



Climate-smart rewilding for Europe

Report on rewilding conflicts and conflict management strategies in the wildE Rewilding Case Study countries in view of EU policies

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Summary

This report (D2.3) is the key outcome of the task 'Rewilding policies and politics: assessing acceptability, conflicts and their management' (Task 2.3) conducted within the European Union's Horizon Europe project wildE. The main goal of this report is to summarise, synthesise and discuss the outcomes of (I) an institutional analysis of the rewilding policy framework and (II) an analysis of rewilding conflicts and their management within the project's Rewilding Case Studies.

Data for the report was collected in three complementary streams: (1) a qualitative institutional and policy analysis, combining systematic document screening, framework-based content analysis, and expert-based validation and triangulation; (2) a systematic literature review of +260 scientific articles focusing on rewilding conflicts and conflict management strategies; (3) qualitative research on the same topic in a set of case studies combining in-depth semi-structured interviews, and stakeholder workshops (i.e. focus groups, group discussions and targeted group activities). For the latter, eight case studies (the Rewilding Cases) were selected to reflect a diversity of both rewilding actions and socio-political contexts were analysed. They cover various rewilding strategies with varying emphasis on rewilding dimensions such as increasing trophic complexity, stochasticity and connectivity. They also vary in terms of types of ecosystems, exposure to natural hazards, rural-urban gradient, and protection level.

The results of the draft report were made available to the project consortium and were discussed with key stakeholders during stakeholder meetings. Additionally, written feedback was gathered from key stakeholders. Revisions and edits to the final deliverable, such as the wording of conflict management recommendations, were enabled by the information generated during this iterative procedure.

The analysis of the European rewilding policy framework (1) reveals that elements of rewilding are incorporated into EU and national biodiversity, climate, and restoration frameworks, although often indirectly, and with inconsistent legal enforceability. EU strategies and the EU Nature Restoration Regulation provide some impetus for rewilding; however, existing forestry and agricultural regulations can present obstacles to its implementation and underlying principles. Funding for rewilding actions is presently contingent upon specific projects. The integration of carbon and biodiversity credits, the development of eco-tourism initiatives, and the strategic implementation of targeted subsidies present promising avenues for future rewilding funding options. Key to ensuring legitimacy and enabling adaptive management are early and transparent consultations with local stakeholders, the integration of scientific, local, and indigenous knowledge, and the establishment of long-term monitoring mechanisms.

The results from the systematic review on rewilding conflicts and mitigation strategies (2) show that increasing trophic complexity was the rewilding principle most often described in rewilding conflict contexts, and wildlife impacts were the most common cause for conflicts reported. Specifically, most papers (n=63) discussing rewilding conflicts are about wolves. The review further reveals a geographic imbalance in terms of studied rewilding conflicts in Europe, with half of the studies concentrated in the Mediterranean region and Portugal (49%). In terms of stakeholders, 'farmers' are the stakeholder mentioned most frequently, followed by 'hunters' and 'local residents/population'.

The review further identifies four dimensions that can be used to typologies conflicts: values, (economic) interests, knowledge, and process. These conflict types can be associated with certain conflict management strategies/interventions that can again be categorised into technical, economic, and cognitive interventions, as well as stakeholder engagement.

Finally, the review indicates that conflicts are often studied when they are already present, which leads to a focus on reactive and technical (ex-post) conflict management interventions. Thus, this report proposes that proactive and preventive conflict approaches should be considered more to address conflicts before they occur/become deeply rooted. Furthermore, while in several papers conflicts are discussed as challenges to rewilding efforts, the report emphasises that there is potential of conflicts to act as constructive forces and a useful lens for opening up spaces for dialogue and a renegotiation of power dynamics, ultimately contributing to more just and locally appropriate rewilding interventions.

The in-depth research on the Rewilding Cases (3) subsequently provides more nuanced insights into beliefs, interests and values of the stakeholders interested in and/or affected by rewilding interventions. This report categorised stakeholders into four groups of actors that can be found in most Rewilding Cases: 1) researchers/scientists, nature conservation bodies and NGO/environmental NGOs; 2) community leaders/representatives of the local civil society and business; 3) hunting organisation/hunters and 4) forest service/administration. The results indicate nuances in the understanding of rewilding and the activities connected to it among these groups. First, stakeholders frequently dispute the term rewilding itself, and how it is used. Local negotiations determine the term's meaning, which is influenced by local, national, and international perspectives. Our report indicates a clear connection between visions for future rewilding and categories of stakeholders, as expectations for the future mirror the interests and beliefs of the interviewed stakeholders; e.g. the environmental organisations (such as environmental NGOs, nature conservation bodies) and scientists often envision the future in terms of advancing passive management and increasing the naturalness of the areas. The understanding of rewilding and associated practices is also hence connected to stakeholder's groups, e.g. forest owner representatives explicitly frame land abandonment and spontaneous forest expansions as 'unsustainable' and 'condemned to failure', at least under Mediterranean conditions. The main rewilding conflicts identified in the studied Rewilding Cases refer to competing land uses, and more specifically tourism, real estate development, forestry, farming, and energy generation. Other discussed conflict patterns include degree of urbanisation, land abandonment, disturbances, tensions between state and local communities, challenges with social acceptability and the politicisation of rewilding decisions. Coming to conflict management strategies, two main good practices and conflict mitigation strategies reported during interviews are stakeholder engagement and compensation strategies. Stakeholder engagement, specifically close collaboration with those impacted by rewilding efforts, was identified as essential for preventing or managing disputes regarding rewilding. While stakeholder engagement was generally considered time-consuming, expensive, and dependent on trust building, it was regarded as vital for both present and future positive outcomes of rewilding initiatives. Compensation strategies were identified in every Rewilding Case as positive approaches to mitigating conflict. However, not in all cases do they refer to financial compensations. "Compensation strategies" also indicated compensation in the form of new infrastructure, activities or training provided for the

community, development of new skills, protection from hazards (such as wildfires), rent for communities, environmental compensation in the form of new habitats, and compensating materials needed for building biodiversity friendly infrastructure or farming activities.

The combined results allowed for the suggestion of the eight recommendations for rewilding conflict management strategies in Europe.

Rewilding Policies and Conflict Management in Europe: Key Findings for Policymakers

This report presents the main findings of the Horizon Europe wildE project task on 'Rewilding policies and politics: assessing acceptability, conflicts and their management'. It examines how current policy frameworks support rewilding across Europe, and identifies the principal sources of conflict associated with rewilding initiatives, together with approaches to address them.

Key Findings

Rewilding is increasingly reflected in European policy frameworks

Rewilding principles are becoming more visible within EU and national biodiversity, climate, and nature restoration policies, even though the term itself is mostly not referred to. The EU Biodiversity Strategy and the Nature Restoration Regulation provide an important basis for advancing rewilding objectives. However, implementation remains uneven, and existing agricultural and forestry policies can create barriers to rewilding efforts. Current funding opportunities largely depend on individual projects. Future implementation could be strengthened through more stable financing mechanisms, including biodiversity and carbon credit schemes, targeted incentive programmes, and sustainable nature-based economic activities such as eco-tourism. Successful implementation also depends on inclusive governance. Early stakeholder engagement, transparent decision-making, integration of scientific and local knowledge, and long-term monitoring are critical for building legitimacy and enabling adaptive management.

Rewilding conflicts are primarily linked to wildlife and land-use interests

The literature review shows that conflicts associated with rewilding most frequently arise from species recovery and wildlife expansion, particularly in relation to large carnivores such as wolves. However, conflicts are rarely driven by ecological factors alone. Four recurring dimensions of conflict were identified:

- Values-based conflicts concerning differing views of nature and conservation goals.
- Interest-based conflicts related to e.g. economic impacts and land-use priorities.
- Knowledge-based conflicts concerning whose expertise and evidence inform decisions.
- Process-related conflicts linked to participation, transparency, and decision-making.

Evidence suggests that addressing only ecological or technical aspects is rarely sufficient; effective conflict management requires attention to all including the social, economic, and governance dimensions.

Stakeholder engagement is essential for long-term success

Case study findings demonstrate that perceptions of rewilding vary considerably across regions and stakeholder groups. Even the term rewilding is often interpreted differently, reflecting local contexts and interests. The most common conflicts concerned competing land uses, including agriculture, forestry, tourism, renewable energy development, and real estate expansion. Two approaches emerged as particularly important for conflict mitigation:

- Meaningful stakeholder engagement, including early involvement of affected communities and long-term trust-building.
- Compensation and benefit-sharing mechanisms, which may include financial support, new infrastructure, skills development, wildfire protection measures, or other locally relevant benefits.

Recommendations

1. Despite the growing incorporation of rewilding into policy frameworks, there are **no legally binding** instruments that specifically address rewilding. Rewilding initiatives **can however draw on leverage supportive policies**, including EU strategies and the Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR), as well as (potentially) climate change related policies.
2. Restricted funding options for rewilding require close monitoring of **future funding opportunities** such as carbon/biodiversity credits, eco-tourism, targeted subsidies, philanthropic support and private-state co-funding partnerships.
3. Rewilding conflicts can often be described as conflicts within **the value dimension** (where politicised terms prevent possible pragmatic solutions), **the interest dimension** (related to material or tangible stakes), **the process dimension** (related to how rewilding interventions are proposed and implemented, and who is included or excluded in that process) and conflicts related to **the knowledge dimension** (where conflicts may emerge because some types of knowledge may be privileged over other types, such as decisions strongly driven by scientific knowledge alone). An appropriate integration of science, local and traditional knowledge, and long-term monitoring of rewilding interventions is crucial for the long-term success of rewilding initiatives.
4. Because rewilding is in parts a politicised concept and connected to both positive and negative emotions, there is **a need for careful consideration of the used terminology**. Being specific about what is actually planned, and avoiding the use of general 'marketing phrases', can help ensure that all stakeholders understand the concrete rewilding proposals and that communication is inclusive.
5. The process of designing and proposing rewilding initiatives should start with **understanding 1) the local context and 2) the history of rewilding interventions** in order to recognise any tensions, resistance, dispossession, underdevelopment or (historic) mistrust which may provoke conflicts.

6. Each rewilding initiative should include a proper investigation and **understanding of the complexity of land value**, beyond economic value also including broader societal values relating to the relationship between people and the landscape.
7. **Collaborative engagement** with local stakeholders, employing **participatory and knowledge-driven governance priori to conflicts** and from early stages of a project, is one important strategy for achieving successful interventions and developing effective, proactive strategies for conflict resolution.
8. **Local context** is crucial for understanding how rewilding perceptions **link to negative wildlife impacts**, particularly from **large carnivores**. This focus on large predators overshadows other important and understudied areas of rewilding, as well as persisting the association of rewilding with these large predators where they **may not be the focus of the rewilding intervention** (e.g. increasing connectivity between habitats may facilitate spontaneous natural expansion).

These actions can help reduce conflict, improve societal acceptance, and support the effective implementation of rewilding initiatives across Europe.

1.Introduction

1.1 Introduction of the project and task

wildE is a Horizon Europe funded project that is researching on options for climate-smart rewilding as a nature-based solution to the twin threats of climate change and biodiversity loss. The overarching aim of wildE is to first assess and then potentially enhance the potential of climate-smart rewilding as a nature-based solution for ecological restoration across Europe. At the core of the wildE approach is the ambition to develop a multi-disciplinary understanding of rewilding addressing the climate-biodiversity nexus in tight association with the socio-economic dimension of large-scale restoration, including consideration of land-use changes and climate change futures.

This report (D2.3) is the key outcome of the task ‘Rewilding policies and politics: assessing acceptability, conflicts and their management’ (Task 2.3), which is again part of Work Package 2 that mostly conducts in-depth studies in eight Rewilding Cases in different European Union (EU) countries. The task contains three complementary activities:

(1) An institutional analysis of the rewilding policy framework – including policy documents and related practices - focusing on how the global, European and national policy instruments and their implementation affect rewilding in the eight countries of the Rewilding Cases. In this report, the term rewilding policy framework does not refer to a formally established or dedicated rewilding policy framework. Rather, it is used as an analytical term for the broader set of legally binding and non-binding policies, strategies, funding mechanisms and institutional arrangements that can enable, constrain or otherwise shape the implementation of rewilding principles across governance levels.

This activity comprises three steps:

- (1.1) Policy document screening at the global and European level (*broad systematic screening*)
- (1.2) Reflection of rewilding principles in 23 key policy documents (*focused qualitative content analysis using a predefined rewilding framework*)
- (1.3) Validation of rewilding principles: analysis and identification of the opportunities and challenges of EU policies for rewilding implementation at national levels (*validation and experiential enrichment via experts, survey, and interviews*)
- (2) A systematic review of the scientific literature to identify the main types of conflicts and conflict management strategies
- (3) Qualitative research in Rewilding Cases:
 - (3.1) A 'scanning' of all Rewilding Cases to analyse the locally relevant policy framework and to map stakeholders, including their interests and beliefs
 - (3.2) An in-depth analysis of selected local rewilding politics and related social dynamics, involving empirical social science field research.

The Institute of Forest Ecology, Slovak Academy of Sciences (IFE SAS) was responsible for activity 1. Wageningen University (WU) was responsible for activity 2 and 3. WU's team was also responsible for preparing this report and compiling the outcomes of research and analysis.

This report brings together the results of activities 1, 2 and 3 and is the advanced version of Milestone M2.4 that was published in December 2025 as an internal wildE project document. The results of the draft report were made available to the project consortium and were discussed with key stakeholders during the stakeholder meetings. Additionally, written feedback was gathered from key stakeholders. Revisions and edits to the final deliverable, such as the wording of conflict management recommendations, were enabled by the information generated during this iterative feedback procedure.

1.2 Introduction of the case studies

The eight Rewilding Cases (case studies) were selected to reflect a diversity of both rewilding actions and socio-political contexts. In terms of rewilding activities, they cover various rewilding strategies with varying emphasis on rewilding dimensions such as trophic complexity, stochastic disturbances and connectivity (Perino et al., 2019; Torres et al., 2018, Carver et al., 2021). They also vary in terms of types of ecosystems, exposure to natural hazards, rural-urban gradient, and protection level. The cases include areas in which rewilding has been ongoing locally for a number of years, either as an unintended consequence of land use changes ('passive rewilding') or as an outcome of conservation or restoration management ('active rewilding'). A rich mix of stakeholders, each with unique socioeconomic situations, perceptions, and expectations, contributes to the varied results of rewilding in these localities. *Table 1* and *Figure 1* summarise the key information on the case studies.





Figure 1 Map and characteristics of the wildE Case Studies

Table 1 Characteristic the wildE Case Studies

Case Study	Baixo Sabor	Barcelona Metropolitan Region	Gelderse Port	National Parks High Tatras	Westliches Ruhrgebiet	Antarr	Coillte	Sveaskog
Country	Portugal	Spain	The Netherlands	Slovakia/Poland	Germany	Portugal	Ireland	Sweden
Overall size (ha)	150,000	245,000	3,000	100,000	5,000	2,260	49,000	185,000
Rewilding type	Natural regeneration plus active management measures	Natural forest regrowth plus active management measures	Mostly measures to reinstall natural floodplain dynamics	Focus on allowing natural dynamics (non-intervention) at least in core zones	Natural regeneration plus active habitat conservation in some parts	Active interventions in naturally regrown forest lands (active restoration)	Removal of drainage systems to allow rewetting	Focus on allowing natural dynamics plus active restoration in management zone
Predominant ecosystem in the landscape	Shrublands/ Forests/Agricultural Mosaic	Forests/Agricultural Mosaic	Riparian wetlands	Forests	Industrial wastelands	Shrublands/ Forests	Peatlands	Forests
Rural-urban gradient	Rural	Peri-urban	Peri-urban	Rural	Urban and peri-urban	Rural	Rural	Rural
Large herbivores/apex predators	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Protection status	Natura 2000	Natura 2000	Natura 2000/ national and regional	Natura 2000/ National Park	Natura 2000/ national and regional	Natura 2000	National and regional	National and regional



Table 2 provides a summary of the main rewilding interventions in the Rewilding Cases as reported by the Rewilding Case Leads (individuals tasked with supervising the wildE project's activities within a Rewilding Case) and their organisations and as indicated by the interlocutors during the interviews.

Table 2 Rewilding practices in the wildE case studies

Baixo Sabor	Natural vegetation recovery, fire prevention around areas with high fire risk (forests and tall shrublands); planting of oaks (<i>Quercus spp</i>) and ashes (<i>Fraxinus spp.</i>); management of food resources for large eagles and vultures; management for improving habitat conditions e.g. for ungulates and the wolf.
Barcelona Metropolitan Region	Natural forest regrowth on former croplands and pastures; simulation of fire behaviour and fire severity; testing different management strategies for naturally regrown forests, with and without intervention actions to minimise wildfire spread (e.g. grazing and thinning); developing minimal management options to maximise the contribution of passive established forests in peri-urban areas to climate change mitigation and adaptation, while preserving their biodiversity and recreational values.
Gelderse Poort	Cessation of agricultural practices; reintroduction of large herbivores, beavers, sturgeon, otter; clay extraction at specific locations to allow flooding; partial removal of water retention barriers; natural regeneration; creation of walking paths.
National Parks High Tatras*	<i>Slovakia (SK)</i>: Relinquishment of salvage logging in the core zone after a storm and bark beetle outbreaks in 2004 (non-intervention); limiting tourism to protect capercaillies and brown bears. <i>Poland (PL)</i>: 71% of the National Park left to natural processes (no active management) with the goal to increase that area to 75%; also limiting of tourism to protect chamois and brown bears.
Westliches Ruhrgebiet	Natural succession and forest development (non-intervention); active conservation measures for selected open habitats; grazing with goats/sheep in selected cases.
Antarr	Active ecological restoration; provisioning of wood and non-wood forest products; fire prevention around areas with high fire risk (forests and tall shrublands).
Coillte	Rewetting the peat bogs through closing drainage channels.
Sveaskog	Zonation system (Ecopark): 1 Nature conservation zone - free development, natural regeneration e.g. of broadleaved trees in selectively logged mixed/spruce forests or on former farmland; 2 Nature conservation-oriented management zone - mainly management including burning, rewetting of drained areas, increasing the proportion of broadleaved trees, and increasing the amount of dead wood through maintaining and caring for old trees, creating high stumps and scaring (veteranization).

* However, the wildE project originally started with the Slovak National Park, during the first months of the project, we extended our work to the Polish National Park creating a transboundary National Parks High Tatra Rewilding Case.

1.3 Objectives of the report

This report has six interconnected objectives:

1. To analyse the rewilding policy framework (institutions)
2. To identify existing and potential policy, economic and social instruments for rewilding implementation in Europe
3. To identify relevant stakeholders in the Rewilding Cases that are involved in and/or affected by the rewilding practices – including (3a) the identification of emerging groups (discursive and/or in practice)
4. To analyse stakeholders' interests and beliefs relating to rewilding practices in Rewilding Cases
5. To investigate various notions of rewilding (in discourse and in practice) including (5a) an exploration of the acceptance of the rewilding term per se among stakeholders and groups
6. To map and categorise the conflicts and collaborations around rewilding

The aims 3a) and 5a) were added after initial interviews to cover the emerging tensions and topics brought to our attention by stakeholders. The results in this report are analysed in the context of typical regional socio-economic and ecological patterns. This includes:

- (a) Degree of urbanization as a proxy for the social value setting (urban vs. rural gradient)
- (b) Land abandonment/land values (when available) as a proxy for economic values (land abandonment and land value gradient)
- (c) Disturbance patterns with a link to biodiversity value/protected area status as environmental value proxy (disturbance patterns and conservation gradient)



2. Methods

2.1 Institutional analysis of the rewilding policy and the institutional context for rewilding

For the purposes of this institutional analysis, we use the term rewilding policy framework to denote the broader institutional and policy environment relevant to rewilding rather than a formally established policy framework dedicated specifically to rewilding. The analysis therefore examines how existing global, EU and national policy instruments across biodiversity conservation, ecological restoration, climate, forestry, agriculture and related policy domains reflect, enable or constrain rewilding principles. We apply a qualitative institutional and policy analysis approach combining systematic document screening, framework-based qualitative content analysis, and expert-based validation and triangulation. This multi-step design allowed both the identification of rewilding principles in policy frameworks and the integration of experiential knowledge from practitioners and experts, thereby strengthening the robustness and relevance of the findings for EU and national policy contexts.

Step 1. Policy document screening at global and European level (*broad systematic screening*)

Firstly, we carried out a screening of existing policy documents at global and European levels through a systematic online review conducted between 03/2023 – 06/2025. Because rewilding is increasingly recognised as a transformative approach that intersects with diverse land-use domains, we included documents within thematic categories presented in *Table 3*. The search focused on official websites of the EU, public policy portals, and legislative databases.

Table 3 Thematic categories included in the policy documents' screening

Thematic categories	Key terms
Rewilding	term itself
Climate	"climate smart rewilding" "climate change" "climate change adaptation and mitigation" "offset carbon footprint" "climate change disturbances" "emission reductions" "nature-based solutions" "self-sustaining ecosystems" "global warming"
Ecological restoration	"innovative restoration solutions" "restoration activities" "rewilding initiative" "protection of ecosystem" "(re)connect ecosystems"
Biodiversity support and nature conservation	"biodiversity conservation" "low biodiversity management" "green spaces" "impoverish biodiversity" "sustainability" "renewable energy (air quality, water management, wind etc.)" "wetlands wise use" "environmental issues management" "biodiversity data analyses" "marine/seas ecosystems"
Well-being	"quality of life" "recreation values" "prevent dangerous human interference" "technology transfer" "nature-people concept"

Forest	"climate smart forestry" "wildfire risks" "passive forest management" "reforestation" "rainfall increase" "non-timber forest products"
[Un]sustainable landscape	"land abandonment", "fragmented landscape" "different land uses" (intensive etc.) "land protection"
Urban plans	"disturbed ecosystems" "peri-urban areas" "socio-economic changes" "long-term economic stability" "cost-effective restoration" "marginal agricultural areas" "land degradation neutrality"
Renewable energy	term itself

The key characteristics listed in *Table 4* were examined in 101 screened policy documents at the global and European levels. These documents were divided into two groups: legally binding instruments (convention, treaty) impose mandatory obligations on actors and are enforceable through legal mechanisms (Jordan et al., 2005). Non-legally binding instruments (framework, strategy, plan, program, project, partnership research, report) lack formal enforcement mechanisms but can influence behaviour through normative pressure, stakeholder engagement, and political commitments (Abbott & Snidal, 2000). Both instruments play a crucial role in agenda-setting, policy learning, and fostering cooperation.

Table 4 Key characteristics of policy document database

Column	Description
<i>Title</i>	Official name of the document
<i>Level</i>	Global, European
<i>Nature of instrument</i>	Legally binding, non-legally binding
<i>Type</i>	Legally binding: convention, treaty Non-legally binding: framework, strategy, plan, program, project, partnership research, report
<i>Thematic Categories</i>	Rewilding, Climate, Ecological restoration, Biodiversity support and nature conservation, Well-being, Forest, [Un]sustainable landscape, Urban Plans, Renewable Energy
<i>Aim/Goal</i>	What is the document for/about
<i>Link</i>	Web reference or/and a link to PDF document in the library.



