT RAINFOREST HEU

Food and biomass production systems are among the most prominent drivers of biodiversity loss worldwide. Halting and reversing the loss of biodiversity therefore requires transformative change of food and biomass systems, addressing the nexus of agricultural production, processing and transport, retailing, consumer preferences and diets, as well as investment, climate action and ecosystem conservation and restoration. The RAINFOREST project will contribute to enabling, upscaling and accelerating transformative change to reduce biodiversity impacts of major food and biomass value chains. Together with stakeholders, we will co-develop and evaluate just and viable transformative change pathways and interventions. We will identify stakeholder preferences for a range of policy and technology-based solutions, as well as governance enablers, for more sustainable food and biomass value chains. We will then evaluate these pathways and solutions using a novel combination of integrated assessment modelling, input-output modelling and life cycle assessment, based on case studies in various stages of the nexus, at different spatial scales and organizational levels. This coproduction approach enables the identification and evaluation of just and viable transformative change leverage points, levers and their impacts for conserving biodiversity (SDGs 12, 14-15) that minimize trade-offs with targets related to climate (SDG13) and socioeconomic developments (SDGs 1-3). We will elucidate leverage points, impacts, and obstacles for transformative change and provide concrete and actionable recommendations for transformative change for consumers, producers, investors, and policymakers.

PARTNERS