Step 2. Reflection of the rewilding principles in 23 key policy documents (*focused qualitative content analysis using a predefined rewilding framework*)

In the second step, 23 policy documents were selected from the 101 screened documents through expert discussions held within the wildE consortium in 2023-2024. The participating consortium members brought expertise from policy, landscape planning, ecology, applied forestry, nature conservation, as well as knowledge of the national and regional contexts represented by the Rewilding Cases. We then examined the extent to which these documents reflected the rewilding principles synthesised from the existing literature (see *Table 5*). We then examined to which degree these 23 documents reflect the major rewilding principles described in the literature (Bühne et al., 2022; Carver et al., 2022; IUCN, 2022; Jepson et al., 2018; Segar et al., 2021; see *Table 5*). More specifically, the work of IUCN (2022) was central here, providing a foundational framework aimed at guiding practical implementations of rewilding projects. The IUCN principles emphasize ecological integrity, biodiversity enhancement, and community involvement while focusing on the restoration of natural processes and functions in ecosystems. In contrast, Bühne et al. (2022), Carver et al. (2021) and Jepson et al. (2018) contribute insights related to the integration of local knowledge into rewilding practices, emphasizing a participatory approach and the importance of understanding socio-political contexts as well as advocating for flexibility, adaptive management and context-specific rewilding strategies. Segar et al. (2021) advocate for better land-use planning and reflect on the importance of public support in successful rewilding projects.

We conducted qualitative content analysis, in which we evaluated to which extent the documents considers the rewilding (RW) principles, and if it does, we assessed it in three evaluation categories:

- positive – when ideas consistent with RW principles are present,
- neutral – when the ideas are mentioned (e.g. participation) but not in connection with RW,
- negative – when the content goes against RW principles.

Table 5 Rewilding (RW) principles

No.	Category	RW principle
1	<i>Trophic interactions and ecosystem resilience</i>	Rewilding utilizes wildlife to restore trophic interactions. Successful rewilding is nature-led, and relies on accommodating predation, competition and other biotic and abiotic interactions to sustain an ecosystem that self-regulates populations that comprise the biotic system. It is crucial that consideration is given to the role large herbivores and apex predators play in maintaining and enhancing the biodiversity within landscapes, together with the value of keystone species in securing the integrity of the ecosystem, and thus enhancing ecosystem resilience. Where appropriate, interactive keystone species that have roles in maintaining the ecosystem should be reintroduced or depleted populations reinforced to an ecologically effective level.
2	<i>Ecosystem connectivity in landscape planning</i>	Rewilding employs landscape planning that considers core areas and connectivity. At the landscape scale, it is crucial that core areas provide a secure space that accommodates the full array of species that comprise a self-sustaining natural ecosystem. Restoring connectivity between core areas promotes movement/migration across the wider landscape and improves resilience to the impacts of climate change. Rewilding can build on existing core areas such as designated wilderness areas, national parks or privately managed natural areas. Plans for rewilding at the landscape scale should take into account careful integration of cores and connectivity in functioning ecological networks and zoned systems of compatible low-intensity human land use.
3	<i>Ecological processes</i>	Rewilding focuses on the recovery of ecological processes to restore resilient ecosystems and specifically the natural patterns and dynamics of abundance and distribution of native species. Rewilding should allow for natural disturbance within an evolutionary relevant range of variability and take environmental change into account.

4	<i>Dynamic nature of ecosystems</i>	Rewilding recognizes that ecosystems are dynamic and constantly changing. Temporal change is a fundamental attribute of ecosystems and the evolutionary processes critical to ecosystem function. Conservation planning for rewilding should consider the dynamic nature of ecosystems allowing the wider processes of succession, disturbance and biotic interactions to determine ecological trajectories without impediment or constraint.
5	<i>Climate change</i>	Rewilding should anticipate the effects of climate change and where possible act as a tool to adapt and mitigate impacts. Rewilding can also be considered as an example of a nature-based solutions approach (NBS) with the potential to mitigate the impacts of climate change on ecosystems by the capture of atmospheric carbon as well as providing connectivity along environmental and climatic gradients to enhance opportunities for species movements.
6	<i>Participation</i>	Rewilding should be inclusive of all stakeholders and embrace participatory approaches and transparent consultation in the planning process. Rewilding should encourage public understanding and appreciation of wild nature and should address existing concerns about coexisting with wildlife and natural processes of disturbance. Stakeholder engagement promotes education and knowledge exchange about the functioning of ecosystems.
7	<i>Transdisciplinary knowledge exchange</i>	Rewilding is informed by both science and indigenous and local knowledge. Practitioner, researcher, indigenous and local knowledge collaborations can generate benefits, maximizing innovation, providing data and information and best management guidance through knowledge exchange, transparency and mutual learning. All these forms of knowledge are important for the success of rewilding projects and can help inform adaptive management frameworks.
8	<i>Monitoring</i>	Rewilding is adaptive and dependent on monitoring and feedback. Monitoring is essential to provide evidence on short and medium-term results with long-term rewilding goals in mind. This is required to determine whether rewilding trajectories, such as a particular treatment, are working as planned. Monitoring can provide the necessary data and information to identify problems and possible solutions for an adaptive management framework on a cost-efficiency basis.
9	<i>Human-nature coexistence</i>	Rewilding recognises the co-existence of humans and nature. Whilst there is increasing recognition that natural ecosystems, and the species within them, provide valued goods and services to humans, wild nature has its own intrinsic value that humanity has an ethical responsibility to both respect and protect, emphasising values of compassion and coexistence.
10	<i>Paradigm shift in human-nature coexistence</i>	Rewilding requires a paradigm shift in institutions and human actions. This change in paradigm will also help to create new sustainable economic opportunities, delivering the best outcomes for nature and people which means transformative change.

Synthesis of existing rewilding principles approaches adapted from Böhne et al. (2022), Carver et al. (2021), IUCN (2022), Jepson et al. (2018) and Segar et al. (2021); developed by IFE SAS authors

Step 3. Validation of RW principles analysis and identification of the opportunities and challenges of EU policies for rewilding implementation at national levels (*validation and experiential enrichment via experts, survey, and interviews*)

During the 2025 annual project meeting in Porto (Portugal), we followed and documented a structured discussion involving Rewilding Case Leads and other consortium experts. The discussion brought together participants with knowledge of the national and regional policy contexts relevant to the eight Rewilding Cases.



Photo 1 and Photo 2 Stakeholder meeting in Porto, February 2025

We then followed up with a survey (see Appendix I), which was distributed to the Rewilding Case Leads and Rewilding Case teams between February and May 2025. The Rewilding Case teams were invited to provide input themselves and, where appropriate, to involve additional national experts with relevant knowledge of the policy and institutional context in their respective countries. This step aimed to extend the evidence beyond the participants of the Porto discussion and to capture additional country-specific perspectives.

Finally, we analysed excerpts from interviews conducted by the WU team (see Section 2.3) focusing specifically on interviewees' perceptions of EU and national policy contexts relevant for rewilding. The interview data was used to complement and triangulate the perspectives obtained through the Porto discussion and survey.

2.2: Systematic literature review

We conducted a systematic literature review to gain a comprehensive understanding of the types of conflicts emerging in rewilding contexts in Europe, and to understand what strategies the literature identifies to address these. We followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses' protocol (PRISMA hereafter) developed by Page et al. (2021) (see Appendix II). PRISMA guides reviewers on how to transparently report their findings (Page et al., 2021). We used specific search strings (see Appendix III) derived from prominent papers in the field of rewilding, restoration, and human-wildlife related conflicts. The literature review was conducted using Scopus and Web of Science between July 2023 and April 2026. We collected 2570 scientific articles in total. After title and abstract screening of all articles, we proceeded with full text screening of 312 articles which met the inclusion criteria, resulting finally in 269 articles that were read in full and coded (mix of inductive and deductive coding).

2.3: Qualitative research in the Rewilding Cases

For this part of the report, a database of the Rewilding Cases was prepared as a preparatory step. It comprises the information collected via the questionnaire and stakeholder mapping by the wildE consortium partners. This corresponds to the milestone from task 2.1 (M5) to coordinate local stakeholder engagement and co-design activities across all tasks in WP2 (led by the Netherlands Institute of Ecology) and the milestone from task 5.3 (M17) on mapping the relevant stakeholder groups (led by IUCN EURO). For each Rewilding Case, a separate sheet was prepared with basic information on the geographical, ecological, historical, and social (partly also political and economic) context as well as the key stakeholder groups. Furthermore, ethical approval for the empirical research was granted by the Wageningen University and Research Ethics Committee for non-medical studies involving human subjects (WUR-REC).

Methodology for interviewees' selection and conducting interviews

Key stakeholders in the Rewilding Cases were interviewed as the primary data collection method. We conducted initial interviews with the Rewilding Case Leads. In the follow-up step, we interviewed the stakeholders identified as key informants in these initial interviews. Whenever possible, the interviews were conducted in English. If, due to the language capacity of the stakeholders, interviews in the local language were preferred, we offered this opportunity by drawing on the language capacity within the extended team of the Forest and Nature Conservation Policy Group at Wageningen University. In 2026, the interview process for Barcelona Metropolitan Region was supported by researchers from partner EFI.

Selection criteria for interviews:

Stakeholders were selected based on the Rewilding Case Leads' recommendations. In addition to consideration of gender representativeness (whenever possible), the following criteria supported Rewilding Case Leads' suggestions:

- The stakeholder has a good overview of the Rewilding Case and its socio-economic and/or ecological characteristics
- The stakeholder belongs to one of the following groups:
 - Representatives of administrative bodies (e.g. local/regional forest administration)
 - Forest owners & workers
 - Associations (e.g. hunting, recreation)
 - NGOs (e.g. birds, wildlife)
 - Local/regional forest & agriculture industry
 - Private landowners
 - Tourism sector
- In addition, at least one of the two following criteria should be fulfilled:
 - The stakeholder has a good overview of conflicting interests and values of stakeholders in the Rewilding Case
 - The stakeholder represents a perspective of a conflict that is present in the Rewilding Case

In total, 40 interviews were conducted between February 2024 and February 2026. An overview of the interview questions and interview partners can be found in Appendix IV. Each interview partner was asked to sign an informed consent form. The consent form was also signed by at least one member of the research team. The copy with both signatures was always shared with the interview partner and archived in a secure location of the Wageningen University servers.

Methodology for stakeholder workshops

In parallel with the interviews, data was collected during stakeholder workshops. The workshops took place in four Rewilding Cases between January and May 2024 (in chronological order: Westliches

Ruhrgebiet, Barcelona Metropolitan Region, Gelderse Poort, and National Parks High Tatras). While each of the workshops followed an individually tailored agenda, the activity designed for data collection was the same during all four workshops. The format of the data collection exercise was presented to the Rewilding Case Leads prior to the workshops during a meeting titled 'Train the Trainer' that took place between the 28th and 29th of September 2023 in Brussels, organised by partner IUCN EURO. This meeting's purpose was to train the Rewilding Case Leads in the event their assistance was needed for data collection at the workshop, given the stakeholders' language preferences.

The data collection combined (1) a social activity (i.e., an icebreaker) and (2) the data-collection activity. The idea was to perform the data collection during the first part of the workshop to obtain information on stakeholders' beliefs, interests, and interpretations of rewilding activities not impacted or influenced by the later stage of discussions during the workshop. For more details, see Appendix V. The data collection was conducted in English (National Parks High Tatras and Gelderse Poort) or in the local languages of the Rewilding Cases (Westliches Ruhrgebiet, Barcelona Metropolitan Region). During the activity, extensive notes were collected that were later inserted into the activity template (see Appendix V). Also, photos of the group discussion and group notes (e.g. on flip charts) were taken and archived. Both sources of data from the workshop were used to inform this report.



Photo 3 Stakeholder workshop in the Gelderse Poort Rewilding Case, March 2024

2.4. Methodology for coding and analysis for Activity 2.2 and 2.3

Data organisation and preparation

All interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. Interviews conducted in a language other than English were translated, and the transcriptions were checked by native speakers of the original language. Summaries in English (approx. 1 page each) were prepared for each interview to allow all research team members to become familiar with the content of all interviews. The coding was done with the Atlas.ti software. Coding followed a mixed deductive and inductive approach, and the codebook was developed during a series of workshops held between the team members involved in interviewing. The codes and code themes were proposed based on the interview guide and the content of the interviews. Once a satisfactory codebook (with the main themes and subthemes) was developed, it was tested on three interviews by three members of the team. The codebook was updated afterwards, based on the experience gained. In total, 231 codes were included in the final codebook, out of which 31 were added after the initial coding and team workshop.

3. Results

3.1 Results of institutional analysis of rewilding policy framework

Although the term rewilding is gaining visibility in scientific and societal debates, it is not explicitly used in current EU policies. Therefore, we use rewilding in a broad conceptual sense (explained in Methodology: 2.1, Step 1). Rewilding principles can be seen as increasingly aligned with EU ambitions for ecological restoration, climate adaptation, biodiversity enhancement, and sustainable land management in forestry and agricultural contexts. By fostering natural processes, such EU policies aim to enhance ecosystem resilience and support more harmonious coexistence between human activities and wildlife (Aggestam, 2024; Johansen & Evju, 2024; Trouwborst & Svenning, 2022; Recio et al., 2020; Root-Bernstein et al., 2018; Nunes et al., 2016). Despite the encouraging frameworks and policies for rewilding initiatives, rewilding projects may lead to multiple conflicts that involve diverse stakeholder perspectives, especially in relation to land use and wildlife management (Mikołajczak et al., 2022; Glentworth et al., 2024). Successful implementation of rewilding initiatives requires hence navigating conflicts arising between nature restoration objectives and diverse (other) human interests. Engaging diverse voices and creating adaptive governance systems can support consensus and ensure that rewilding leads to sustainable ecosystems while respecting the livelihoods and cultural values of local communities (Butler et al., 2021; Mikołajczak et al., 2022; Glentworth et al., 2024; Wynne-Jones et al., 2018). In our research we focus on an institutional analysis of the rewilding policy framework to explore possibilities for integration of rewilding within existing policies and to investigate the potential of these policies to enhance the legitimacy and coherence of rewilding strategies.

Step 1. Policy documents screening at the global and European levels

The screening covered 101 policy documents at global and European governance levels across the thematic categories defined in Section 2.1. Within this screened set, biodiversity support and nature conservation represented the largest thematic category (27 documents), followed by climate-related documents (26), forestry (13), ecological restoration (9), (un)sustainable landscape (9), and well-being (8). *Figure 2* figure describes the thematic composition of the screened document set and should therefore be interpreted in relation to the selection criteria used in the review rather than as an indication of the relative importance of these policy domains.

Across the screened documents, biodiversity conservation, ecological restoration and climate-related objectives were frequently addressed, whereas explicit use of the term ‘rewilding’ was rare. Climate-oriented documents generally focused on mitigation, adaptation and ecosystem-service objectives rather than referring explicitly to rewilding.

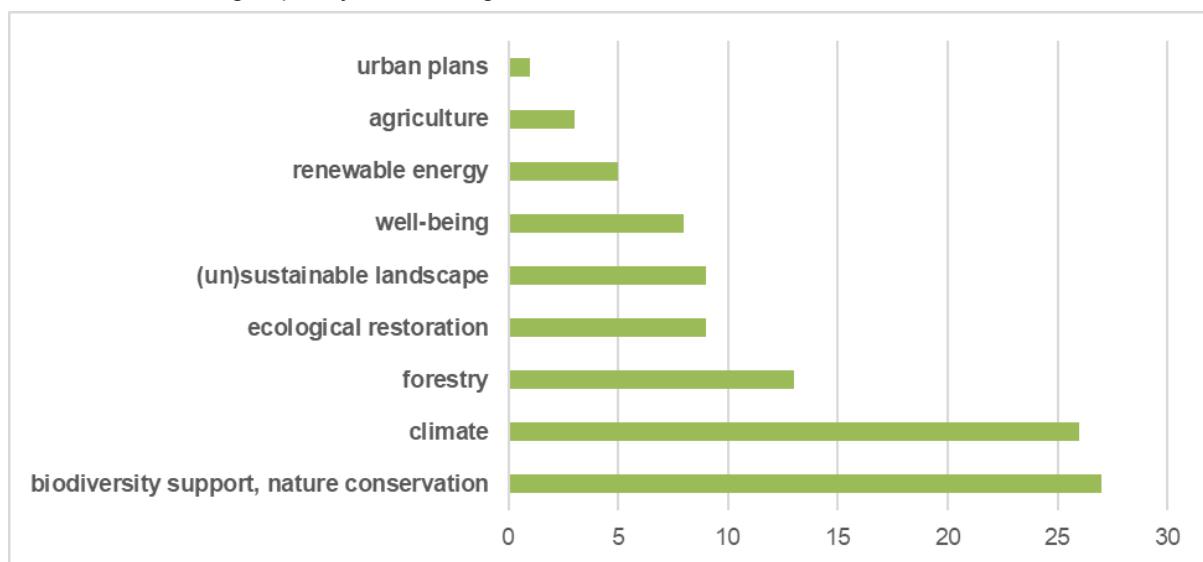


Figure 2 Thematic categories of screened documents

A total of 101 documents were analysed, representing global and European governance levels (*Table 6*). Of these, approximately 30% were legally binding, while the remaining 70% consisted of non-binding or ‘soft-law’ instruments.

The screened set comprised 31 global-level and 70 European-level policy documents (*Table 6*). The screening was designed to identify policy instruments considered most relevant to the thematic domains through which rewilding principles may be supported, constrained or implemented. Based on their legal status, approximately 30% of the identified documents were classified as legally binding instruments and around 70% as non-legally binding or soft-law instruments. The distribution therefore characterises the policy environment captured through this relevance-based screening.

Table 6 Type of screened policy documents

Governance level	Global		European	
Total number	31		70	
Legally binding documents	Convention	7	Regulation	12
			Directive	5
	Treaty	5	Convention	4
			Decision	1
Non-legally binding documents	Program	7	Strategy	13
	Project	4	Project	13
	Framework	3	Framework	8
	Partnership research	3	Plan	7
			Partnership research	5
	Plan	2	Program	1
			Report	1

This distribution of analysed documents shows that rewilding remains primarily supported through non-binding strategic instruments rather than formal legal obligations. Nevertheless, recent legislative developments indicate a gradual shift toward more integrated, binding frameworks that could operationalise rewilding within restoration and climate adaptation goals.

The substantive relationship of individual policy instruments to rewilding principles was assessed separately in Step 2.

Step 2. Reflecting the rewilding principles in key selected policy documents at global/international and EU levels

Figure 3 summarises the 23 policy documents selected for the focused analysis. The selected set then served as the basis for assessing how individual rewilding principles (see Table 5) are supported, addressed or constrained across different policy instruments.



EU Level		Global Level	
BINDING	NON BINDING	BINDING	NON BINDING
European Climate Law (2021) Invasive Alien Species Regulation (2014) EU Water Framework Directive (2000) Habitats Directive (1992) Council of Europe Landscape Convention (2000) EU Nature Restoration Law (2024) Environment Action Programme to 2030 (2022) Regulation EU on Deforestation (2023) Common Agricultural Policy 2023-2027 (2021)	European Green Deal (2019) New EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate change (2021) EU Water Resilience Strategy (2025) EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 (2020) Rewilding Europe's Strategic Plan 2030 (2021) Forest Genetic Resources Strategy for Europe (2021) EU Forest Action Plan (2007) New EU forest strategy for 2030 (2021) EU Soil for 2030 strategy (2021)	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992) Convention on Biological Diversity (1992)	Kunming Montreal Biodiversity Framework (2022) United Nations strategic plan for forests (2017) The Forest Principles (1992)

Climate

Biodiversity

Ecological Restoration

Forestry

Agriculture

Figure 3 Legal status and type of 23 selected policy documents

Biodiversity conservation and ecological restoration policies show varying degrees of alignment with the ecological rewilding principles RW1–RW4: trophic interactions and ecosystem resilience (RW1), ecological connectivity (RW2), restoration of ecological processes (RW3), and recognition of the dynamic nature of ecosystems (RW4). Instruments such as the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the Nature Restoration Regulation support several of these principles, particularly ecological connectivity, ecosystem resilience and the recovery of natural processes. However, this alignment is not uniform across all biodiversity policy instruments. Some conservation frameworks, including those centred on maintaining particular habitats or species in a favourable conservation status, may in certain contexts create tensions with more dynamic, process-based approaches in which ecosystem trajectories are allowed to change over time. Climate-related documents generally show weaker direct alignment with RW1–RW4, as they focus primarily on mitigation, adaptation and ecosystem services rather than on ecological process restoration. Several forestry-related documents likewise contain objectives or provisions that support some rewilding principles while constraining or only partially addressing others.

Principles related to climate change adaptation and mitigation (RW5), participation and stakeholder engagement (RW6), and the integration of scientific, local and Indigenous knowledge (RW7) were addressed positively in many of the analysed documents, although the strength and form of this support varied across policy domains. In the reviewed forestry policies, RW7 was generally addressed less explicitly. Monitoring and adaptive feedback (RW8) and human–nature coexistence (RW9) were also present, but less consistently across the selected climate and forestry instruments.

Finally, we examined how RW10 - a paradigm shift in human-nature coexistence - is reflected in the analysed policy documents. In this analysis, RW10 was treated as a normative principle of rewilding rather than as an assumption that every rewilding process necessarily results from, or produces, broader societal transformation. We therefore assessed whether the documents call for changes in human–nature relations, institutional arrangements, policy priorities or socio-economic conditions that are consistent with this principle.

Climate-oriented documents emphasise the green transition and the development of climate-resilient societies. Biodiversity, nature conservation, agriculture and ecological restoration policies refer to changes in financial resources, regulatory frameworks and incentives. Forestry documents predominantly promote sustainable and multifunctional forest management, including the protection of primary and old-growth forests and closer-to-nature forestry. These approaches do not in themselves constitute rewilding or a paradigm shift, but some of them reflect institutional or socio-economic changes that may be consistent with elements of RW10.



<i>RW principles in selected documents</i>	RW1	RW2	RW3	RW4	RW5	RW6	RW7	RW8	RW9	RW10
CLIMATE										
<i>European Green Deal</i>										
<i>European Climate Law</i>										
<i>United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change</i>										
<i>New Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change</i>										
BIODIVERSITY										
<i>Convention on Biological Diversity</i>										
<i>The Kunming Montreal Biodiversity Framework</i>										
<i>EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030</i>										
<i>European Landscape Convention 2020</i>										
<i>Habitats directive</i>										
<i>Invasive alien species regulation</i>										
<i>EU Water Framework Directive</i>										
<i>EU Water Resilience Strategy</i>										
FORESTRY										
<i>United Nations strategic plan for forests</i>										
<i>New EU forest strategy for 2030</i>										
<i>EU Forest Action Plan</i>										
<i>The Forest Principles</i>										
<i>Forest Genetic Resources Strategy for Europe</i>										
<i>83 Regulation (EU) 2023/1115 on Deforestation</i>										-
ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION										
<i>Rewilding Strategic Plan 2023</i>										
<i>EU Nature Restoration Regulation</i>										
<i>Environment Action Programme to 2030</i>										
AGRICULTURE										
<i>EU Soil Strategy for 2030</i>										
<i>Common Agricultural Policy for 2023-2027</i>										

LEGEND

positive neutral negative not mentioned

Figure 4 Rewilding principles analysis in selected 23 policy documents (own elaboration)

In Figure 4, 'positive' indicates substantive support for the respective rewilding principle, 'neutral' indicates that the issue is addressed without clear support or constraint, 'negative' indicates potential conflict with or constraint on the principle, and 'not addressed' indicates that the issue is not substantively covered in the document.

Step 3 Experiencing rewilding at national (and local) level - the opportunities and challenges of EU policies for implementation rewilding

This step summarises the findings from the discussions during the wildE 2025 annual meeting and the survey completed by the Rewilding Case Leads and additional national experts, and relevant interview materials. We organised the results into three categories: (A) existing policy/legal frameworks, (B) existing economic and financial instruments, and (C) dynamic actor–stakeholder relations, illustrated with examples from selected case studies.

A. Existing policy/legal frameworks

There are some existing legal and policy frameworks at national and regional levels in the Rewilding Case countries that are relevant to rewilding. They focus on ecological restoration or nature conservation but not explicitly on rewilding itself. Rewilding is understood as focusing predominantly on biodiversity, nature and landscape protection and on reducing human interventions and management. This may sometimes be controversial, for example when human access to a given landscape is limited. According to the conducted discussions, the existing legal frameworks are not sufficient for the successful implementation of rewilding. Legal documents set the habitat protection, which may require ongoing active (and sometimes intensive) management in order to conserve them.

The following are examples concerning forest land:

In Portugal, specific legislation (Decree-Law no. 169/2001 of 25 May) aims to ensure protection and enhancement of cork oak and holm oak. Cutting or removal of cork oaks and/or holm oaks, in stands or isolated trees, requires authorisation from the Institute for Nature Conservation and Forests, I.P. (ICNF, I.P.). However, conversion cutting is allowed if the justification for the intended cutting or removal falls in a specific part of this law which says no alternative location exists for essential public utility or agricultural undertakings of relevant and sustainable interest to the local economy. Then, compensatory measures are mandatory and provided through the submission of a compensation project and a Management Guidance Plan. While this legislation is not a rewilding instrument as such, it is relevant to the institutional context of rewilding because it restricts certain forms of land-use conversion and thereby shapes the conditions under which natural regeneration, habitat continuity and other rewilding-compatible processes may occur.

In Sweden, rewilding-compatible measures are implemented primarily through existing conservation and forest-governance instruments rather than through policies explicitly labelled as rewilding. The Forest Act requires biodiversity considerations in forest management, while protected areas and voluntary conservation measures can create space for reduced-intervention or process-oriented management. In the Sveaskog, Ecoparks combine areas of non-intervention with biodiversity-oriented management, including natural regeneration, prescribed burning, rewetting, increasing the proportion of broadleaved trees and enhancing deadwood. These measures align to varying degrees with the rewilding principles analysed in this report,



particularly ecological processes, ecosystem dynamics and habitat complexity. The Ecopark model is voluntary and implemented by Sveaskog, a state-owned forest company, illustrating how rewilding-compatible practices can emerge within existing forest-governance arrangements without being formally defined as rewilding policy.

The present Polish government plans to remove 20% of Poland's forests from timber harvesting and similar forestry practices. Stakeholders and the public are currently discussing this issue. The map of forests where forestry will not be allowed is being developed by the Polish State Forests Service, which manages about 80% of the country's forests. These also include 'social forests', planned near Poland's major cities, prioritising recreation and conservation with significant restrictions on timber harvesting. In the National Parks High Tatras Rewilding Case, the Tatra National Park Management Plan indicates that 71% of the Polish Park is strictly conserved, implying no interventions or actions are permitted in those areas.

In Germany, relevant forestry and conservation legislation foresees several categories for strict protection of forests; in practice, however, only a small percentage of the forest area is strictly protected (around 2.5 %), whereas the main focus is on multifunctional forest management. Rewilding (understood as strict protection) therefore occurs mainly in the 16 German National Parks that contains larger areas with non-intervention management, which are usually forested. Such non-intervention areas are compatible with particular rewilding principles, especially the restoration of ecological processes and the dynamic development of ecosystems, but strict protection should not be equated with rewilding as a whole.

B. Economic instruments

Funding relevant to rewilding can originate from both public and private sources, including EU programmes such as LIFE, national funding schemes, compensation mechanisms financed by companies, and funding provided by NGOs and philanthropic organisations. Evidence collected in the Rewilding Cases indicates that rewilding-related activities frequently depend on time-limited, project-specific funding rather than on dedicated and permanent rewilding funding instruments. While both public and private funding sources were identified across the case studies, the study did not systematically collect comparable financial data that would allow us to quantify their relative shares. A systematic comparison of public and private financing would be valuable for assessing the long-term financial sustainability of rewilding initiatives and their dependence on public policy support.

Rewilding-related activities can obtain indirect funds from the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP), through agri-environmental and climate measures. These range from habitat restoration, rewetting peatlands, or reducing livestock to allow natural regeneration, afforestation, set-aside and land abandonment measures encouraging leaving land fallow or converting farmland into semi-natural habitats, and financial incentives for maintaining or improving protected areas. Still, the CAP prioritises agriculture, and most funding requires landowners to keep or even intensify agriculture activities, primarily aiming at agricultural production. Landowners could be incentivized in the future through economic tools like subsidies, conservation easements, and eco-tourism ventures. One example is establishing transition initiatives for farmers who could be impacted by rewilding projects. Governmental departments (ministries) and administrative organizations focused on the environment

and science, alongside NGOs, eco-tourism enterprises, farmers supporting rewilding, and forestry companies, can promote national economic tools to encourage rewilding efforts. For instance, peatlands function as major carbon sinks, and restoring these ecosystems can lead to the creation of carbon credits. This can potentially be a good economic reason for local businesses and industry to get involved in or fund local rewilding projects.

C. Dynamic actors/stakeholders' relations

Early communication and planning are considered essential elements for engaging a diversity of parties in rewilding. A lack of consultation can lead to resentment and block the rewilding process. Consequently, it is crucial to adopt planning processes that are prompt, well-informed, and clear, fostering an open, unbiased dialogue about the core principles of rewilding—such as restoring ecological processes, allowing greater ecosystem self-regulation and reducing management intensity where appropriate—while also discussing how these principles can be practically implemented under specific local ecological, social and institutional conditions. Such dialogue should embrace diverse perspectives on rewilding and openly consider where particular rewilding approaches may need to be adapted to local circumstances rather than assuming complete removal of human presence or management. When planning, it is important to openly present both the advantages and the drawbacks of rewilding for local communities (and their individual members), because they will be directly affected.

Participative planning

Based on the structured discussion held during the 2025 wildE annual meeting with Rewilding Case Leads and other consortium experts, participants emphasised that, rewilding initiatives should be launched and executed by local and regional stakeholders, incorporating rewilding into urban and regional planning processes. It should be noted that those actively involved in ecological restoration, even if they do not use the term 'rewilding', will likely provide the most compelling viewpoints. Participatory governance and knowledge sharing facilitates the involvement and enhances the collaboration of various entities, such as municipalities, policymakers, local businesses, and residents, in the co-creation of rewilding strategies. While citizen science initiatives can engage local communities in monitoring species and ecosystems, landscape planners and managers can be informed by traditional ecological knowledge from farmers, shepherds, and local communities.

Environmental non-governmental organizations are actively promoting policy alterations, along with citizen-led initiatives that champion rewilding and nature-based solutions. In the Baixo Sabor, NGOs are attempting to purchase or lease land; however, this process is arduous due to the land's attributes and the challenge of identifying landowners. In the Antarr Rewilding Case, common land is typically employed for activities including grazing, herding, firewood harvesting, other forest uses, and small-scale community farming. 'Baldios' are neither state-owned nor privately owned; instead, they belong to the local communities ('compartes'), who have customary rights over them. Management of 'baldios' is regulated by Portuguese law, specifically under the 'Baldios' Law (75/2017), which establishes that local communities, often through elected assemblies or



partnerships with public or private entities, oversee their use and conservation. These lands play a significant role in rural economies and environmental sustainability.

Science for rewilding?

Scientific research can significantly contribute to clarifying approaches and highlighting the special importance of rewilding and a way of measuring rewilding progress. Substantial scientific support is required to evaluate the trade-offs, outcomes, drivers, and barriers to effective rewilding in various socio-ecological contexts. Biodiversity monitoring, GIS mapping, and ecological modelling can help with site selection and demonstration of economic and ecological benefits in order to convince landowners. However, it is crucial that scientific assessments also reflect potential disadvantages or social tensions related to rewilding—for example, changes in land use, perceived restrictions, or uncertainty related to long-term livelihoods. A balanced understanding of both benefits and challenges is essential to ensure local support and equitable outcomes. Pilot projects and trials of rewilding strategies in specified natural areas provide evidence-based recommendations through the generation of evidence that principles such as complexity, connectivity, and nature self-sufficiency benefit conservation or ecosystem services before scaling up. Areas under strict protection (wilderness) provide valuable locations for research and natural experiments and can be utilized in the management and conservation of other areas. Furthermore, it is recommended to initiate long-term research on rewilding locations to monitor and detect ongoing ecological changes. Long-term research endeavours like these can aid in capturing the changing experiences of local communities, offering useful insights into the practical implications of rewilding policies.

The link between social, cultural and environmental rewilding considerations

Rewilding initiatives in densely populated urban areas, such as the Barcelona Metropolitan Region, encounter social and environmental challenges, especially where natural spaces are commonly used by the public, leading many residents to view nature as something to be managed rather than self-regulating. Moreover, the expansion of rewilding may create conflict between providing public access and preserving biodiversity since visitors typically desire open access to natural areas, whereas unrestricted human activity could disrupt wildlife and impede ecosystem recovery. In Portugal, rewilding initiatives are implemented in areas experiencing depopulation and land abandonment. The support of land abandonment may exacerbate rural desertification and result in a loss of livelihoods and unique heritage and historical land uses. Another example comes from the Tatras region, severely affected by large-scale disturbances such as windstorms and subsequent bark beetle outbreaks, which presents both opportunities and challenges for rewilding. On the one hand, these events have disrupted traditional forest structures, creating openings for the restoration of natural processes and allowing for a shift toward more self-regulating ecosystems. On the other hand, the altered landscape has also intensified pressures for rapid development, including infrastructure expansion, tourism facilities, and new construction projects that may compromise ecological integrity. Socially, rewilding efforts may face resistance from local communities and other stakeholders. Balancing conservation goals with local development interests remains a critical challenge, requiring inclusive governance, clear communication of long-term ecological

benefits, and carefully designed policy instruments that align environmental objectives with socio-economic realities.

Climate change is exacerbating the frequency of fire and drought occurrences. A significant opportunity exists in demonstrating rewilding effectiveness as a restoration tool within the context of climate change. Rewilding can enhance ecosystem resilience, but it also raises concerns about how to balance natural regeneration with fire prevention and water management. Peatlands in Ireland are currently being restored in many areas and are being monitored for greenhouse gas emissions. They are considered an important tool in climate management, as well as important ecosystems. Scientific investigations indicate that the restoration of peatlands ultimately functions as a carbon sink. Credits acquired from peatlands might eventually be employed to offset industrial carbon emissions. In light of the EU's climate neutrality goal by 2050, scientific research on greenhouse gas emissions from bogs presents a compelling rationale for rewilding in these ecosystems.

The reintroduction of species not currently present in the area may not be well-received by the local community. The legal structure governing the reintroduction of wildlife in Portugal is dispersed amongst various legislative acts, substantially impacted by international and European Union laws, specifically the Bonn and Bern Conventions and the EU Habitats Directive. (Re)introductions are not allowed in Portugal if they involve non-native species.

Future outlook – Nature Restoration Regulation

New regulations may broaden rewilding zones outside protected areas, provide financial motivations for landowners to participate in rewilding initiatives, and resolve legal ambiguities regarding species reintroduction and passive ecological restoration. Regulation (EU) 2024/1991 on Nature Restoration (NRR), which entered into force on 18 August 2024, is binding in its entirety and is directly applicable in all Member States. The EU has, for the first time, established a legal framework with mandatory goals for the protection and recovery of nature. Even if the term 'rewilding' is not present in the Regulation itself but only in associated documents, the description of one of the restoration measures highlighted is in its Annex VII (List of examples of restoration measures referred to in Article 14(23): 'Allow ecosystems to develop their own natural dynamics for example by abandoning harvesting and promoting naturalness and wilderness'). The absence of the term rewilding from the Regulation also reflects the fact that rewilding is not established as a distinct legal category in EU environmental law. This may create some ambiguity when rewilding is discussed as a policy objective in its own right. However, it does not necessarily prevent the implementation of rewilding-related practices, as many of its underlying principles can be pursued through existing legal concepts and instruments, including ecosystem restoration, strict protection, species recovery, ecological connectivity and measures that allow natural ecosystem dynamics. In this sense, the practical relevance of the NRR for rewilding lies less in legally defining the term itself than in creating binding restoration obligations and policy space for measures that are compatible with rewilding principles.

The EU Member States are required to submit their National Restoration Plans by 1 September 2026. The NRR places a high value on respecting cultural and social peculiarities. The NRR text indicates that



establishing a comprehensive objective for ecosystem restoration is appropriate to facilitate economic and societal transformation, generate high-quality employment, and promote sustainable growth. The goal of restoration efforts should be to optimize the ecological, economic, and social functions of ecosystems, encompassing their potential for productivity, with consideration for their contribution to sustainable regional and community development. NRR provides a binding legal framework for ecosystem restoration that can create substantial policy space for the implementation of rewilding-compatible measures.

At the EU level, the NRR and transboundary ecological corridors can enhance biodiversity connectivity, while CAP reforms and LIFE funding support sustainable land management. The habitat directive, due to its goal-oriented nature, presents challenges in conjunction with the NRR for rewilding projects. Many targeted habitats are actively managed. Those unmanaged may possess implicit or explicit targets that are inconsistent with certain rewilding outcomes. The creation of a case that demonstrates rewilding's advantages for the NRR's goals is required. It is recommended to review the Natura 2000 network (Habitat and Bird Directive) to address potential inconsistencies with wilderness areas. The central question is whether the objective is to preserve natural processes, or to conserve the existing state of habitats and species. It is possible for one Natura 2000 habitat to be transformed into another via natural processes. Under these circumstances, in the context of strict conservation efforts (wilderness areas), we adhere to natural processes, accepting that the habitat's conservation status will diminish over time, ultimately evolving into an alternative Natura 2000 habitat. Conversely, current Natura 2000 guidelines could be interpreted to mandate habitat preservation, with active conservation measures required to maintain its conservation status. Ultimately, we are preserving a specific habitat akin to a museum exhibit, actively safeguarding nature from its intrinsic processes. The potential for such issues/questions may increase with continuing climate change. It is important to acknowledge that nature is dynamic and governed by natural disturbances.

At a national level, the integration of rewilding into climate adaptation strategies and the expansion of payments for ecosystem services should be considered to incentivize land restoration. The national restoration plans, which are due by September 1 2026, require careful consideration of the interplay and potential conflicts among the conservation strategies implemented for Natura 2000 sites. Thus, the regulation is a relevant policy for further increasing demand for Nature-based Solutions at regional and local levels. However, there is a brief window to work with officials, and national strategies can vary, leading to diverse understandings of the NRR. In the Portuguese Rewilding Cases, the NRR may strengthen policy support for ecological restoration and other measures compatible with rewilding, particularly in landscapes affected by land abandonment. At the same time, these restoration opportunities interact with other national and local policy priorities. Recent changes facilitating development in some rural and peri-urban areas may increase competition for land and potentially reduce the area available for future restoration. The Portuguese Rewilding Cases therefore illustrate how the practical effects of the NRR will depend on its interaction with spatial planning, rural development and land-use policy.

At the local level, urban planning necessitates a balance between rewilding and public access, fire prevention, and drought resilience; this would involve the use of zoning regulations and green infrastructure to address potential conflicts. Rewilding endeavours can be further supported by municipal incentives, community engagement, and eco-tourism initiatives, which ensure both ecological restoration and socioeconomic advantages. Engaging in open dialogue with sceptical stakeholders will foster trust, address concerns, and underscore the advantages of rewilding. To integrate and evaluate scientific data, local conditions, and knowledge, constructing RW strategies must enable the most beneficial and least conflict-ridden compromise for rewilding, biodiversity, advantages, economy, and the local population.

Box 1 Key messages from the rewilding institutional framework analysis

Key messages:

- **Increasing policy integration but no dedicated laws** – Rewilding is now embedded in EU and national biodiversity, climate, and restoration frameworks, though coverage remains indirect and varies in legal enforceability.
- **Opportunities and policy gaps** – EU strategies and the EU Nature Restoration Regulation support rewilding, yet forestry and agriculture frameworks can conflict with rewilding principles and implementation.
- **Economic potential but limited instruments** – Current funding is mostly project-based; carbon/biodiversity credits, eco-tourism, and targeted subsidies offer future opportunities.
- **Participatory and knowledge-based governance** – Early, transparent engagement with local actors, integration of science, local and indigenous knowledge, and long-term monitoring are crucial for legitimacy and adaptive management.
- **Climate change as a driver for a paradigm shift** – Rewilding is positioned as a Nature-based Solution for resilience, carbon capture, and adaptation, requiring institutional change, cross-sectoral collaboration, and new narratives.

3.2 Results of the systematic literature review

The aim of the systematic literature review was to elucidate which conflicts are described in relation to rewilding contexts in Europe and how they are addressed in the literature. We paid attention to what the characteristics of rewilding conflict contexts are, identified the types of conflicts present, and what management and mitigation strategies are proposed to address them. In the review, we understood the core principles of rewilding to be a) increasing trophic complexity, b) facilitating connectivity between habitats, c) restoring natural processes including stochastic disturbances and d) aiming towards minimising human intervention (derived from Perino et al., 2019; Torres et al., 2018, Carver et al., 2021). We found that around one third of the articles that study conflicts in relation to these core principles of rewilding in Europe use the term ‘rewilding’ explicitly to describe such interventions (78 out of 269). The remaining 191 studies do not use the term ‘rewilding’, but were included in the review because they met our criteria based on the core principles of rewilding mentioned above.

In general, there has been an upward trend in papers published on rewilding related conflicts, starting with only one paper in 1992 and surpassing 10 in 2015. The highest number of studies published is in 2023 (n=33), and remained high in subsequent years (data collected up to end of 2025).

Increasing trophic complexity and connectivity are the rewilding types most often described by the literature (n = 214). This intervention type refers to facilitating the reintroduction, recolonisation, or expansion of keystone species to specific habitats, either by direct or indirect human involvement. We found wolves to be the subject of most articles about rewilding conflicts, and wild boar to be the least frequent. Articles discussing conflicts around rivers, fires and marine animals are the least represented in our sample (*Figure 5*). The latter could relate to the observed historical terrestrial focus in the rewilding literature. While the main topics of rewilding related conflicts overlap in some cases, most studies on wildlife focused on the impacts of one species specifically.

These findings highlight the diverse interpretations of rewilding, indicating that even within scientific discourse, a definitive distinction between *intentional rewilding* (e.g. restoration) and *non-intentional rewilding* (such as the return of wolves) is not always explicit or clear. Consequently, conflicts identified in scientific literature as potential ‘rewilding conflicts’ do not always stem directly from rewilding interventions. In other words, many rewilding conflicts may not arise from rewilding activities targeting nature restoration alone but be also consequences of wider global changes (including farmland abandonment). Still, due to the complex and inter-linked character of these conflicts, they may be classified as rewilding conflicts by certain groups of impacted stakeholders.

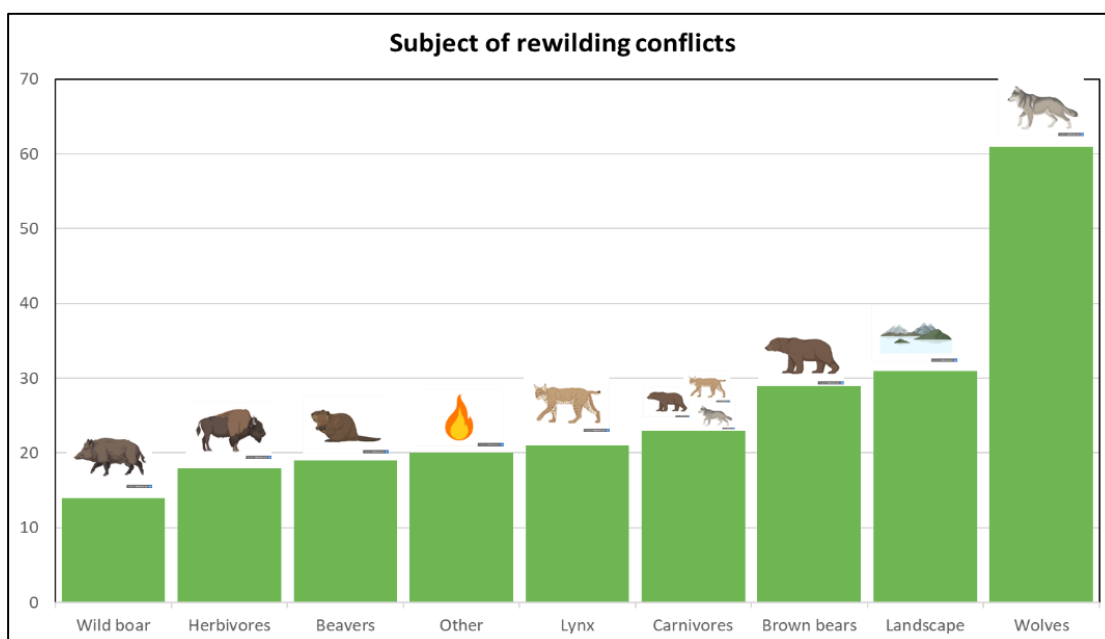


Figure 5 Topics of rewilding related conflicts in the literature review. Category “Carnivores” refers to studies mentioning >1 species of carnivore.

Restoration (n = 35) was the second largest code referring to rewilding processes which did not explicitly use the term. Restoration here refers broadly to restoring natural dynamics in a landscape, with many examples from riverine ecosystems and floodplains. Land abandonment (n = 11) and stochastic disturbances (n = 6) were the least frequently described rewilding processes.

Most research on rewilding related conflicts in Europe is concentrated in specific regions. The figure below shows the geographical distribution across Europe, as well as how many studies were published per country. Studies are most frequent in Spain (n=47), Italy (n=34), Portugal (n=25) and the United Kingdom (mostly England, n=26) and Scotland, n=12). There is an overlap here with where the first authors of the articles are affiliated, with most based in England, Spain and Italy. The stakeholders most frequently mentioned in the literature reviewed are farmers, hunters, and the local population.

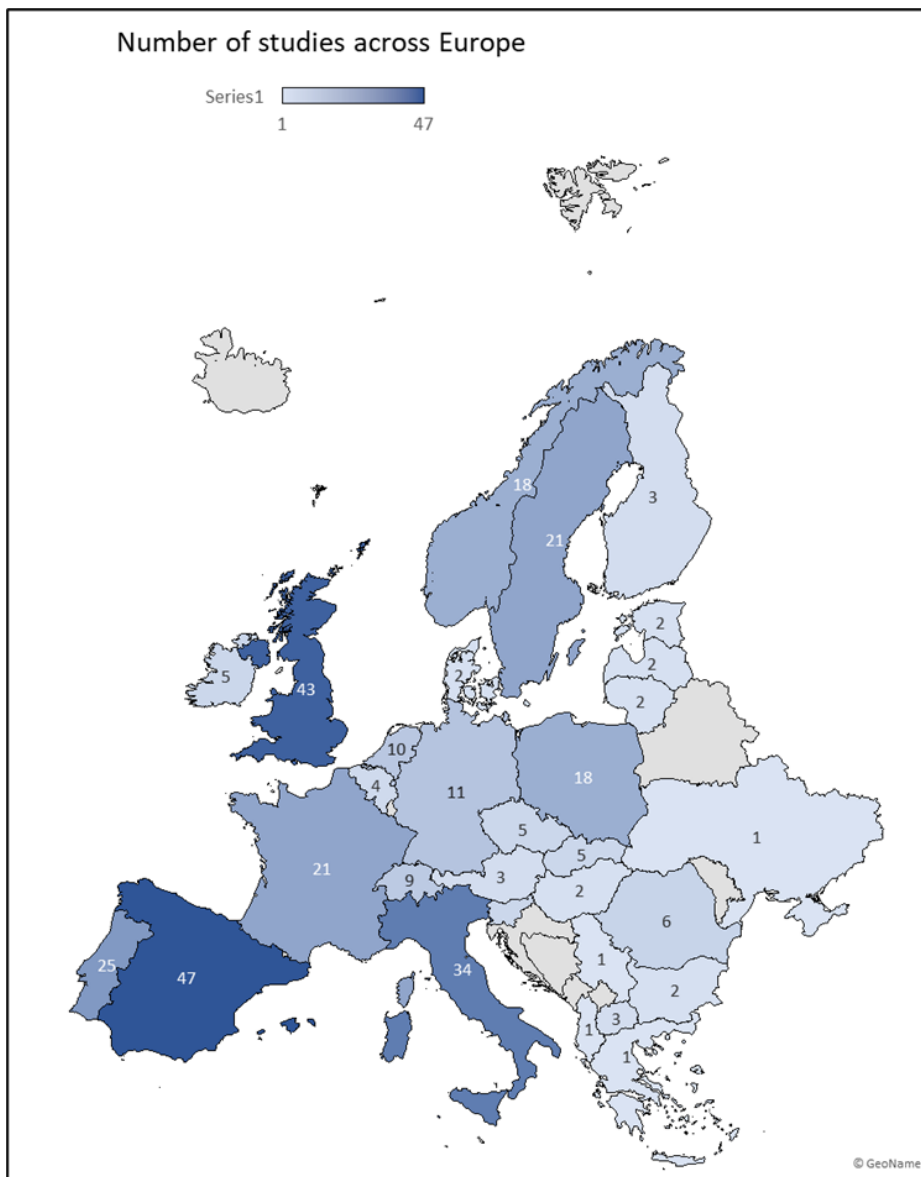


Figure 6 Number and geographical distribution of literature

In the review, we identified four main conflict dimensions and four strategies to address them, either tested or merely proposed by the studies we found in the literature. In the table below, we summarise the conflict dimensions and their associated management strategies.

Table 7 The summary of the conflict dimensions and associated management strategies.

Conflict dimensions	Conflict Management strategies
<i>Interest dimension</i>	<i>Technical and economic interventions</i>
Relates to material stake in a conflict and often linked to economic costs and power relations	Technical and economic interventions are proposed in response to tangible risks and damages associated with rewilding (e.g. fences against predators, compensation for losses of livestock)
<i>Value dimension</i>	<i>Cognitive interventions</i>
Relates to the different values people hold about nature, for example ecological, social or economic, and where they clash	Strategies recognising and targeting the human/social aspect of conflicts, by addressing attitudes, behaviour and values, and emphasising learning between stakeholders
<i>Process dimension</i>	<i>Stakeholder engagement and local participation</i>
Relates to how rewilding interventions are proposed and implemented, and who is included or excluded in that process	Strategies emphasising transparency, engagement and inclusion of local stakeholders in decision making processes
<i>Knowledge dimension</i>	<i>Cognitive interventions</i>
Relates to the type of knowledge referred to in making decisions about nature and land, and where uncertainties, ambiguities and divergence may arise.	Relates to strategies recognising different types of knowledge, with a particular focus on research and investigation to address uncertainties and knowledge gaps.

Hence, our review indicates that, as a general line, there are distinguishable dimensions of rewilding conflicts that do also relate to specific conflict management strategies. Yet, importantly, these different conflict dimensions are often interconnected with each other, as well as conflict management strategies which may be interrelated and not always neatly connect to specific conflict types in practice.

The review shows a strong focus of rewilding related conflicts in Europe related to the impacts of large animals, mostly carnivores (56%). These instances are controversial, where on the one hand these emblematic animals are important in restoring trophic complexity in ecosystems, and may also be critical for attracting financial support for projects, but on the other hand they often become symbols of polarisation (e.g. Ericsson et al.,

2006; Bone, 2018; Breitenmoser, 1998; Frei, 2020). We recognise the importance of redirecting the focus of rewilding efforts towards ecosystem functioning as opposed to a species focus, smaller areas, or areas outside the usually expected rural landscapes, e.g. also in urban or post-industrial settings.

Box 2 Key messages emerging from the review on rewilding conflicts in Europe

Key messages

- The **number of publications** about rewilding conflicts has increased over time, the highest number in **2023** (n=33)
- **Increasing trophic complexity** was the rewilding principle most often described in relation to rewilding conflicts in the literature, and **wildlife impacts** the most common cited cause of conflicts
- Most papers about rewilding conflicts are about **wolves** (63 papers)
- Half of the studies in Europe have been concentrated in the **Mediterranean and Portugal** (49%)
- **'Farmers'** are the stakeholders mentioned most frequently by studies, followed by 'local residents', 'landowners' and 'hunters'
- Most of the early studies on rewilding conflicts were done by natural scientists, with social sciences engaging much more on the topic in the last decade. This can result in a (proposed) **change of perspective on conflicts as being a productive force for improving – and not preventing – rewilding projects**.
- We observed that conflicts are usually studied when they are already present, leading to a focus on **reactive and technical conflict management interventions**. We suggest a stronger emphasis on **proactive approaches** to address conflicts before they become deeply rooted.

Our findings generally underline the importance of distinguishing between different dimensions of rewilding conflicts, which then points to the relevant and most appropriate strategies proposed to manage them. For example, in the case of reintroducing beavers or extending connectivity between habitats, there are often conflicts relating to economic interests of specific groups, such as farmers or those living next to nature reserves, that come into conflict with each other. On the other hand, wildfire may be an issue where large parts of the population are concerned, and where not only economic interests, but also more deeply rooted fears and emotions come to the fore. Again, other conflicts – e.g. relating to the presence of dead trees or deadwood in 'rewilding' forest landscapes – may be related mostly to diverging values and perceptions towards nature. These may require a different set of management strategies more related to taking concerns seriously and allow mutual learning to address them.

In general, the engagement of other disciplines, especially those coming from the social sciences, in the study of emerging conflicts in rewilding contexts has been relatively late. We identified a trend that conflicts are studied when they are already present, which leads to a focus on reactive and technical conflict management interventions rather than proactive and preventative conflict approaches. Studies have shown that in the case of wildlife damages, for example, proactive approaches are more successful in addressing conflicts (Bautista et al., 2021). The reactive focus may have contributed to the worsening of conflicts, where tensions and disputes are not sufficiently resolved, and may become deeply rooted and identity related conflicts (Madden and McQuinn, 2014).



Related to that, the review points out a historical lack of social science contributions to the field of rewilding conflicts in its first 10+ years of use (most existing studies from that time were conducted by natural scientists), and the subsequent rooting of rewilding related conflicts since then. These are now gaining more attention and engagement from the social sciences, and we identify this importance. There is a need to build conflict mitigation into the design and approach to rewilding interventions, so that proactive engagement is possible before tensions escalate to a deeply rooted dynamic that is difficult to shift. We propose to see conflicts as constructive forces and a useful lens, which opens up spaces for dialogue and a renegotiation of power dynamics, in the hope of promoting more critical, socially and environmentally just rewilding interventions.

There are some limitations linked to this systematic literature review. First, there is a certain negativity bias in the search strings. By including the term ‘conflict’ (and related terms), we exclude other (less conflictive) impacts of rewilding. The search string also contained a large diversity of concepts related to rewilding due to its plural and diverse nature, yet still trade-offs existed between being all-encompassing and keeping the amount of literature manageable. Perhaps the most relevant term that was excluded from the search process is ‘strict protection’, which arguably overlaps quite significantly with the key principles of rewilding. Furthermore, we were unable to include articles not written in English and only included literature from peer-reviewed scientific journals, though much has been researched and written about rewilding outside of academia.

3.3. Results of qualitative research in Rewilding Cases

The following section presents the results of the qualitative research conducted in the Rewilding Cases, consisting of ‘screening’ and in-depth analysis (see Section 2.3). The information summarize interview-based insights and workshop data, presenting the stakeholders’ perspective, though they do not include a rigorous evidentiary verification. We acknowledge that diverse perspectives and interpretations may exist.

Key stakeholders

The interviews and workshops revealed several groups of key stakeholders relevant in the investigated Rewilding Cases (see Appendix IV). They can be organised into the following overarching categories:

- Researchers/Scientists
- Business (other than tourism)
- Tourism industry
- Nature conservation bodies
- Forest service/administration
- NGO/Env NGO
- Local administration
- Community leaders/Representatives of the local community
- Fire prevention/suppression units

- Landowners (including farmers)
- Hunting organisations/Hunters
- Media
- Artists

In practice, the categories presented above overlapped, and several stakeholders belonged to more than one category ('stakeholders with many hats'). In such cases, one stakeholder was able to provide a more comprehensive overview of the situation of the case study, which led to a quicker saturation of data (see Section 2.3). Furthermore, while still considered, the division between local, regional, national and the EU-level of the stakeholders was less important in our analysis, as we focussed mostly on local and regional stakeholders active in the Rewilding Cases.

The key groups of the stakeholders as listed above are representative of all investigated Rewilding Cases. Depending on the specificity of the case, the influence of certain groups of stakeholders, as well as the impact of their beliefs and interests, varies. For instance, the fire prevention and suppression units were more prominent in the Barcelona Metropolitan Region compared to other areas. Similarly, the forest service, administration, and related businesses were most noticeable in the Sveaskog and Antarr Rewilding Cases. Although providing a comprehensive summary of stakeholder interests and beliefs across all Rewilding Cases is challenging, we propose groups that can be identified, at least to some extent, in most of the investigated cases, as we will outline in the following.

Conservation Researchers/Scientists, Nature conservation bodies and NGO/Env NGO

The Rewilding Cases demonstrate a general support for rewilding within this group. Its members are in parts even seen as initiators, or at least advocates of rewilding efforts. Frequently, they brought in the idea of rewilding (including the term, its approaches, and its underlying "philosophy") in the context of local Rewilding Cases. Thus, they serve as translators of the concept, carrying it from international or national dialogues to the local sphere, and converting it into a defined collection of practices and actions. Researchers (but also representatives of NGOs) use the rewilding sites as 'showcases', example of 'success stories' or key sites for education about rewilding. These locations serve as field trip destinations for educational institutions, including schools and universities, where students can engage in nature-based learning experiences.

This group hence often believes rewilding can benefit both nature and people, and therefore should be further supported through policy, regulation, economic incentives, and education. While the role and place of people in rewilding projects are generally acknowledged, this group also promotes restrictions on human activity within these areas, partially including access limitations. Rewilding as a nature protection and management approach is thereby aligned with the core beliefs and values of the members of this group – i.e. that nature should be given room and space to develop at its own pace, and that there is value in self-regulating natural processes,

there is a need to act now and not postpone nature protection activities for later. While the possibility of conflict is acknowledged, there is also a belief in solutions through, e.g., compensations and engagement of affected stakeholders. When asked directly about the notion and the use of the term rewilding, members of this group usually do not oppose the term, but rather presented it as a useful tool for describing the activities in the case studies:

“I think that was a very good example of rewilding. First of all, because we had a strong base - we still have wild nature. We have three large carnivores. We have some areas with pristine landscapes. Pristine habitats that are almost untouched. (...) Yes. Some areas can even be called pristine. The others are basically natural. Except maybe spruce monocultures. But they can be changed either with human impact or just by giving it to the nature. And basically, if you look at the strategy of the park, this is rewilding. Probably the founders of the park, they already had the idea to rewild [this site]. They, for example, banned sheep herding in the alpine zone. So, over time, this became a strict conservation zone. So, just natural processes” (representative of the nature conservation body, quote from the interview).

Landowners (including farmers) and local administrations

This group presents a generally more reserved perspective regarding rewilding practices in the Rewilding Cases, also depending on how rewilding is actually understood and practiced. The interviews conducted with the representatives of this group highlighted both the advantages and disadvantages of different rewilding approaches. What unites this group is its focus on the ‘local realities’ and implications of rewilding practices for the local inhabitants and their daily lives. The strong belief among this group was that the local inhabitants, especially those (potentially) directly affected, such as farmers, private forest owners, or those living in close proximity to strict protection zones, should have a direct say about the implementation of rewilding (including e.g. the design of proposed zonation). The presumption was that local people should be allowed to decide what to do and how to proceed, as opposed to experts from far away. These narratives also reflected a sense of systematic exclusion or being undermined by decision-makers in distant capital cities (e.g. Brussels). The members of this group, more often, expressed the “unnegotiable boundaries” for rewilding intervention. Those could be related to the return of predators, the proximity of strict protection zones, access restrictions, or – as in the case of the Gelderse Poort – the localisation of rewilding interventions:

“In our municipality, outside the dikes is actually intended for nature development. Inside the dikes, yes, that’s where we want buildings and [do] things like that and farming. So we are actually trying as much as possible looking for those solutions outside the dikes” (local resident, quote from the interview).

“With farmers [these things], trigger some bad blood. [T]here are also small rules and restrictions on the agricultural land inside the dikes. That does strike a chord with the city council members. Because the farmers are their constituents of course and their inhabitants [...] . You also have a lot of local nature groups, but it is sometimes seen as something from outside” (representative of local administration, quote from the interview).

Also, firefighters and fire suppression units were included in this group. Rewilding was viewed with ambiguity by firefighting units in Barcelona's Metropolitan Region, where they are important stakeholders. The passive rewilding understood as 'hands-off' approach was opposed as risky in the metropolitan context. In their opinion, unmanaged forest growth could result in intense fires, potentially causing political repercussions that stall restoration plans. On the other hand, there was an appreciation for the ecological aspirations of rewilding. Frequently, a lack of clear definition of rewilding was raised as a problem. For instance, if rewilding was viewed as a more directed strategy employing methods such as prescribed burning or ungulates to 'naturally manage' fire prone ecosystems in order to lessen susceptibility to extreme wildfires, it was deemed appropriate and vital within the Mediterranean context.

When asked about the term rewilding, perceptions and acceptance within this group vary. Some strongly opposed the term as too closely linked with the idea of strict protection and excluding human interventions. Rewilding was also described as a potential obstacle to economic activities by this group, especially in rural areas. Others (especially representatives of the local administration) have a more favourable view on its use and application in the Rewilding Case. This can be linked to the potential opportunities for local municipalities and administration related to the development of rewilding areas, such as additional income sources for the local population and administration (e.g. via tourism).

Community leaders/Representatives of the local civil society and Business

This group considers rewilding an avenue for meeting the needs of various stakeholders by creating different engagements and actions. Unlike the first two groups that view rewilding mostly from an ecological perspective, this group perceives it more as evolving into a business mechanism or intervention with benefits that are mostly understood in non-ecological categories. Rewilding is sometimes viewed as a market-based approach to resolving local problems, especially by community leaders, or to generate new business prospects, primarily from a business standpoint. In general, the group's members consider rewilding as a means of connecting local community interests with those of external investors. In several case studies, this group proposed rewilding to involve the community and address local issues, as indicated by the following three original quotations:

"[In] three municipalities next to this area, the unemployment is very high, and there are no jobs for the people who live next to this area. So of course, tourism could be an expanding sector here. But it takes that there will be some real entrepreneurs that see that this could be the case, that would be a good thing because many people want to go to national parks. So that could still be a start of tourism" (member of the local community, quote from the interview).

"The other thing we're doing, which I find hugely interesting – we're going to try and make a solid material out of the wool with the bio-resin. And so it's going to be, a plastic alternative. So we're going to make, plastic dam,



alternative with wool and bio-raisins and for blocking the drains as well, so that, you know, when we're doing bog restorations, it should be as close to, 100% natural products so that we're not using plastic that's been engineered, abroad. We'll have it made in Connemara. And again, that's an industry. So what that's doing is solving the problem with bog restorations and the problem of, making farming more viable in the area and also solving the problem of waste. So we're actually making a waste product into, something that is economically sellable" (representative of local community, quote from the interview).

"No, the local municipalities were not so much concerned about the biodiversity values. They were much more concerned about having financial compensations. And from what I know, they use the money for infrastructure mainly. They created a thing called Sabor Lakes, and they tried to take advantage of the water surface as a touristic exploitation area" (researcher, quote from the interview).

According to the members of this group, rewilding can also establish a local brand:

"But if you decide to make local products, for example, local cheese, you can sell this cheese in the region (...). You can sell a lot of products in the region at a higher price. But to do so, you have to connect all the farms, and to make one brand and maybe one company which will make these products. You can take milk, for example, from different farms and in one place you can make cheese out of it and sell it, well, under the brand, Tatra cheese or something, Tatra bio, eco cheese" (local activist, quote from the interview).

Hunting organisation/Hunters and Forest service/administration

The group with the most cautious approach to rewilding efforts comprises representatives from hunting associations, forestry services, and administrations. In certain Rewilding Cases, this group also included, at least in part, farmers and other landowners (e.g. in Sveaskog, Coillte, and Gelderse Poort). A reluctance to embrace 'hands-off' approaches and to employ a primary focus on natural processes characterises this group. Here, we found disagreement with the idea that 'nature can do the job' or that it should substitute human interventions.

"And I think that is where the problem started in the first place. That there was one policy for farming in Ireland [...]. The peatland was drained for grazing back in the 80s. And now we've been told, block these drains that we paid you to dig up 50 years ago in" (representative of local community, quote from the interview).

A focus on 'non-intervention' is also viewed as potentially harmful to natural and cultural heritage:

"A few years ago I talked to the people from the National Park and they say, that in Białka or Bukowina Tatrzńska, they wanted to change the forest status from active protection to strict protection. And they said that for this people, that's their tradition. If they cannot work behind their yard on some sculpture and they

cannot take this wood from the forest, that's a big thing for them" (representative of the EnvNGO, quote from the interview).

"So there was huge confusion with farmers. I'm not sure if you're aware, but in Ireland, it is almost like a cultural right to cut turf, to burn turf. And, that's something that we have to handle. And if maybe somebody from Europe came to some of my meetings and was sitting there, they would probably have their heads in their hands going: 'Oh my God, what is this woman saying?' But you can't just come in and say, you cannot cut turf, you cannot cut turf. We're going on and say: 'If you want turf, that's your right, that's up to you. Here's what we want you to do. And you can actually get paid by doing this. So if you want to cut the turf, that's fine. That's up to you. It's your choice if you want to go this way. If you want to cut a little and do a little bit more of the restoration on this land, we will show you how'" (representative of local community, quote from the interview).

Ultimately, the members of this group showed the least amount of enthusiasm regarding the suitability and correctness of the term rewilding:

"So when you talk about rewilding in Sweden, it's often about the wolf. [...] So rewilding by a general public is often not thought very positively, especially because hunting is such a big thing for Sweden. Of course, if they connect rewilding to the wolves, that would also impact their hunting and so on and so forth" (researcher, quote from the interview).

"When we started the project, we were given the press release, which we adopted locally, to do with advancing rewilding. [...] And there was quite a bit of pushback from local groupings [...] There was a lot of disquiet about the word rewilding. So they didn't like the word rewilding very much. And part of the reason for that is that it has very much been associated in Ireland with things like reintroducing wolves, reintroducing seagulls, this sort of thing. [...] They don't have an issue with the work we're doing, but they do have an issue with this fear of wild, fear of wilderness (...). You have to be careful of these words" (researcher, quote from the interview).

Summing up, the interviews generally indicated nuances in understanding of rewilding and the activities connected to it. Stakeholders show very different attitudes towards the rewilding term that also depend on how it is understood, and how rewilding is practiced. Local negotiations always determine the term's meaning, which is influenced by local, national, and international perspectives on the rewilding approach. It is critical to be aware of the term's local interpretation as this may be crucial for the support of rewilding projects that at times may be more harmed by the term than helped.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that some subcategories of the stakeholders and perspectives ended up being underrepresented in the report. This refers, e.g., to private forest owners, small landowners/farmers,



hunting associations, and stakeholders often missing the means and capacity to engage in social and environmental debates (such as the unemployed, retired or digitally excluded – but also – and most important – the general public that was surveyed in Task 1.5 – see [D 1.4](#)). During interviews and workshops, we made a point of including women's voices and considering the perspectives of those less privileged to account for gendered representation. We also tried to include stakeholders who weren't fluent in English by allowing them to participate in their native languages.

As mentioned above, the stakeholders' classification relates to their interests, beliefs, perceptions of rewilding practices in the Rewilding Cases, and their involvement in the conflicts. We will continue discussing these aspects in the sections that follow.

Rewilding vulnerabilities

We understand *Rewilding vulnerabilities* in the sense of critical processes related to rewilding interventions that may result in social tensions, conflicts or socio-environmental harm. It can be perceived as a process requiring rewilding intervention or as a risk arising from such intervention. Wildfires, flooding, bark beetle outbreaks, historical land abandonment, and afforestation were most commonly mentioned by the stakeholders under this perspective. Next to resulting from/consisting of natural dynamics, vulnerabilities are often rooted in past land use practices, governance regimes and former policies adopted by different authorities. Therefore, they are essential to advancing the understanding of current conflicts about rewilding. First, these vulnerabilities are briefly discussed; thereafter associated rewilding practices will be detailed for each case study.

Rewilding vulnerabilities are critical processes related to rewilding interventions that may cause social tensions, conflicts, or socio-environmental harm. They can result from/comprise natural dynamics, and are often rooted in past land use practices, governance regimes, and former policies adopted by different authorities. Rewilding vulnerabilities can be viewed in two ways: (1) either as a process that rewilding initiatives should tackle and mitigate the subsequent impacts on both people and the environment, or as (2) a potential risk introduced by rewilding practices themselves. The way stakeholders see and interpret rewilding interventions is linked to how rewilding vulnerabilities are understood. In the studied Rewilding Cases, these include: wildfires, flooding, bark beetle outbreaks, historical land abandonment, and afforestation.

Wildfires

Wildfires have, on average, become more frequent and violent in many regions across southern Europe, and have a larger potential for causing serious threats to property and human life inter alia due to the expansion of settlements and infrastructure, including in the Barcelona Metropolitan Region. Today, the city is surrounded by many continuous areas of dense forests partially resulting from land abandonment, and urban-forest interfaces resulting from rapid urban expansion and industrialization. Climate-induced droughts and heat waves intensify both the frequency and severity of wildfires, increasing the risk of populated areas such as Collserola and Vallvidrera to be directly affected. Here, wildfires pose direct threats to human safety (both residents and tourists) and to infrastructure, while the smoke degrades the air quality well beyond the

immediately affected area. To address these challenges, fire mitigation goes hand in hand with forest restoration in this Rewilding Case, and the effort of bringing together local authorities, firefighters and Collserola Park administration as the main responsible stakeholders aided by other actors like farmers and forest owners as directly interested parties. Fire is also a severe threat in the Antarr Rewilding Case, with communities facing increasing fire risks.

Flooding

In the early 1990s, several massive floods on the Waal (Rhine) river severely affected the Gelderland province, and in particular Nijmegen and the Gelderse Poort area. Ten thousands of people were evacuated, while the agriculture, infrastructure and housing sectors took substantial economic damage. This region was particularly vulnerable because urbanisation and agricultural intensification reduced the floodplain over time, increasing the risk of overflow during periods of intense upstream rainfall. The flood events of 1993 and 1995 prompted a national emergency response and significant changes in regional planning and spatial water management involving authorities at all levels.

Afforestation and traditional turf mining

In western Ireland, historically, afforestation has been a major driver of peatland degradation as it regularly involved draining and ploughing both blanket and raised bogs. Afforestation was for many decades a state project which not only changed ecological dynamics but was also seen as unjust for local farmers who experienced complex processes of dispossession. Commercial plantations prompted long-term vulnerabilities such as negatively affecting water retention, carbon storage, increasing the risk of wildfires, and soil depletion. Across the region, commercial forestry favoured monocultures such as Sitka spruce – a non-native conifer species. There is significant biodiversity loss and increased carbon emissions from the land planted with those monocultures. Some of these forestlands are patchy; they are affected by wildfires and remain commercially unviable. Currently, localised restoration proposals are planning to undo some of the commercial plantations. As a result of the largest forest administrator in the country adopting an open forest policy, initiatives such as the Galway Wind Park were made possible.

Afforestation aside, the health of peatlands has also been affected by turf mining – an important part of local livelihoods. Historically, locals had the right to cut turf, and this practice was seen as part of the local culture. Turf was used locally, predominantly for auto-consumption across rural areas, but as the demographic transition changed the age-demographic and a migration towards the urbanised centres, turving is practiced less and less. Even if young people seem to abandon the practice, many households still depend on turf as a source of energy in a region where solar panels are largely absent. In this context, it is important to highlight that vulnerability depends on perspective. From a conservation standpoint, extracting turf from bogs is comparable in its negative impact to conifer plantations, and its effects on climate change are even more severe. However, from a cultural viewpoint, it is not regarded as such, as it is perceived as a traditional practice.





Photo 4 Coillte Rewilding Case

Bark beetle outbreaks

Historic afforestation which led to the creation of large areas of spruce monocultures, is also prompting significant vulnerabilities in the Tatra Mountains. On both the Polish and Slovak sides, the two national parks have been affected in recent times by repeated bark beetle outbreaks which came in the aftermath of severe storms and windthrows. Monocultures of Norway spruce are dense and uniform, so their resistance to natural disturbances is limited. During strong storm events in 1998 and 2004, large areas planted with spruce were windthrown. The fallen trees became breeding grounds for bark beetles, facilitating larger outbreaks. The authorities responsible for forest management and the two park administrations were faced with the situation of deciding fast on the most effective ways to deal with the outbreaks. While salvage logging dominated in the 90s, non-intervention and long-term planning for climate-induced risks are gaining ground in recent years.

Industrialisation and Urbanisation

Rapid industrialisation starting in the 19th century prompted fast-paced urbanisation in the Ruhrgebiet area, the region attracting millions of new workers seeking employment in the coal and steel industries. These changes brought industrial pollution and environmental degradation, most notably rivers clogged with industrial effluents, poor crop yields, acid rain, and frequent smog. These environmental impacts were uneven across the region, with the north being the most affected, and the resident population more at risk of suffering from pollution-induced health conditions. As the industries declined towards the end of the 20th century, natural

succession and forest regrowth became widespread across abandoned industrial sites in the Ruhrgebiet, offering new opportunities for post-industrial regeneration and more environmentally minded urban planning, including urban rewilding and restoration measures for open habitats.

Land abandonment

Land abandonment is one of the key land use processes across rural Europe. The phenomenon has complex environmental and socio-economic impacts. Three of the wildE Rewilding Cases, Barcelona Metropolitan Area, Antarr and Baixo Sabor, are significantly impacted by the abandonment of farmland. In all three cases, the accumulation of biomass through natural forest and shrubs regrowth augments the frequency, size, and intensity of wildfires. Among the most important socio-economic changes associated with land abandonment in the Baixo Sabor Rewilding Case is the disappearance of heritage landscapes, which are considered valuable as both cultural and ecological systems.

In the Hörnso ecopark in Kalmar County, part of the Sveaskog Rewilding Case, a decline in farming and grazing for the last century has been contributing to the decline of native species such as oak, birch and aspen. While farming has historically been disincentivized in the past to favour the development of commercial forestry in the region, currently the regional authorities are making efforts to bring farmers on board and involve them in the nature restoration process. The process faces multiple challenges, including difficulty in securing sufficient local cattle without resorting to far-away farmers, and the raising budgetary pressures of the compensation schemes.

Practices

In the introductory section, we summarised the main rewilding practices present in each of the eight Rewilding Cases. Below we detail the most important ones, which often span across multiple cases.

Fire management

Wildfires and their prevention serve as an example of how the interpretation of rewilding practices differs significantly among the Rewilding Cases. Wildfires are viewed as both a component of rewilding initiatives and an impediment to them, necessitating suppression. Wildfires are a complex factor in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area, in Sveaskog, and in the two Portuguese cases (Antarr and Baixo Sabor). On the one hand, they are risk factor, and managing the risks (for human and ecosystems) associated with wildfires takes various forms across these Rewilding Cases, from mechanically removing shrubs to prescribed burning. On the other hand, wildfires are also part of natural dynamics and could be part of rewilding. As they have potential to cause social tensions, conflicts, or socio-environmental harm, they clearly link to vulnerabilities of humans.

Given the aforementioned vulnerabilities as well as contextual definition of rewilding practices, understanding wildfire prevention and management is essential for rewilding efforts in the Mediterranean. Around Barcelona Metropolitan Region, a key intervention is wildfire prevention through modelling and actual interventions that would allow for more natural fire regimes, with the main aim of avoiding extreme wildfire events. Fire prevention is mainly conducted by firefighters together with a broad group of interested actors, some being directly

exposed to wildfires (like forest owners), others having administration responsibilities over local protected areas (like the Collserola Nature Park). Thinning the understory, which acts as fuel, and addressing drought by selectively removing certain trees are ongoing fire prevention activities. Maintaining access roads in good condition for firefighters to intervene is done year-round, while sustained surveillance from fire towers is organised only during the summer months.

In Antarr, the main fire management intervention is the maintenance of buffer zones called fuel management strips, which are essential for securing the health of the forest lands included in the carbon and biodiversity offsetting business model. As the local population remains very sensitive to the fire issue because of their strong emotional attachment to the land, Antarr has a strong mandate to lower the risk of severe wildfires in the areas by applying above mentioned practices.

In the Sabor region, fire prevention is done by mechanically removing the fuel in protection strips, but also by deploying so-called donkey brigades. These local herds selectively remove the shrubs, are tended by the villagers and supported by local NGOs with veterinary care.

Forest fires have been one of the forces shaping some of the areas of Sveaskog as well. For example, in the Hörnsö ecopark in Kalmar County, a historically fire-formed forest transitioned towards a production forest during the 20th century (the introduction of fire suppression), a process that saw spruce becoming dominant, while the original species (pine, oak, birch and presumably aspen) became less common. Currently, one of the interventions that is aimed at supporting oak recovery is prescribed burning in young forests, which is done jointly with controlled grazing.

Floodplain management

The severe floods which affected the Gelderland province in the Netherlands described above prompted the formation of broad groups for more effective floodplain management which included not only authorities at various levels but also environmental NGOs, farmers and locals using the area for recreation and different livelihood strategies. The Plan Stork proposed managing the Waal river in a more nature-friendly way after the devastating effects of the floods in the early 1990s. As the vulnerabilities to massive floods became more evident, water retention barriers began to be partially removed, which created more space for overflowing. Similarly, the extraction of clay was encouraged in select locations to create floodable areas. Agriculture became less intensive, and urban sprawl better regulated, and the floodplain's regeneration was further boosted by the introduction of large herbivores, beavers, and other species with a high renaturation role.

Rewetting

In Coillte Rewilding Case, peatland restoration is done through various interventions. Coillte company, one of the promoters of Galway Wind Park intend to fell 130 hectares of Sitka spruce monoculture and to block the former drains in an attempt to raise the water table. The last intervention done by Coillte in partnership with the Galway University was funded by a LIFE project. In parallel, local NGOs are on a quest to find local solutions to boost the carbon storage capacity of degraded peatlands. For example, Forum Connemara, an

organisation with a long engagement in local development, tries to involve farmers in peat restoration by giving them a sense of ownership over the process. Locally abundant wool is promoted by them as a crucial material in rewetting interventions, posed to replace the coconut husks currently used, but which are sourced from thousands of kilometres away. By working together to solve a global environmental problem, farmers take pride in the process. This happens despite legal issues associated with the status of wool as a waste product, which legally makes it unfit for its repurposing in the rewetting interventions.

Compensatory Measures

Working with local partners proves important for the success of the rewilding intervention in the Baixo Sabor as well. Here, NGOs like Palombar are crucial for the implementation of a range of compensatory measures related to the offsetting of the environmental costs of the development of the Sabor hydroelectric dam. The maintenance of historical stone drywalls which are prime habitats for reptiles and insects, the renovation of local pigeon towers which are valuable cultural elements, and the restoration of riparian galleries to the benefit of several fish and amphibian species are just some of the interventions that the local farmers can allow on their lands by signing voluntary agreements with associations such as Palombar. Their interests are very often aligned, and local councils benefit from an environmental fund supported by the dam operator, while local hunters are incentivized to maintain feeding stations for game species like ungulates, which in turn benefits a healthy wolf population.

Non-intervention

In the aftermath of the bark beetle outbreaks described above and which affected large areas across the Tatra Mountains, the question of how to deal with such large-scale disturbances became central. On the Polish side, around 71% of the park's territory was left to natural processes. At the same time, the park made efforts to oppose the development of new ski infrastructure and limit the impacts of overtourism by closing selected trails at different periods throughout the year. Currently, the Polish park administration aims to reach at least 75% of non-intervention and to improve existing tourism infrastructure in an attempt to halt the development of additional infrastructure. On the other side of the border, the Slovak authorities were more reluctant in declaring large areas for non-intervention after the windstorms which prompted bark beetle outbreaks negatively impacting local commercial forestry operations. The land in the Slovak Tichá and Kôprová Valleys is owned primarily by the Slovak state (managed by national park administration). Large tracts of land belong to private individuals and historic forest common associations (*urbariai*, such as those from the village of Východná), which in the past has led to conflicts, including disputes over tree felling following major storms. Following sustained civil society campaigns and mobilisation, the Tichá and Kôprová Valleys were put under strict protection in 2007. Today these areas are subject to the highest (5) level of protection, which means that landowners' rights to use the land for economic purposes (e.g. logging) are restricted by Slovak environmental law. The political support for non-intervention in Slovakia fluctuated over the last two decades, and environmental NGOs constantly pressured the authorities to not engage in salvage logging in the two valleys. For both national parks, the land ownership regime was crucial in the implementation of non-intervention zones: in Poland with the majority of forestlands under state ownership (85%), strict protection rapidly reached



almost three quarters of the park's surface; in Slovakia, where forestlands are also under private ownership (50% of the park land is owned by commons and individual owners), in July 2026, the national government approved the new zoning plan introducing zone 4 or 5 for the 76% of the national park area, indicating stricter protection regime.

Another example comes from the Ruhrgebiet in Germany, where the Biologische Station Westliches Ruhrgebiet (BSWR) is managing the nature on the post-industrial heritage sites. They take a "mosaic" or mixed management approach; which means that different levels of intervention are applied to nature throughout the sites. Some areas are managed quite intensely, for example, the grass is mown continuously, while in other places natural processes are dominant, such as leaving deadwood in the forest areas and allowing natural succession. In this way, they aim to meet the needs and uses of different visitors, while providing a diversity of habitat types to local fauna and flora.

Expectations and visions of the future

To better understand how stakeholders' perceptions of rewilding practices relate to their interests and beliefs, we investigated their expectations and visions for the future of rewilding in the respective Rewilding Cases. Besides the interviews, we also performed "a future scenario exercise" with stakeholder representatives in four case studies (see Appendix V).

Our report indicates a clear connection between particular visions of the future and categories of stakeholders. Future expectations mirrored the interests and beliefs of the interviewed stakeholders; e.g. the environmental organisations (such as environmental NGOs, nature conservation bodies) and scientists often envision the future in terms of advancing passive management and increasing the naturalness of the areas. For instance, regarding the Tatras, nature conservation organisations, NGOs, and scientists involved believed that increasing the strictly protected areas in national parks on both sides of the border should be the primary focus:

"We should define the vision. This vision should be the IUCN standard for the national parks with 75% of strict protection. The vision should be the Tatra label. Nature knows no boundaries, and we should work together on this vision. We should move forward, not backwards" (representative of the NGO, quote from the workshop).

"I think in our long-term strategy, this area which is currently under the active conservation zone, once we reestablish, rewild this forest to natural, let's say level, we will probably go forward and probably extend the strict conservation zone" (representatives of the nature conservation body, quote from the interview).

"What we need is to extend the wilderness to the lower altitudes, and there are some possibilities of how to make it. I believe that, you know, maybe in 20, 30 years it will happen. The biggest threat to this is development, because people like to build houses for holidays or things like that in these areas. And once there are houses, it is more difficult to have, for example, natural numbers of bison. So, this development looks like it is not dangerous now because it's not on a big scale in some places, but from a longer perspective, it will influence

rewilding process in the Tatra mountains. So it will slow down this process. If there is no new infrastructure now, it will be easy to extend the wilderness in the future.” (local activist, quote from the interview).

A common goal for the future allowed the stakeholders to identify potential threats as well as applicable solutions. The rising number of tourists poses a potential threat in the Tatras case. Interestingly, here, strict protection can be a measure to constrain access, as the quotation below demonstrates.

“There is pressure from the constantly increasing number of tourists present in the Tatras” (representative of the NGO, quote from the workshop).

“Strict protection is the best tool to prevent tourists from entering the forests. If there is dead wood, the forest is like a jungle; no one is going to leave the trail and go there” (representative of the nature conservation body, quote from the workshop).

Across numerous case studies, the connection between the envisioned future and the potential for it to be realised was found to be associated with the political landscape and policy-making at the national level:

“The problem is that we are not going forward and we are going to have lost a lot of employees. We are losing every day, people who work for governments that are losing jobs. And it is very difficult to bring them back later. So they will find jobs in some other countries or, you know, in different fields, and they will never come back. That's what is very, very bad because you cannot make any reforms again with, you know, we don't have those people to do reforms” (local activist, quote from the interview).

“So basically, the state would have to somehow reconcile the needs of industry and the needs of nature and then decide that, okay, nature is actually so important to us that we want to make our children and our future citizens aware of what well-preserved nature looks like, and then they would have to steer it in this direction. So I'm not sure if this is something that they will actually seriously take into consideration in next year. I don't think so” (representative of the NGO, quote from the interview).

The local residents more often refer to the role of people in the future of the case studies and rewilding practices. They linked the solutions to the current problems with the acknowledgement of the right of the people to be part of nature and rewilding areas. The narratives of the future highlight the stress between competing land uses and the values attached to land and land use:

“You have to find some places which will be also very protected and some parts that will be there for the people to go (...). This is very important for connection. It is very important if you have kids here from the schools and,



it's very important to make the connection between the kids and between the nature, because it's for the future" (local resident, quote from the interview).

"And well, that is one big concern for us and I do know that WWF have presented alternatives again: do as much nature development as possible, because then you can solve a lot of problems. Well, you can actually say that. In our municipality, outside the dikes is actually intended for nature development. Inside the dikes, yes, that's where we want building and things like that and farming. So we are actually trying as much as possible looking for those solutions outside the dikes" (local resident, quote from the interview).

"Is indeed true what we do want, all those isolated nature reserves to be connected to each other. In other words, we also have it put in the environmental vision. That they are the large European ecological corridor of IJssel Gendarmerie Nederrijn, Duivelsberg, Ooijse Graaf, Millingenwaard Rijn coming to the Veluwe soon. For that to come about, you have to lay all kinds of stepping stones, actually so makes that possible for larger animal species such as the deer have been able to move freely without being restricted, and remove all those fences. But that also means that you have to sacrifice agricultural land, for example. So yes, as long as agriculture or individual future-proof farmers benefit from it, it's not a problem. If it is at the expense of agriculture, then yes, there is a discussion" (local resident, quote from the interview).

Finally, different time horizons were highlighted by different groups of stakeholders. While the nature protection bodies, (environmental) NGOs and scientists focused on a long-term visions and periods spanning over ten years, often even a few decades or hundred years, the local residents, members of local administrations and landowners (including farmers) chose to emphasis a shorter time horizon, that is, the next few years up to a decade:

"The situation is changing. And the situation with strategic planning is also changing. And they probably did the same thing, the same exercise, in the Tatra National Park. That is an exercise when they're trying to envision the park in 100 years. So, this is the kind of planning that you should be doing actually in protected areas with this kind of time horizon in mind." (representatives of environmental NGO, interview quote)

"After the next elections, if there is a progressive party, we can start this process. But, you know, it can be very long term. So you need stability for at least ten years. You know, you start this process and run it. And after, you know, invest some money and educate people and do this job. And after ten years, you can have a result. But, you know, in politics, everybody is only short time there. And even if somebody starts good thinking, he's not there in two years, then somebody else comes and they'll try different ways". (local environmental activist, quote from the interview).

"Yes, the government has come up with the Environment and Planning Act, hasn't it? That it has to be, so they have also determined that it was introduced on 1 January. As a municipality, we just have to do certain things, don't we? I think we need to have an environmental vision from 2027, 2032 should the environmental plan be

finished? Well and that creates a lot of things processes that we had to adjust and are still adjusting, as a municipality we also make some choices in that more about our level of ambition, so that was our own choice, wasn't it? So you can enter it very narrowly. The introduction of the Environment and Planning Act and you can tackle it on a very large scale. Yes, we're kind of in the middle of that" (representative of local administration, quote from the interview).



Photo 5 Stakeholder workshop in Tatra case study, May 2024

Conflicts around rewilding in Rewilding Cases

Competing land uses

To better contribute to the understanding of various conflicts around rewilding in the selected case studies, we present below a range of competing land uses that emerged during the screening exercise and were further described by the participants during the interviews.

Tourism

Various forms of tourism emerge as an important land-use across some of the case studies. In the Tatra Mountains, mass-tourism is a growing concern for both park administrations. On the Polish side, the annual number of tourists comes close to five million, a figure comparable to Yellowstone National Park, despite the obvious size difference. With a growing number of tourists, the pressure to develop additional tourism



infrastructure such as ski lifts, parking, and accommodation poses great challenges for local authorities and the park administration alike. On the Slovak side, in parallel with an exponential growth in the number of tourists, spa and wellness resorts are putting unprecedented pressure on groundwater resources. In addition to the Tatra Mountains, tourism is also a competing land use in the Sabor river basin. Here, local municipalities have made consistent efforts to advertise the area as a prime fishing and gastronomic destination with multiple opportunities to practise aquatic sports – a new reality that threatens the already fragile habitats in the Baixo Sabor case study area.

Real Estate Development

A sustained demand for housing and real estate development is an important competing land use in both Ruhrgebiet and the Gelderse Poort case studies. Here, urban sprawl often comes at odds with nature recovery and passive rewilding. Similar pressures in the Tatra Mountains are augmented by lacking or poor urban planning. In the nearby Polish city of Zakopane, for example, real estate is considered an important economic investment opportunity, with an unprecedented high demand pushing the prices of flats to levels higher than those in the country's capital.

Forestry

Commercial forestry is another competing land use present in a range of case studies, regardless of the proposed rewilding interventions. Economically viable forestry activities remain important in the general operations and business planning of actors such as Coillte, Sveaskog and Antarr, even when logging is coupled with other measures such as certification or the development of carbon offsetting. In other cases, commercial forestry remains an important source of income for funding the functioning of protected areas' administration, as is the case of the Tatra National Park in Slovakia, where logging continues outside the areas under strict protection. While converting monocultures and homogenous plantations is essential for restoration, a great diversity of ownership regimes over forestlands, from private to commons, impacts these restoration ambitions in both the Tatra and Sveaskog cases.



Photo 6 Swedish Case Study

Farming

Even if it currently witnesses important transformations, farming remains an important livelihood strategy across the case studies. We highlight the Swedish (Sveaskog), the two Portuguese (Baixo Sabor and Antarr) and the Dutch (Gelderse Poort) case studies. In the Kalmar municipality in Sweden, large angus cattle farms are incentivized by EU subsidies, while small farmers get little support. As a result of minimal support, small-scale farmers' involvement in fire mitigation and environmental restoration remains limited. In the Sabor area, on the other hand, consistent subsidies for developing almond plantations are putting a strain on already limited water resources. The issue is highly complex, as there is no easy choice between supporting marginal agriculture to continue traditional land use practices, or decrease this support with the risk of augmenting land abandonment, which further creates new opportunities for rewilding initiatives. In the Dutch case, agricultural activities needed to move away from the floodplains. This was done because of the flooding events in the mid-90s and the development of new nature/rewilding areas next to the river. Farmers were able to trade their former agricultural grounds, which were at risk from the water, for land inside the dikes. This trade was experienced as challenging by some farmers, as well as a loss of cultural landscapes they had valued in former times.



Energy generation

Finally, energy generation is present in both the Coillte and the Baixo Sabor case as a competing land use, - but also as a primary reason that prompted rewilding and restoration interventions in the Coillte case: The development of the Galway Wind Park was facilitated by the fact that the lands were owned by the public enterprise Coillte, and not the local population, who might have been more difficult to get on board during the initial stages. During the development, the wind park's developer Airtricity engaged in multiple rounds of negotiations with local stakeholders, having to address concerns for safeguarding the habitats of various species, from freshwater pearl mussels to white-fronted geese. Similarly, the planning phase of the Sabor river dam in the Baixo Sabor case did initially not include compensatory measures for environmental harms and negative impacts on the local municipalities. As the project advanced, these were conceived in partnership with local environmental associations who, after initial strong opposition, got on board and became the main implementing partners. Currently, local partnerships and the involvement of local councils need to be constantly negotiated and renewed, as political support remains fragile.

Conflict patterns

Following our analysis of key stakeholders, their groups, narratives, and relevant policy frameworks involved in the rewilding activities across our case studies, and considering the broader context from our literature review, we pinpointed recurring conflict patterns. We will explore two categories of patterns a.) those arising from the conceptional approach described earlier; and b.) further patterns discovered through detailed analysis of the data.

A. Patterns arising from the theoretical approach described earlier

- Population density/urbanisation

The case studies examined varied greatly in terms of population density, urbanisation level and closeness to urban areas (ranging from the Tatras and Baixo Sabor to the Barcelona Metropolitan Region and the Ruhrgebiet). On one hand, in sociological terms, some studies have shown that, at least in the past, (peri-)urban populations tend to support nature and rewilding more than rural populations that tend to support more land use and managed nature (Roitsch et al. 2026). On the other hand, one could also assume that rewilding efforts closer to cities/in densely populated areas generate greater conflict or tension. Our cases do not show a clear pattern here. For example, in the Tatras region, the pressure from real estate and high land costs - higher than in many major European cities - causes tension and conflicts among stakeholders on both sides of the border, despite the area's rural and remote nature. At the same time, wild nature is also an important asset for the tourism industry in that region. The rewilded areas in the Ruhrgebiet, in contrast, have high recreational value, partly due to their nearness to major urban zones and high population density. At the same time, they are under potential pressure from development, and some social groups may prefer more well maintained parks lands. Rewilding projects' locations can also have unexpected effects on adjacent cities; the Gelderse Poort example shows how rewilding fostered a new green area, influencing land and property prices

and spurring unforeseen green gentrification. Hence, to gain conclusive insights into conflict patterns, it is necessary to analyse the degree of urbanisation and the urban-rural gradient alongside other indicators.

- Land abandonment

Land abandonment can significantly affect rewilding efforts in the areas studied, yet in different manners. Case studies like Antarr or Baixo Sabor, on the one hand, highlight the issue of social transformation linked to depopulation in regions such as inland Portugal. The decline of historical commons, outward migration of rural populations into urban areas and an aging population, combined with new economic crises and climate change challenges like mega-fires, create, on one hand, opportunities for rewilding through abandonment. At the same time, land abandonment in these regions also increases fire risks, and the decrease in traditional local practices and extensive farming can be linked to a loss of cultural landscapes and the respective biodiversity. Again, active rewilding strategies involving herbivores can provide solutions here. On the other hand, examples like the Gelderse Poort and the High Tatras indicate that high land value, including in rural areas with less profitable agriculture, may present a challenge to increasing the size of rewilded areas. Overall, in the case studies examined, there is no unidirectional correlation between land abandonment, land value, and the amount of conflict related to the approach. Thus, we would warn against a simplistic equation: land abandonment = cheap rewilding or cheap land = easy rewilding. Rather, the case studies in this report demonstrate various interrelations between land use practices, land value, and the cultural and historical significance of land for local populations, along with their attachment to it and the local identity tied to traditional practices, that can all be crucial for the success or failure of rewilding interventions.

- Disturbance patterns

The analysis highlighted natural disturbances as a key element affecting rewilding efforts within the case studies. Disturbances may facilitate rewilding, be incorporated into the rewilding strategy, or arise as a result of successful rewilding efforts. They might facilitate (enable) rewilding, but they could also be a source of conflict and controversy. Below, we describe three disturbances, the most prominent in the investigated cases:

Fire

Fire represents an important risk in the Barcelona Metropolitan Region, Antarr and Baixo Sabor cases. Rewilding can, on one hand, be related to land abandonment and natural forest regrowth, and then often increasing fire risk. On the other hand, in these contexts, rewilding practices are seen as an answer to increasing fire risk where active rewilding strategies are (part of) the strategy to reduce rewilding risks, e.g. in a form which focuses on stochastic disturbances. The first approach was more strongly represented by stakeholders linked to business (Antarr), local administration or communities, while the second was linked to the researchers and nature protection representatives. In Antarr case active fire-risk reduction practices include introduction of buffer zones called fuel management strips. In the Baixo Sabor case, actions taken to reduce wildfire risk include clearing shrubs with "donkey brigades," mechanically removing fuel in strips, and modifying the road network to accommodate larger firefighting vehicles. Fire remains a highly debated element of the rewilding approach due to its severity and direct impact on human life and livelihoods.





Photo 7 Antarr Case Study where the fire is important element of rewilding discussions

Bark beetle outbreaks

The presence of Norway spruce monocultures, regarded by some stakeholders (nature protection bodies, environmental NGOs, and researchers) as the lasting effect of a previous forest management regime, was associated with bark beetle outbreaks in case studies such as the Tatra and Sveaskog. The outbreaks created an opportunity to emphasise natural processes and rewilding principles, reducing the direct involvement of human management. However, this demand to halt active management was another source of contention (see the chapter “Key stakeholders” and “Hunting organisation/Hunters and Forest service/administration” section). Although the bark beetle outbreak in the Tatra (and to some degree Sveaskog) encourages the implementation of rewilding, its highly contested and polarised character may be a significant impediment to advancing rewilding practices due to the clash between the key actors, and their values and interests (e.g. nature protection agencies vs. forestry services).

Flooding

Flooding of river floodplains is characteristic for the Gelderse Poort Rewilding Case. It may be regarded as a natural disturbance, facilitated through human action, and frequently perceived as correcting past management and human interventions. Flooding appears in highly cultural landscape (of Dutch rural sites), with

a strong presence of agriculture. Therefore, supporting this process requires careful negotiation, taking into account the land's significance, the cultural value of rural customs, the sense of place, and local identity.

Generally speaking, disturbances are strongly connected to prior management styles and practices prevalent in the case studies. Forest fires, for instance, are linked to land use practices, and can be facilitated, for instance, through land abandonment or specific forest management practices, e.g. planting of plantations with vulnerable trees. Forest management priorities and decisions, coupled with market incentives and the wood's economic value, have resulted in spruce monocultures prone to bark beetle outbreaks. Flooding is reinforced through the loss of floodplains and retention areas in river systems. While disturbances, on one hand, are a critical process element of rewilding, disturbance mitigation is, in our cases, also a critical rationale for rewilding projects. Considering the rewetting of bogs in the Coillte Rewilding Case (which, while not a direct disturbance, is related to water management), both sides of will likely gain additional importance for rewilding under climate change.

B. Other patterns

Below, we discuss additional patterns identified in the case studies, which either fuel conflicts regarding rewilding or reveal discrepancies between stakeholders' values and interests. Although these points may not be relevant to each case study, they underscore significant trends and tensions related to implementing rewilding in European landscapes.

- Tensions between state, companies, and local communities

In some of the investigated case studies (e.g. in Sveaskog, Antarr, Tatras) we detected a tension between local actors and the state and its representatives, but also large companies. Frequently, this tension has roots in the past and connects to actions of the state or companies that local communities considered unjust. Eventually, in some cases, this resulted in long-term mistrust between local and state authorities. For example, in the case of the Polish side of the Tatras, distrust towards the state is linked to the creation of the Tatra National Park in 1955. Before 1955, a significant portion of the land in the Tatra Mountains was privately owned and used for economic purposes. The establishment of a national park meant that these areas would be taken over by the State Treasury, which was met with resistance from owners and users. Many local activities were based on the natural resources of the Tatra Mountains, such as shepherding, forestry, and mining. The creation of the national park meant restrictions and often a complete ban on existing forms of economic activity, which led to protests and fears of job and income losses. After 1989, many of the old landowners or their descendants went to court to seek compensation; of which some cases are still pending. The way the land was taken over by the state created mistrust and hesitation towards state administration:

"We were even, I would say, surprised that it's more than 70 years when it happened. Still, the local society, people remember that, and they feel upset about the way the park was established. Yes, they were forced to give their land" (representative of the nature conservation body, quote from the interview).



“Many Highlanders are totally against because they feel a sort of being cheated in the past, because the national park was established on the lands that belong to some very found Highlanders families. They've been there for 600 years; a couple of them have been living there for literally centuries. And all of a sudden there's a state that comes and says: 'okay, now this is going to be the national park'. So those guys, they just don't trust any government, any political power, anyone, because they feel that they have been cheated in the past. Right. So money is one thing, but the trust [towards] government action, is something that you have to have in mind here” (journalist, quote from the interview).

Similar pattern emerges with Sveaskog, Coillte, Baixo Sabor and Antarr, where a lack of trust of local communities towards both the state and (large) companies is reported:

“Well, that was one of the big advantages of involving these NGOs. Because people are a bit suspicious of the big companies and it was this cultural thing as well here in Tras-os-Montes, because it's a very depopulated region. We cannot say it's one of the priorities of every government so people feel neglected, people don't trust big companies or central measures that come and do something here in the region, people usually are suspicious here. So typically, traditionally there is a bit of suspicion, there is not a lot of trust with the big companies, or with the government actions” (researcher, quote from the interview).

- Politicisation of rewilding decisions

In line with the pattern mentioned above, the politicisation of decisions about rewilding (or wider restoration) significantly impacts the majority of the cases discussed. The implementation of rewilding and restoration, including the fluctuation of the funding available for these actions, was clearly tied to the political development of the case studies, at national and European level. While politics have facilitated rewilding, the opposite is also frequently the case. For instance, in the Sveaskog case study, the funding available for the ecoparks and strict(er) protection was dependent on the changes in the national government:

“There have definitely been some changes in the government recently, and that has led to huge budget cuts on everything. That includes nature conservation, that is in general, the nature conservation associations. Almost everything gets less money. National parks, reserve side budgets cut some 40% of the municipalities. So that's a huge cut on anything that has to do with nature except maybe marshes, but all the other areas in nature get less, less attention now from the government. Nature conservation is not a priority anymore. I would say I'm quite politically angry. Yes. It has been, I think, a struggle” (researcher, a quote from the interview).

Interviewees also describe how rewilding becomes contested politically, or is hampered by a generally critical political mood, as illustrated by the situation in the Coillte, Ruhrgebiet and Gelderse Poort Rewilding Cases:

"I don't like it because the politicians are almost scaremongering, and they just see the farming community as one big block vote. So if there's a few voices in the farming community that are against us, they complain and they say" 'oh, I'm going to grab these votes and I'll be on their side and I'll say, well, this is the biggest, like some of them were calling it, a land grab by the European Union'. And then the farmers would ask me what I think like, and I do have to be careful as well" (representative of local community, quote from the interview).

"Well, it's politically relatively difficult at the moment, of course. In the political discourse now, renaturation/rewilding and wilderness aren't exactly popular. We saw the European elections yesterday, the results. I spent a few days last week in East Westphalia, where the Egge National Park is being voted on and where opponents of the national park are protesting against it. Of course, it is not easy at the moment for renaturation measures, I would say, in the political sphere due to political conditions" (representative of Hunting Association, quote from the interview).

"There's also a very strong Farmers Party. It was elected and they have made huge election wins. Sometimes also rewilding is used too much in political framing, particularly by farmers parties" (researcher, quote from the interview).

- Tourism: between pressure and opportunity

Many of the case studies examined presented rewilding projects as a way to stimulate tourism. Developing tourism was presented as a different way to use land, rather than the conventional activities of farming, forestry, and extracting resources. Despite the promise of "eco-development" through "green tourism," increased tourism posed a challenge from the perspective of various stakeholders.

- Tourism as a threat to nature and natural processes - While increased visitor numbers in rewilded areas boosted local economies, mass tourism's growing pressure posed a serious threat to nature and natural processes. To protect sensitive species from the effects of overtourism, some trails and areas in the Tatras were temporarily closed. This created occasional friction with tourists seeking access to the protected areas. There is an ongoing discussion about how to balance the impact of tourism and the focus on natural processes.
- Tourism presents a dilemma for local residents - Tourism can stimulate the local economy, but it may also threaten their livelihoods by raising living costs (land, property, and housing) and straining resources like groundwater, and worsening traffic. Also, natural hazards may be exacerbated by inconsiderate tourists who, for instance, start fires, or the behaviour of predators such as bears might be negatively impacted by tourists through garbage left behind or the pursuit of close encounters with wildlife. Therefore, sustainable tourism should be prioritised in rewilded areas, accounting for local conditions and the needs of permanent residents.
- Tourism as a risk to traditional practices: under certain circumstances, the development of tourism was seen as a risk to traditional practices. Tourism revenue appeared to be more profitable than

extensive agriculture, animal husbandry, or forest work. However, these traditional activities preserve local culture and identity, and may contribute to the region's unique biodiversity features. Transitioning to tourism would frequently mean abandoning these activities.

In case studies like the Ruhrgebiet and Gelderse Poort, one of the greatest opportunities and "selling points" for rewilding projects with local communities was considered to be ensuring the rewilded areas were accessible and attractive for local recreation, especially for residents of neighbouring cities.

- **Rewilding as Business**

To differing degrees, the rewilding projects in this report frame rewilding as a business opportunity or as linked to particular business or economic endeavours. This was especially visible in the cases of Sveaskog, Antarr and Coillte. For Antarr, rewilding involved carbon offsetting, securing certification, and promoting green energy. Rewilding's viability as a tool for carbon offsetting, certification, or green energy hinges on policy changes in the European Union, specifically the growing emphasis on carbon markets. These conditions necessitate a shift in the rewilding field, urging rewilding advocates and "visionaries" to re-evaluate and adapt their economic models for rewilding initiatives. This connects to the use of rewilding as part of "Environmental Corporate Responsibility", which the Sveaskog case best exemplifies in this report (along with activities in the Coillte and Baixo Sabor cases). The eco-parks promoted by Sveaskog are designed to address a range of requirements. While providing protected habitats, they also allow the company to maintain a degree of commercial forestry and timber harvesting.

Conflict mitigation strategies

As demonstrated by our analysis and noted by stakeholders (see *Figure 7*), there are multiple strategies for mitigating conflict. Engaging stakeholders was identified as the primary approach to alleviate conflicts concerning rewilding initiatives. Compensation, in conjunction with two additional codes - 'Investment in local communities' and 'New income opportunities' – was similarly prominent, highlighting the crucial role of supporting local communities, as they often bear possible costs associated with rewilding.

Stakeholder engagement, specifically close collaboration with those impacted by rewilding efforts, was identified as essential for preventing or managing disputes regarding rewilding. The process was generally considered time-consuming, expensive, and dependent on trust building. At the same time, it was regarded as vital for both present and future positive outcomes of the rewilding initiatives. In the Coillte case, the work of Forum Connemara in addressing problems of the local population while also addressing restoration/rewetting can be seen as an example. Another example from the Tatra case study is the consultation process for the management plan, which involved all communities within the park's borders.

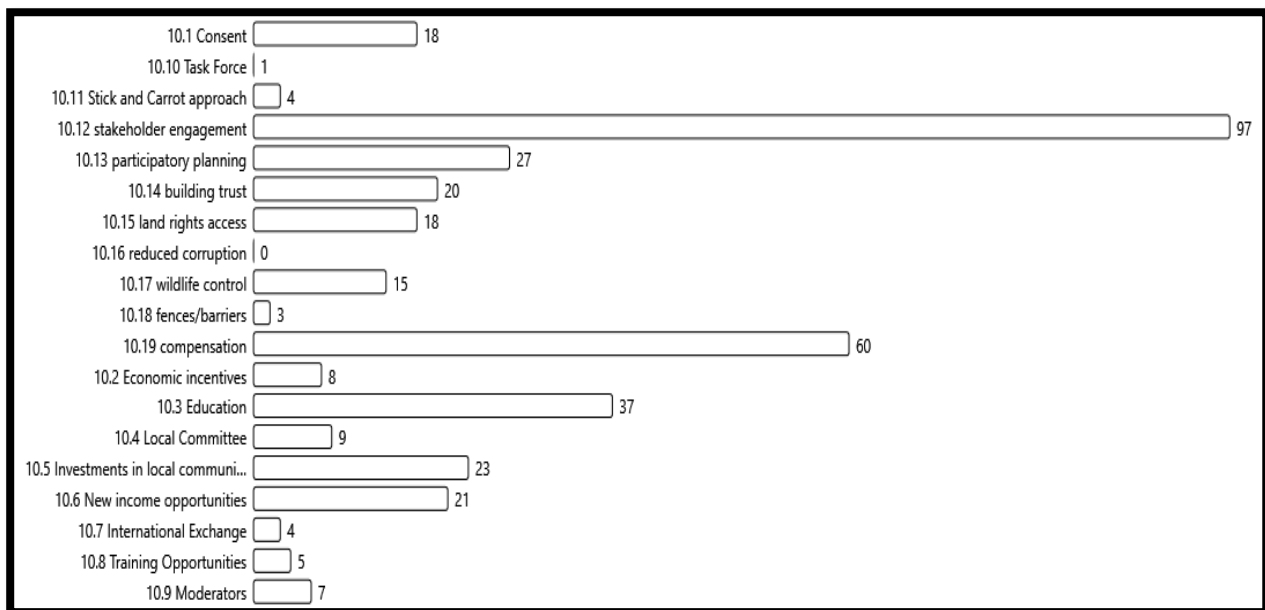


Figure 7 Overview of the codes pointing to the conflict mitigation strategies mentioned during the interviews. A code in qualitative data analysis is a short word or phrase that assigns a descriptive, summative label to a specific segment of text. Codes group similar pieces of data together allowing comparison, and helps in finding broader patterns and themes. The instances where listed conflict mitigation strategies were referred to by interlocutors as rewinding conflict mitigation tools are reflected in the numbers above.

Compensation strategies were identified in every case study as positive approaches to mitigating conflict. The quote referring to the Coillte case study illustrates it:

“This land management is very complicated and no one policy fits everybody. So I think it needs to be kind of a nice, slow, phased, balanced approach that will bring people with us on that journey. Obviously this [needs to] make economic sense also. So if there's going to be, I suppose, ecological services provided by the land and that needs to be flood management, carbon sequestration, the landowner needs some form of compensation. Not compensation, that's a bad word, but basically some way to monetise that service so that they can continue on. People are all extremely passionate, (...) they are protectors and watchers and they're the guardians of the land” (Environmental Advisor, quote from the interview).

However, not in all cases do they refer to financial compensations. “Compensation strategies” also indicated compensation in the form of new infrastructure, activities or training provided for the community, development of new skills, protection from hazards (such as wildfires), rent for communities, environmental compensation in the form of new habitats, compensating materials needed for building biodiversity friendly infrastructure or farming activities. For example, in the Barcelona Metropolitan Region, the farmers are supported by special programs to continue agricultural activities in the areas with a high farmland abandonment ratio. The Antarr case study showed that fire protection can be a successful compensation strategy in high fire-risk areas.

Experiences from the Baixo Sabor point out that the implementation of compensation measures, including buy-in, can have a positive response by local communities.

In terms of both stakeholder engagement and compensation strategies, it is vital to consider the long-term perspective and the need for long-term planning. Without a proper vision, impromptu consultations or incentives can slow rewilding and negatively impact acceptance and collaboration.

Lastly, we want to highlight some **lessons learned** from the case studies we examined regarding conflicts surrounding rewilding and strategies to mitigate them:

- **Working closely with local partners** (as presented by the case studies of Coillte, Baixo Sabor, Ruhrgebiet and Tatra) can lead to successful interventions;
- The intervention should be framed using **neutral terms** that involved stakeholders can easily understand. This can involve clarifying or even avoiding the term rewilding and similar terminology, such as "reflooding" or "rewetting".
- There is a need to invest in a proper understanding of **local history and past land uses**. This step is needed to understand the present opposition, which might be rooted in historical mistrust, dispossession, or underdevelopment.
- **Land value** has a much more complex meaning than economic value. To understand the meaning of the land, as well as the connection between land value and social change (outmigration, demise of agriculture etc.), there is a need to pay attention to the power dynamics behind values (whose values matter?) and the complex relationship between people and landscape.

Rewilding Case Boxes

This section features four Rewilding Case Boxes. Each box explores the local significance of rewilding and associated practices, common disputes concerning rewilding, methods used to manage these conflicts, and future prospects typical for each Rewilding Case. The four Rewilding Cases were selected during the in-depth analysis of rewilding politics and related social dynamics, involving empirical social science field research (see section 1.1).

Rewilding Case Box No. 1 *Spontaneous forest expansions and wildfire risk*
Barcelona Metropolitan Region (BMR), Spain



What is rewilding?

Most interviewed stakeholders described rewilding as happening “passively” through **spontaneous forest expansion** (SFE). SFE was described as an “unplanned” process occurring naturally, and it was perceived rather critical by several stakeholders connected to the land use sector. Forest managers described SFE and rewilding as processes leading to dense, unmanaged forest growth that heightens wildfire risk, especially near urban centres requiring forest management. The representatives of fire prevention units opposed passive rewilding for similar reasons. Yet, some interviewees (environmental organisation) also connected rewilding to activities that should reduce the risks related to unmanaged SFE, e.g. the introduction of herbivores (e.g., donkey herds) to provide grazing functions and limit vegetation encroachment. Interviewees limitedly discussed rewilding or SFE as desirable restoration processes within a mosaic landscape. Interview partners in some cases framed landscape change in terms of wildfire prevention, agricultural viability, forest management, biodiversity conservation, or the maintenance of agroforestry mosaics, without explicitly using a rewilding perspective.

What is the issue?

Several conflicts regarding land uses were mentioned for BMR. Competition between **renewable energy** projects (wind farms and photovoltaic plants) and conservation was one of them. Because of more attractive prices, landowners are keen on selling “more naturalised and more restored” SFE areas to energy companies. Mass tourism/recreation and rapidly growing touristic infrastructure also presented a significant issue, potentially affecting vulnerable ecosystems and increasing fire risk. Tension also arises from **real**



estate and **urban expansion** into ecologically sensitive areas like Collserola that compromises conservation efforts. The issue of **land abandonment** presented itself as complex and multilayered, linking to many potential tensions and conflicts, i.e., wildfire risk, wildlife conflicts (e.g. with wild boars). This links further to the tension between **active vs. passive management** of abandoned SFE areas, as mentioned above. Finally, several stakeholders addressed possible **governance challenges** concerning land management for and around rewilding in BMR. The local land governance appeared fragmented and unclear. Private owners and small agroecological farmers lacked sufficient representation in decision-making bodies. From a fire management perspective, local territorial planning and administrative competencies were seen as fragmented. The wider EU governance with European processes were seen as top-down, narrowly framed, poorly coordinated across EU–state–regional levels, and participatory processes where landowners are involved as without a real influence. The policy and legal frameworks that support rewilding were described as originating mainly from green infrastructure and protected area legislation without a specific, widely used rewilding framework.

How are conflicts managed?

In response to the conflicts, the interviewees suggested a combination of interconnected strategies, primarily focused on stakeholder engagement and technical and economic interventions. The first strategy relates to the need for **integrated planning and participatory governance** to address local governance challenges, the rural-urban divide, as well as diverging perspectives on active versus passive management. Current strategies include forest owners' formal involvement in decision making on their land, integrated territorial planning, and forest owner associations and collaboration between forest, environmental and emergency authorities. Existing collaborative structures – such as agrarian parks (parcs agraris), provide platforms where municipalities and producers work through long-term agreements that balance biodiversity, local identity, and fire prevention. A second reoccurring strategy was **education and communication** to close the gap between urban perceptions of nature and the rural management worldviews, as well as implement socially accepted territorial strategies. Currently, communication platforms and awareness raising initiatives facilitate dialogue among stakeholders. The Land Stewardship Network, for instance, acts as an important communication platform, especially important for small environmental actors for getting heard. Interviewees emphasised the need for broader public education on the meaning, purpose and scale of rewilding, as well as the multifunctionality of metropolitan forests, and raising awareness on wildfires risk to residents in the wildland–urban interface. A third strategy concerned **zoning** to find appropriate areas for management and rewilding and balance agriculture and natural areas, as well as urban development. The Catalan Forest administration uses zoning of management types, distinguishing areas for production and for free forest evolution, but it is implemented unevenly and not always as a coherent landscape-scale strategy. Zoning is currently addressing fire risk reduction through strategic areas prioritization, although cross-sector planning remains fragmented and should incorporate also recreation. Proposed approaches ranged from land sharing, which integrates uses in mosaic landscapes, to land sparing with clearly defined protection boundaries. “Custòdia del territori” (land stewardship) proved to be a practical and frequently used tool, enabling work on private land without relying on the public administration or slow land-planning processes for restoration and conservation projects. Taken together, science-based zones for fire spread prevention combined with adaptive wildlife management and stewardship agreements all serve to make zoning effective and socially legitimate, but stakeholders frequently argue that more integrated and coordinated zoning is needed. Finally, **compensations** were addressed as essential for balancing economic, cultural, and environmental values, particularly in conflicts related to competing land uses and abandonment. Payments for ecosystem services, climate credits, and incentives for fire-risk reduction help to redistribute costs of environmental stewardship away from forest owners and farmers, with forest owners

association assuming a key role in providing technical support. Combined with revitalised primary-sector economies and value-adding cooperatives, compensation can contribute to making forest management and agriculture viable and socially supported in the long term. Instead, these mechanisms were primarily framed as tools for supporting stewardship and managing broader land-use conflicts rather than being explicitly connected to rewilding itself.

What is the future of rewilding in the Rewilding Case?

The future of rewilding in the BMR was presented as depending on many interconnected factors. They link directly to the conflicts described above, as well as to the political situation and more general social support for the restoration and SFE passive vs active management. The long-term visions related to the rewilding activities included: enchantment of biodiversity and ecosystem functionality, reduction of the risk to the population in the event of wildfires, ensuring sustainable, and regulated public and social use of rewilded areas, meeting the target of 10% of strict protection to restore natural processes, increasing the area devoted to agriculture and extensive livestock farming to enhance food security in the BMR. In addition, rewilding actions should help in improving timber production and utilisation of forestry, as demand for timber is set to rise in the future. Rewilding practices should, wherever possible, make use of ecological processes.

Rewilding Case Box No. 2 Recreation, access and urban pressure

Westliche Ruhrgebiet, Germany



What is rewilding?

The Ruhrgebiet is characterised by its **post-industrial and metropolitan setting**. Urban rewilding in this case is targeted at former industrial sites, infrastructure corridors, brownfield areas and mine spoil heaps. It does not aim to replace parks or other designed green areas but rather broadens the spectrum of urban open spaces by incorporating areas that are allowed to develop through natural processes. Natural succession is permitted in certain areas, while others are actively managed. In this way, interventions enhance dispersal and connectivity by allocating land for natural regeneration, reconnecting fragmented post-industrial landscapes, and restoring ecological corridors. As for disturbance patterns, windthrow is left unmanaged those reforestation areas that are left for natural processes (also called “industrial forest” (“*Industriewald*”)), taking issues of visitor safety (along pathways) into account. Hence, urban rewilding in the Ruhrgebiet takes a **multifunctional approach**, balancing recreational use, ecological development, climate adaptation, water regulation and public health, where biodiversity is understood to contribute to all these aspects. Old infrastructure related to the industrial and mining history usually remains on the sites, and is only rarely removed, preserving the cultural history by integrating them into the design, management and restoration activities. An ongoing discussion centres around the **terminology** of these interventions in urban settings. This relates also to the concept of rewilding and how it differs from other types of urban wilderness and/or ideas to bring nature back into cities.

What is the issue?

The tensions in the context of the Ruhrgebiet arise out of the necessarily **multifunctional character linked to various societal expectations, and/including competing land use interests** in this highly urbanised and densely populated landscape. Other challenges/issues include the increasing effects of climate change, ongoing urban development, biodiversity loss and increasing demands for quality of life and recreation of the urban population. In a survey conducted with 250 visitors of two of the rewilding sites in the Ruhrgebiet, respondents indicated they experienced **clashes between different uses within the sites**, for example between those walking dogs and cyclists moving through the park. Some enjoyed the different levels of wildness across the space whereas others were concerned about accessibility, safety, presence of ticks, and ‘messy’ looking nature in the wilder areas. There have been incidents of vandalism of park infrastructure, and some find the history of industry and pollution in the area uncomfortable, for example when foraging in the area. Underlying these immediate concerns may be **differences in attitudes, beliefs and values** the diverse population hold about nature. From the survey results, we observed a trade-off between human elements relating to accessibility and safety (e.g. installing benches, lighting, asphalt path etc.) and wilder aesthetic elements (e.g. wildflowers, ponds, gravel path etc.), where respondents overall rated the wilder images lower on accessibility and safety but higher on attractiveness and naturalness. The diverse site design, combining active and passive nature management processes, encourages a range of people to visit the site, whose divergent views on how nature should be managed may present certain challenges.

How are conflicts managed?

As the tensions described in this case study emerge from the strong population pressure and competing land uses; **engaging the public and policy** in the long-term planning and implementation of rewilding is essential to address challenges. This means tailoring the concept of rewilding to the urban context; no classically large and sparsely populated wilderness areas but rather fragmented and highly diverse small spaces with a multifunctional character, and integrating this adapted concept within urban development, design and climate adaptation strategies. Successful interventions depend on **policy support and public acceptance**, which is built through participation and communication, such as offering educational activities and excursion programs to schools and local businesses. The development of **alternative sources of revenue** has been very important in a region undergoing socio-economic changes with the closing down of most of the industry. Examples include promoting cultural institutions like museums, develop tourism activities, leisure and the hospitality industry. A great deal of attention must also be paid to **coordinating**

all the different stakeholders in the Ruhr area to ensure ecological continuity and resilience, with important partnerships including between voluntary conservation organisations, ecological research stations, authorities and businesses. Concrete suggestions which came out of the surveys to improve some user-related aspects of the urban rewilding sites were to offer information in more languages than English and German, to improve and increase various facilities such as parking spaces and benches, and to offer a mix of separated paths for cycling and walking.

What is the future of rewilding in the Rewilding Case?

With climate change increasingly affecting cities, natural spontaneous ecosystem development on former industrial sites can help urban centres in the Ruhrgebiet to adapt to heatwaves, droughts and heavy rainfall events while increasing overall **urban climate resilience**. Considering the combination of industrial nature, brownfield redevelopment and ongoing scientific monitoring and expertise, the Ruhrgebiet has the potential to become an **international case study** to showcase urban rewilding as a means to transform a post-industrial landscape. Overall, respondents to the survey were very positive about their experience of the urban rewilding sites, and continued management of the sites allowing for different levels of wildness seems to be preferred.

Rewilding Case Box No. 3 Balancing flood safety, farming, nature and urban visitors

Gelderse Port, the Netherlands



What is rewilding?

Rewilding in this case study was generally understood as a process of **restoring natural processes and reducing human intervention**, although respondents differed considerably in how they interpreted the concept, and some questioned whether the Gelderse Poort project should be classified as rewilding due to the level and continuity of human management in the landscape. The most common understanding was

that rewilding involves allowing ecosystems to become increasingly self-regulating by giving nature greater autonomy. Respondents described it as “letting nature take its course”, in this case by restoring dynamic river systems, creating space for rivers and allowing for natural processes such as flooding, succession and natural regeneration as well as grazing and browsing to shape the landscape. Rather than managing for predefined conservation targets or individual species, rewilding was often viewed as enabling natural processes to determine ecological outcomes. Rewilding was considered broader than traditional nature restoration, representing a shift away from restoring static landscapes, habitats and species compositions towards facilitating dynamic ecological change. This follows generally the established principles of rewilding found in academic literature. At the same time, respondents stressed that rewilding in the Netherlands differs from the idealised notion of untouched wilderness. The Dutch landscape is densely populated, highly engineered and intensively used, and most argued that rewilding inevitably **requires active human intervention**. In Gelderse Poort, initial active rewilding measures were needed to restore keystone processes – including excavation and soil nutrient removal, hydrological restoration, restoring former river channels and introducing natural grazers and browsers. However, as soon as these initial steps were taken, human intervention has been largely reduced, mostly constrained to herbivore management and periodic removal of sand and clay to maintain water channels. Several respondents preferred to describe the project as **‘cultivated rewilding’** specific to the Dutch context, where it occurs within strict ecological and societal boundaries. In the Gelderse Poort, the partnership with sand excavation industry makes for an unusual collaboration, where permits are acquired for dredging companies, which later return the land to nature organisations for nature restoration purposes. Some respondents feel that this activity does not fall under rewilding, and that the term was used only when communicating the project to the public. Others suggest that spontaneous **nature development** has already been occurring for decades following previous extraction activities and the transition to marsh forest. This precedes the coining and popularisation of the term ‘rewilding’, though the principles are arguably, fundamentally the same.

What is the issue?

Bringing back the natural processes in the Gelderse Poort, such as restoring river channels and introducing keystone species, is generally considered a success for rewilding according to stakeholders and scientists. The case study is recognised as **best practice** showcasing the potential for scaling up rewilding and **pioneering ‘climate-smart rewilding’** in the Netherlands and abroad. The case study, however, reveals also conflicts. These largely arise from the **coexistence of multiple land-use functions and stakeholder interests** within a highly managed landscape. Rather than a single conflict, respondents described a series of interconnected tensions between economic development, ecological restoration, agriculture, water management, recreation and local residents. A central tension concerns balancing nature restoration with **flood safety** and water management. Several respondents highlighted that ecological ambitions cannot compromise other concerns like flood protection, shipping and groundwater management. Allowing rivers greater freedom may improve ecological aspects and biodiversity, but also creates uncertainty around erosion, changing water levels, reed marsh succession and potential impacts on nearby agriculture and infrastructure. Wildlife associated with restored habitats, such as beavers, was also mentioned as creating new challenges for flood defence by burrowing into dikes. **Agricultural interests** represented another source of tension, as the conversion of farmland into nature reserves generated some negative perceptions among respondents about the **loss of traditional and cultural landscapes**. However, many acknowledged that agricultural intensification had degraded the environment and that rewilding has contributed to ecological recovery. Social changes also emerged as an important issue. Increasing tourism, recreation and rising house prices were perceived by some as positive developments, while others feared demographic changes and the **displacement of long-term residents** by newcomers who are attracted by the nature in

the area. The **pressure of recreation** on the natural area, such as dog owners, limited parking spaces and people roaming freely inside the floodplains may also clash with conservation objectives, e.g. relating to groundnesting birds. Several respondents also noted that people often resist visible landscape changes, such as tree removal or untidy-looking vegetation, although this resistance frequently diminished once ecological improvements became visible. Finally, **uncertainty** itself was identified as a challenge, as rewilding outcomes cannot be fully predicted, and ecological succession may not always produce the habitats or species originally anticipated. A caveat is, as described in the section about what rewilding is in this case, that some respondents also do not necessarily consider the project a rewilding project, but rather more similar to a nature development/restoration project that is **marketed as rewilding**.

How are conflicts managed?

The interviews suggest that conflicts surrounding the project are managed primarily through collaboration, adaptive management and efforts to balance competing interests rather than attempting to eliminate disagreement altogether. Respondents generally recognised that rewilding in the Dutch context requires ongoing negotiation between ecological goals and societal needs and demands. **Stakeholder engagement and participation** emerged as one of the most important conflict management strategies. The engagement of stakeholders early on in the restoration plans, and the formation of groups such as 'klankbordgroepen' (advisory or consultative group of people to provide feedback, ideas, or critical perspective), or groups of community representatives, helped to generate a sense of shared ownership and ability to consider different stakes and perspectives in discussions. Although respondents generally supported the principle of minimising interventions, they were generally aligned that some level of active management remains necessary. Examples include maintaining flood safety, using herbivory for managing vegetation succession, removing excess organic material, controlling invasive species and ensuring that ecological restoration remains compatible with shipping, water management and flood safety. Rather than viewing management as contradicting rewilding, many respondents considered it an inevitable feature of restoring nature within a highly regulated landscape. There are some **practical measures**, such as financial compensation for villages affected by the dredging activities, creating new walking paths, improving recreational accessibility and restoring historical landscape features, which were taken to increase public acceptance. It was noted that acceptance grew over time, and initial opposition to interventions such as tree felling or excavation frequently subside when ecological improvements become visible.

What is the future of rewilding in the Rewilding Case?

Overall, respondents expressed **positive and optimistic attitudes towards the future of rewilding** in the Gelderse Poort, recognising the need to balance ecological, climate, social and flood safety goals. Rather than expecting the landscape to become fully wild without humans, interviewees envisioned a system where natural processes play an increasingly important role alongside necessary human management, aligning with rewilding principles. Climate change featured strongly in respondents' expectations for the future. Many viewed the area as a valuable **climate buffer** capable of storing water during periods of drought, reducing flood risks and supporting groundwater replenishing. Ecologically, most respondents anticipated continued habitat development and **increasing biodiversity**. Several highlighted the return of birds, insects and wetland habitats already visible following the restoration activities, though mentioning these changes take time and may continue over many years. Others expected the landscape to become increasingly attractive for recreation through expanded walking routes, birdwatching opportunities and improved accessibility. In general, the future of the rewilding case entails a balance of societal objectives, including climate adaptation, biodiversity restoration, recreation, agriculture and flood safety, combined with a gradual expansion of natural processes related to rewilding ideas.



Rewilding Case Box No. 4 *Strict protection, forest use and historical mistrust*

National Parks High Tatras, Slovakia and Poland



What is rewilding?

Rewilding in the Tatra Mountains, on the Polish and Slovak sides, was perceived through the lens of **strict conservation and enabling natural processes**. The long-term objective of rewilding initiatives is to designate 75% of the Polish National Park as strictly conserved areas, aligning with its existing IUCN Category II status. The concept of rewilding was understood to be inherent in the **historical and current management practices** of the area. Although the term “rewilding” is relatively recent, several of its underlying principles, particularly strict protection and allowing natural processes to operate, have been part of conservation management in the Tatras for many decades. In connection to that, **species protection**, especially of capercaillies, brown bears and chamois, was seen as an integral part of strict protection efforts. The possible **reintroduction** of the European bison has occasionally been discussed as one of several hypothetical rewilding options, particularly on the Slovak side. However, no official reintroduction program currently exists, and the ecological suitability of the Tatra Mountains for a free-ranging bison population remains debated. Rewilding was evidently also connected to the incidence and handling of **natural disturbances** in the area, primarily windstorms and bark beetle infestations. These disturbances were viewed as both a consequence of rewilding and an enabler of it.

What is the issue?

Similarly to other Rewilding Cases, in the Tatras, there are several conflicts related to competing land uses. One obvious issue is **(mass) tourism**, and the still increasing number of tourists visiting this relatively small region every year. The Polish side attracts close to five million tourists each year, matching Yellowstone National Park's figures despite the size gap. In this cross-border area, the increasing number of tourists creates significant challenges for local authorities and park administration because of the need for more tourism infrastructure, such as ski lifts, parking, and accommodation, alongside spa and wellness resorts

already heavily straining groundwater resources. Tourists do not always welcome or understand the seasonal **access limitations** introduced to protect certain species and/or natural processes, which may cause misunderstandings or the breaking of access regulations. The mass-tourism further fuels **the real estate** market, contributing to increasing land prices, and competing with new conservation areas. Conversely, **historical land use** like sheep herding can hinder rewilding efforts, leading to the trade-offs when areas are designated for strict protection. The Tatra region's land and forest ownership is varied, featuring large state-owned sections as well as privately held parcels. **Fragmented land ownership** can hinder integrated rewilding efforts, causing value and interest conflicts. For example, disagreements may arise over managing storm-damaged spruce stands infested with bark beetles. Such disputes are part of a bigger value conflict related to the tension between **active vs. passive management**. Finally, on the Polish side, **historical mistrust** related to the creation of the Tatra National Park in 1955, has been impacting the perception of the National Park and activities undertaken on its territory. Before 1955, a significant portion of the land in the Tatra Mountains was privately owned and used for economic purposes such as shepherding, forestry, and mining. With the establishment of the National Park these areas were taken over by the State Treasury, which was met with resistance from owners and users. The creation of the National Park meant restrictions and often a complete ban on existing forms of economic activity, which led to protests and fears of job and income losses. The way the land was taken over by the state created mistrust and hesitation towards state administration.

How are conflicts managed?

Conflict prevention and management strategies in the Tatra region can be organised into three categories: (1) stakeholder's engagement; (2) compensations and incentives; and (3) zoning.

To resolve current conflicts and avert future misunderstandings, **engaging stakeholders** in the Tatras is a key strategy focused on **building trust** to overcome historical mistrust and the lack of local community involvement. One example of this approach was the active participation of all municipalities within the Polish Tatra National Park area during the creation of the Management Plan for the National Park. Throughout this process, National Park representatives attended municipal council meetings to present and discuss the draft Plan. All municipalities gave their approval to the plan as a result. Another method to incorporate local perspectives involves **local committees and councils**, exemplified by the Scientific Council present at each national park in Poland. Although it is called "scientific," in practice alongside scientists, it includes representatives from local communities such as town mayors and village representatives from the park area. It is also regarded as good practice that the director of a national park consults the Scientific Council before making decisions affecting the local community.

Another commonly used strategy is to offer **incentives and compensation** to local communities. Regarding the incentives, they are more common on the Slovak side of the mountains, as there are many more protected areas on private land. Such incentives might involve payments for safeguarding ecosystem services and biodiversity. On the Polish side, incentives may target private forest owners whose forests lie within protected areas. For example, the incentives could lead private forest owners to manage their forests less actively after disturbances, like retaining deadwood. The incentives should motivate forest owners to allow more space for natural processes, rather than just focusing on wood production. Other types of incentives aim at visitors and tourists to, for example, avoid closed trails, not litter in the park, or choose more distant parking and use public transport. While compensation can be financial (like for wildlife damage), it can also involve infrastructure improvements, new jobs, income diversification, and entrepreneurial support.

Zones and zonation were proposed as strategies to alleviate current tensions and organize future land use. They were described as an effort to create a win-win scenario, combining human activities (including

traditional land use) with biodiversity protection. Nonetheless, zonation was characterized as an activity requiring significant time and effort for both planning and execution. It was also emphasized that zoning can only occur if the stakeholder engagement process is already established and trust exists between the involved stakeholders.

What is the future of rewilding in the Rewilding Case?

The notion of future rewilding in the Tatras was perceived positively. Many stakeholders aimed to enhance cross-border collaboration and research the IUCN standard for category II, which signifies 75% strictly protected areas. It was clear that rewilding's future is tied to the growth of tourism in the regions, so efforts should focus on promoting sustainable tourism through positive incentives and responsible practices. The uncontrolled growth of real estate and tourism infrastructure presents a clear danger, necessitating measures to manage these elements. Governance and politics concerning protected areas on either side of the mountains were identified as key elements for larger rewilding initiatives in Tatras.

3.4 Discussion

In this section, we link the findings of the literature review with the qualitative case study research to explore patterns, overlaps and differences. In the literature review, we found that the stakeholders mentioned most frequently in the context of rewilding conflicts are farmers, hunters, and a reference to the 'local community/population'. Similarly, in our qualitative case study research, farmers (even when combined with other stakeholders under an overarching category of 'landowners') play an important role in discussions about and around rewilding. This reinforces the notion that farming, even amidst substantial ongoing shifts, continues to be a vital livelihood strategy within the examined case studies, and wider, in Europe, and farmers' values, beliefs, and perceptions strongly affect the discussions and uptake of rewilding initiatives in Europe. It also strongly links to the politicisation of rewilding decisions and the political notions of the concept 'rewilding', wherein the mobilisation of specific beliefs, values, or emotions, such as land attachments or traditional land use practices, can serve as a political strategy for garnering support or votes. The representation of hunters in the cases under consideration was less pronounced than that reported in the literature review. It could be posited that the significant representation of hunters within the literature review correlates with an emphasis on conflicts particularly concerning the presence of predators like wolves. Conversely, the case studies' qualitative research underscores a more significant potential conflict between rewilding and forestry than the literature review does. Our interpretation suggests that this is, to some extent, a regional concern. A significant disparity exists between Northern and Eastern Europe, where forestry holds substantial economic value for the respective nations, and Southern and Western Europe, where its economic importance is less prominent. This trend can be compared to the policy development at the EU level, where countries like Poland, Slovakia and Sweden, with a strong interest in forestry, are less interested in policy development related to rewilding. The difference may further be linked to terminology – i.e., in the review, a purposeful decision was made to exclude 'strict protection' from the search algorithm – yet this terminology may be more prominent in many forest rich countries of Europe than rewilding to refer to 'rewilding like' non-intervention strategies. Finally, both the literature review and the qualitative on-the-ground research point to the importance of local

stakeholders and trust-building processes between rewilding implementation bodies and communities living around the affected areas.

Our research suggest that gender was not a major determinant in people's comprehension of, backing for, or involvement with the term rewilding. Although gender was systematically considered by us in selecting interviewees, no significant disparities were observed in the gathered data. The literature review, however, also failed to produce significant findings that would suggest gender plays a role in rewilding conflict development and mitigation strategies, though this was not explicitly explored in many papers. This, however, does not imply that gender would not have any impact on the perception, valuation and support of rewilding initiatives. Our work in Task 1.5 ([D1.4](#)) has indicated some gender related differences in perceptions of nature when surveying the broad population. Hence, it is plausible to assume that gender might also influence and shape rewilding conflicts, at least as a 'background factor'. By qualitatively juxtaposing gender and conflict dimensions in European rewilding efforts, future research can deepen understanding of the rewilding conflicts and related mitigation strategies.

The literature review allowed us to propose the following different dimensions of conflicts, which arise out of rewilding contexts in Europe: **interest, values, knowledge and process-oriented conflicts**. These correspond to some degree with the results obtained from thematically analysing the interviews, as well as complement the categories inductively obtained from the qualitative research. The **interest** dimension, for example, relates to material or tangible stakes, which have been (perceived as) at risk because of rewilding processes. The results from the interviews, focusing mainly on competing land uses, reflect the differences and often clashing interests in what to do with land, and the economic motivations behind these choices. Here, the conflict between the development of green energy and rewilding can be seen as an example, or the developments related to real estate and mass-tourism. Most prominent, however, for economic interests related conflicts may still be the conflict potential between rewilding and the primary sector, and namely agriculture, forestry, and, to some degree, hunting.

Different land use traditions, options and visions do also relate to deeper motivations, based on **values and beliefs** of decision makers and landowners in terms of people's relation with nature, and priorities when it comes to making choices based on economic interest, conserving nature or meeting social needs, often with trade-offs between these goals. The conflicts over land abandonment and rewilding can be seen as an example of this category in our qualitative study. Within each examined case study, we could see that the value attached to land, and the process of attaching value to certain landscapes is more complex than a simplified estimation of economic values. Equalizing value of land for people with economic values overlooks complex relationships between people and landscape and thus may fuel additional conflicts.

The dimensions of **knowledge**, referring to uncertainty and different types of knowledge, and **process**, denoting how rewilding is proposed to be implemented, can also be discussed considering the interview results. Tensions between the state and local communities are frequently based on historic mistrust between



locals and different levels of authority. They have been observed, for instance, in the Tatras case, and are also found in the literature with examples where authorities have not been responsive to concerns from affected communities (Bennet et al. 2022) or top-down governance structures making it difficult for locals to participate in decision making. Our interviews also revealed a strong tension arising from a sense of being systematically excluded from making decisions and/or being marked as 'non-experts'. In our qualitative research, the representatives of local communities have clearly expressed their desire for their knowledge, voice, and perspectives to be recognised as legitimate and equal in rewilding's implementation and management processes.

A key theme in rewilding conflicts is (knowledge) uncertainty, inherent in the open-ended character and outcomes of rewilding which seeks to minimise human control. This comes back in conflicts described in the case studies related to disturbances, where examples such as fire, bark beetle outbreaks, and rewetting/flooding of ecosystems are encouraged as part of bringing back natural processes. However, their exact outcomes are uncertain and can cause controversy and conflict representatives of former land management styles. A pattern visible in both interview and literature results is that the degree of urbanisation may matter. The literature shows (e.g. Pettersson et al., 2021) an often polarising dynamic between urban supporters for rewilding actions and resistance coming from more rural areas, which are faced more directly with the impacts of rewilding efforts. The case study research presents a more nuanced perspective, suggesting that it is incorrect to make assumptions about urban and rural residents based purely on an assumed social gradient. For instance, in the National Parks High Tatras, a more secluded and rural area, one might expect lower economic land values. Yet, the real estate market fueled by mass tourism inflates land costs, causes stakeholder disputes, and hinders support for rewilding efforts. Conversely, in urban regions like Gelderse Poort and the Ruhrgebiet, which typically have high land costs and limited opportunities for rewilding, being close to cities actually increases the recreational appeal of rewilding projects and support for them. However, rewilding projects may foster green gentrification, and thus create tensions between stakeholders. This indicates that each context is highly specific, and although this gradient has been identified by both the literature and case study analysis as important, it is necessary to consider it alongside other factors.

One notable difference between the interview results and the literature review is that the impacts of returning wildlife are highly emphasised in the literature, while most case studies in the report barely mention these effects. This interesting observation can potentially be linked to two factors: first, the interventions in the case studies go beyond the rewilding definition we used in the literature review to encompass place dependent measures that even incorporate "rewilding mitigation" strategies, depending on the perspective (e.g. fuel management in Mediterranean abandoned lands). In addition, only some of the case studies are directly concerned by the return of wildlife. Second, in the literature, we speculate that the great focus on wildlife impacts also relates to the omnipresence of this factor beyond and outside of rewilding projects (e.g. the return of the wolf in large parts of Europe indirectly facilitated by rewilding actions and related to changes in European landscapes, while not being an objective of rewilding projects themselves). This is further complicated by (negative) media framing, historic connotations of rewilding with (re)introducing wildlife, and charismatic wildlife

being used as flagship species and selling points for rewilding inspired economies such as ecotourism. And finally, the decisions taken regarding search terms used in the literature review may also be an influencing factor (as we discuss above).

The key take-aways of the literature review are twofold; 1) there is a focus on reviewing the efficacy of technical and economic interventions to rewilding conflicts related to economic interests, and 2) calls for engaging with stakeholders are seen as essential in any rewilding intervention and associated conflict. The latter aspect highlights a lack of engagement so far, often pointed out as a contributing factor to the conflict in the first place. This seems to go hand in hand with a historically limited engagement of the social sciences with this field, and greater recognition for addressing environmental issues from multiple disciplines more recently. In this way, we point out that there has been a focus on reactive approaches; technical and economic interventions when conflicts are already occurring, whereas proactive conflict responses would be needed to address tensions before conflicts escalate, following along the stakeholder engagement and cognitive intervention types identified in the literature. In the rewilding case studies, both stakeholder engagement (a more proactive response) and compensation strategies (a more reactive response) were identified by our interviewees as good practices in addressing rewilding conflicts. Examples of successful measures and conflict mitigation strategies for rewilding interventions are provided by the qualitative study results. Here, compensation, seen as one of the key mitigation strategies, is presented as a more complex and broader category than merely financial compensation. The investment in the local community through skill-building programs, infrastructure development, and job creation was presented as complementary to financial support. In the same way, good examples of stakeholder engagement underscored trust-building, recognition of stakeholders' beliefs and values, and a long-term approach to the inclusion of the stakeholders in the decision-making process.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The draft of this report was used as a basis for discussions and reflections within the wildE consortium and external stakeholders regarding 1) the conflicts and 2) conflict management strategies in the wildE rewilding cases in 3) view of current EU policies. Using the collected feedback on the results from the policy analysis, literature review, and qualitative research on rewilding conflicts, policies, and mitigation strategies, we draw the below conclusions and derive the following recommendations:

Aligning rewilding with policy and funding

From a policy perspective, there is an increase in the integration of rewilding into policy, but we did not identify any legally binding documents that explicitly consider rewilding. This makes enforceability of the rewilding principles challenging. In addition, there are visible mismatches between forestry and agricultural frameworks on one hand, and relevant EU strategies and the NRR which support rewilding on the other hand, making implementing rewilding difficult at the country and local level. We could also observe that climate change, through related policies and regulations, has some 'potential' to drive a paradigm shift towards rewilding in conservation. This pertains to positioning rewilding within the framework of nature-based solutions. When



assessing the economic potential of rewilding, we identify some potential for advancing the economic attractiveness of rewilding; however, restricted funding options keep its economic potential currently inadequate for potential stakeholder groups interested. The identified resources for future opportunities include carbon/biodiversity credits, eco-tourism, and targeted subsidies. The close monitoring of these instruments in the future will be important for understanding the potential for rewilding in Europe. In this context it is worth mentioning that current rewilding activities in Europe are mostly funded through private sponsorship (see Dunn-Capper et al. 2023). This indicates the potential for philanthropic support for the rewilding and private-state co-funding options.

Importance of proactive stakeholder engagement

Our three lines of empirical evidence (policy analysis, review and own fieldwork) consistently highlight the significance of working in close conjunction with local partners and stakeholders. Though this observation is not novel, our research indicates that a proactive strategy for stakeholder engagement, implemented prior to interventions and potential disputes, can be very helpful. Therefore, our shared perspective is that stakeholder engagement and robust local collaboration are not just conflict-avoidance tactics, but rather essential prerequisites for any rewilding project. Considering the emerging conflicts, collaborating closely with local partners through participatory and knowledge-based governance should be regarded as the primary approach to resolving conflicts. Still, early participation alone will not be sufficient concerning groups that refuse rewilding for economic reasons and/or relate to fundamentally different values, calling for the necessity to combine participation with other policy instruments, including compensation options for losers of land use change decisions.

Role of clear terminology and communication

While working closely with diverse stakeholders, we should pay special attention to the terminology and rewilding vocabulary. In our qualitative research, we observed a politicised understanding of the word rewilding, encompassing both positive and negative sentiments and implications. We also noted considerable variations (and in parts related confusion) about the meaning of the term, which can itself spark reluctance in some cases. Therefore, being precise about what is actually planned, and steering clear of using terms as broad 'marketing phrase' in contested context can help ensure that all stakeholders clearly understand the specific rewilding proposals and that communication remains inclusive. This, in turn, links to careful attention to the knowledge and expertise that is included in designing and implementing rewilding projects. This relates especially to local perspectives and ways of knowing, and true openness to local beliefs and values. Although time-consuming and expensive, knowledge integration processes should be viewed as valuable and suitable components in the context of rewilding.

Understanding of (land) value beyond economic terms

Ultimately, a genuine commitment to local values and practices necessitates substantial investment in comprehending the historical and contextual background of any rewilding initiative. To integrate local values and their bearers into the broader dialogue and planning of rewilding efforts, one must be aware of any tensions, resistance, dispossession, underdevelopment, or historical mistrust that may trigger conflicts. This is connected to the manner in which rewilding projects are proposed and developed, which we have identified

as the process dimension of conflicts in our literature review. According to our research, a big part of this issue links to the notion of land value. Beyond mere economic considerations, grasping the multifaceted aspects of land value entails examining changing land utilisation, instances of land abandonment, intrinsic values, and the reciprocal relationship between humans and the landscape.

Recommendations

1. Despite the growing incorporation of rewilding into policy frameworks, there are **no legally binding** instruments that specifically address rewilding. Rewilding initiatives **can however draw on leverage supportive policies**, including EU strategies and the Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR), as well as (potentially) climate change related policies.
2. Restricted funding options for rewilding require close monitoring of **future funding opportunities** such as carbon/biodiversity credits, eco-tourism, targeted subsidies, philanthropic support and private-state co-funding partnerships.
3. Rewilding conflicts can often be described as conflicts within **the value dimension** (where politicised terms prevent possible pragmatic solutions), **the interest dimension** (related to material or tangible stakes), **the process dimension** (related to how rewilding interventions are proposed and implemented, and who is included or excluded in that process) and conflicts related to **the knowledge dimension** (where conflicts may emerge because some types of knowledge may be privileged over other types, such as decisions strongly driven by scientific knowledge alone). An appropriate integration of science, local and traditional knowledge, and long-term monitoring of rewilding interventions is crucial for the long-term success of rewilding initiatives.
4. Because rewilding is in parts a politicised concept and connected to both positive and negative emotions, there is **a need for careful consideration of the used terminology**. Being specific about what is actually planned, and avoiding the use of general 'marketing phrases', can help ensure that all stakeholders understand the concrete rewilding proposals and that communication is inclusive.
5. The process of designing and proposing rewilding initiatives should start with **understanding 1) the local context and 2) the history of rewilding interventions** in order to recognise any tensions, resistance, dispossession, underdevelopment or (historic) mistrust which may provoke conflicts.
6. Each rewilding initiative should include a proper investigation and **understanding of the complexity of land value**, beyond economic value also including broader societal values relating to the relationship between people and the landscape.
7. **Collaborative engagement** with local stakeholders, employing **participatory and knowledge-driven governance priori to conflicts** and from early stages of a project, is one important strategy for achieving successful interventions and developing effective, proactive strategies for conflict resolution.
8. **Local context** is crucial for understanding how rewilding perceptions **link to negative wildlife impacts**, particularly from **large carnivores**. This focus on large predators overshadows other important and understudied areas of rewilding, as well as persisting the association of rewilding with these large predators where they **may not be the focus of the rewilding intervention** (e.g. increasing connectivity between habitats may facilitate spontaneous natural expansion).

Justification of the deliverable delivery date

The deliverable is delivered as planned.

Additional references for the institutional analysis are available from the corresponding author upon request.

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6. Appendices

Appendix I

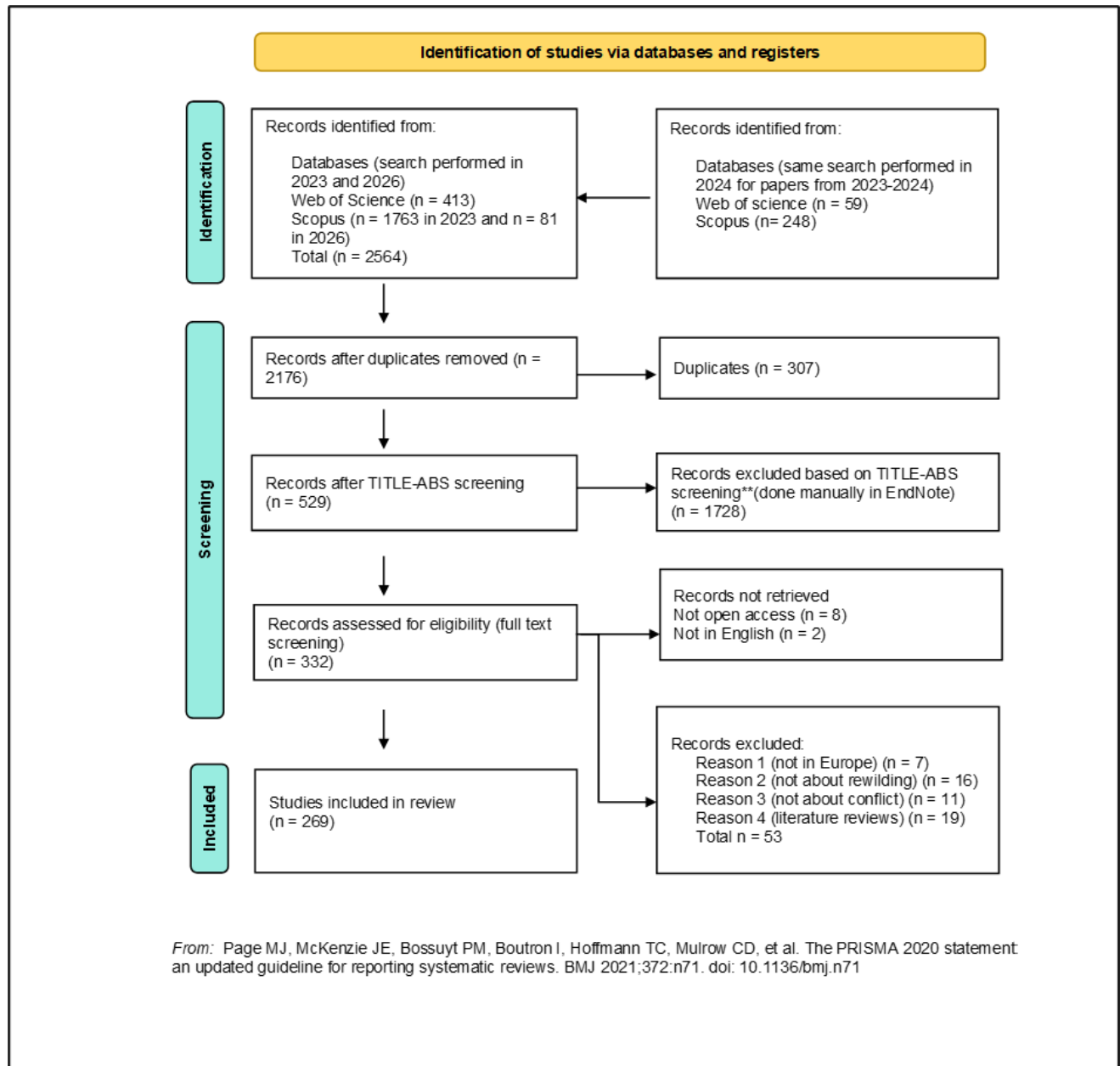
Discussion and questionnaire guide

1. Is there any existing political support, legal frameworks, or economic instruments that can foster rewilding in your country (your RW case)?
2. If not, who can advocate for the adoption?
3. How can scientific research and data be effectively integrated into rewilding processes?
4. If yes, what are the unique social and cultural considerations that should be taken into account in rewilding projects, and how can they be integrated into planning, decision-making and implementation processes?
5. Are existing legal frameworks supporting RW implementation enough or do we need new legal frameworks? In addition, where do you see the role of the new Nature Restoration Law in this topic? Please, share your thoughts with us.
6. What policy measures or legal frameworks can be implemented to facilitate the expansion of rewilding (on a larger scale / cross-border, national level, local level)?
7. How can scientific research and local knowledge collaboration enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of rewilding efforts?
8. What strategies can be employed to foster cooperation between communities and stakeholders?
9. What are the most effective strategies for policymakers and organizations to overcome potential challenges and opposition to rewilding?



Appendix II

PRISMA Diagram 2020 for systematic literature reviews



Appendix III

Search strings used for the systematic literature review in Scopus and Web of Science

Rewilding	("rewild*" OR "wildness" OR "wild W/15 nature" OR "wild W/15 landscape*" OR "reintroduc*" OR "restor* W/15 ecological" OR "restor* W/15 natur*" OR ({non-intervention}) OR (land W/15 abandon*) OR (strict* W/15 protect*))
Stakeholder	("stakeholder*" OR "public*" OR "societ*" OR "household*" OR "farmer*" OR "manager*" OR "tourist*" OR "visitor*" OR "communit*" OR "inhabitant*" OR "social" OR "forester" OR "citizen*" OR "scientist*")
Conflict	("conflict*" OR "dispute*" OR "controvers*" OR "trade-off" OR "complain*" OR "disagreement*" OR "protest*" OR "threat* W/10 human")
Europe	(abkhazia* OR abkhaz OR adriatic OR akrotiri OR åland* OR albania* OR alps OR alpine OR andorra* OR apennine OR italian OR armenia* OR artsakh* OR austria* OR azerbaijan* OR azeri* OR azores OR azorean* OR balkan* OR baltic OR baltoscandia* OR barents OR belarus* OR belgium OR belgian* OR benelux OR "Black Sea" OR bosnia* OR herzevovina OR herzegovinian OR british OR brits OR britons OR bulgaria* OR canary OR canarian* OR canaries OR {Cap of the North} OR nordkalotten OR carpathia* OR {Caspian Sea} OR caucasus OR caucasia* OR celtic OR {Channel Islands} OR {Channel Islander} OR {Channel Islanders} OR croatia* OR croat* OR cyprus OR cypriot* OR czech* OR danubian* OR danube OR denmark OR danes OR danish OR dhekelia OR dinaric OR dinarides OR england OR english OR estonia* OR eu OR europe* OR eurozone OR faroe OR faroese OR fennoscandia* OR finns OR finnish OR finland OR france OR french OR georgia* OR german* OR gibraltar* OR greece OR greek* OR hellenic OR hellenes OR guernsey* OR hebride* OR herzevoginian* OR herzevovina OR hungary OR hungarian* OR magyar* OR iberia* OR iceland* OR ireland OR irish OR {Isle of Man} OR {Isle of Mann} OR manx OR italy OR italian* OR jersey OR jersian OR jërriais OR jutland OR karelia* OR kazakh* OR kosov* OR latvia* OR letts OR lettish OR liechtenstein* OR lithuania* OR {Low Countries} OR {Low Lands} OR luxembourg* OR macaronesia* OR madeira* OR malta OR maltese OR mediterannean* OR moldovan* OR monaco OR monacan* OR monégasque* OR montenegr* OR nordic* OR macedonia* OR cyprus OR cypriot* OR irish OR irelands OR norway OR norwegian* OR pannonian OR poland OR poles OR polish OR portugal OR portuguese OR romania* OR russia* OR {San Marino} OR sammarinese OR sápmi OR sámi OR scandinavia* OR scandinavia* OR schengen OR scots OR scotland OR scottish OR serbs OR serbia OR serbian OR slovak* OR sloven* OR {South Ossetia} OR {South Ossetian} OR {South Ossetians} OR spain OR spanish OR spaniards OR svalbard OR sweden OR swedes OR swedish OR switzerland OR swiss OR netherlands OR dutch OR holland OR {United Kingdom} OR {uk} OR british OR brits OR britons OR {Vatican City} OR vaticanian* OR vaticano OR transnistria* OR pridnestrovian* OR turkiye OR turks OR turkish OR turkey OR ukraine* OR wales OR welsh* OR Apennine* OR Alps OR Pyrenees OR carpathians OR laponia OR {oder delta} OR velebit OR {Thracian mountain*} OR {danube delta} OR {bialowieza forest} OR {rhodope mountains} OR {Swedish Lapland} OR {greater coa valley} OR {affric highlands})

Appendix IV

Interview guideline and Overview of the Interview partners

Interview with the stakeholders

As we informed you via e-mail, this interview is part of the wildE project conducted by a research team from Wageningen University and the Slovak Academy of Sciences. The goal of this research is to 1). map stakeholders' interests and beliefs as they refer to rewilding/restoration/protection/management activities in the Case Study; 2). Map and investigate the conflicts and collaborations around the Case Study.

If you agree, we will record the interview. The data will be used for research purposes only, e.g. for scientific publications, as well as for preparing a scientific report for the project stakeholders. The data will be fully anonymized before the analysis, so no conclusions can be drawn on who has said what.

We also would like to ask for permission to store your name and email address. Your permission is required by the GDPR rule on the protection of personal data. This data will be treated as strictly confidential following the Wageningen University privacy policy and regulations.

Questions

1. Could you elaborate shortly on the development of the Case Study area? [*Land use history and current project transitions*]
2. How would you define and describe the activities that are happening in the Case Study? [In case of difficulties with understanding the question, ask about protection, active management, and rewilding mix? Ask for examples and explanations]
Optional: Would you describe it as rewilding? Why/Why not?
3. What is your link to or interest in the Case Study?
4. Do you feel that your interests/expectations are represented in the planning/management of the Case study?
 - a. If yes, how?
 - b. If no, what could be changed to ensure that your interests/expectations are represented?
 - c. In general, do you think that the interests of all stakeholders in the Case Study are equally represented in the planning/management of the Case Study?
5. Who are the key stakeholders involved in the Case Studies?
 - a. What are the main interests and values of the involved stakeholders?
 - b. What motivates stakeholders to be involved in the Case Study?
 - c. How are they involved in the Case Study?
 - d. How do the stakeholders relate to one another?
6. Who are the stakeholders affected by the Case Study? [*We mean here not only classical stakeholders but also e.g., local citizens of a village, recreationists*]
7. Who are the key national stakeholders influencing (*positively/negatively, directly/indirectly*) activities in your Case Study? [*Ask about interventions from other policy levels once the main stakeholders have been described and no national or EU stakeholders are mentioned*]
8. Do you see any conflicting interests (e.g. economic, political) or values (conservation vs. management) between actors in the Case Study?

- i. Who is responsible for solving these conflicts?
 - ii. What would be needed to solve these conflicts and/or better align conflicting interests/values?
 - iii. What immediate actions could be taken to support conflict resolution?
9. Do you think there are 'winners' and 'losers' related to the Case Study?
 - a. Who are they and how do they 'win' or 'lose'?
10. What other challenges/opportunities do you see that hinder/support the development of the Case Study?
 - a. Optional – Do you see any sociocultural, political, environmental, or economic challenges/opportunities?
11. Are you aware of support for rewilding in your country?
 - a. Are there some unwritten norms (e.g. societal rules or cultural heritage) that affect the management of the Case Study?
 - b. What kind of economic instruments are implemented, if any?
 - c. What kind of existing political support, legal norms, and strategic documents exist? (international, national, regional)
 - d. Are there already ongoing or implemented projects? If yes, please specify.
 - e. Is there discussion and/or recognition of rewilding in your country?
 - f. Has something changed recently?
12. Anything else that you think is important that we haven't discussed yet?

Overview of the interview partners

Case Study	Interview Partner
Antarr	Case Lead/Researcher
Antarr	Representative of business
Baixo Sabor	Researcher
Baixo Sabor	Nature Conservation Body
Baixo Sabor	NGO
Barcelona	Case Lead/Researcher
Barcelona	Fire Prevention Unit
Barcelona	Member of local administration
Barcelona	Rural development
Barcelona	Environment/NGO
Barcelona	Firefighter
Barcelona	Forest owners
Barcelona	Forest owners
Barcelona	Environment/NGO
Barcelona	Hunters/Forestry
Coillte	Case Lead/Researcher
Coillte	Environmental Advisor

Coillte	NGO
Coillte	NGO
Gelderse Poort	Case Lead/Researcher
Gelderse Poort	Member of local administration
Gelderse Poort	Forester
Gelderse Poort	Farmer/Member of local organisation
Gelderse Poort	Community Leader
Gelderse Poort	Member of local administration
Ruhrgebiet	Case Lead/Nature Conservation Body/Researcher
Ruhrgebiet	Regional Association
Ruhrgebiet	Hunting Association
Ruhrgebiet	Researcher/Nature Conservation Body/Researcher
Sveaskog	Case Lead/Researcher
Sveaskog	Member of local administration/Local organisation
Sveaskog	Member of local administration/Researcher
Tatras	Journalist
Tatras	Nature Conservation Body/Member of local community
Tatras	Researcher/Scientific Board of the Nature Conservation Body
Tatras	Member of local community
Tatras	Env NGO
Tatras	Activist, Politician
Tatras	Env NGO
Tatras	NGO

Appendix V

The scenario of the group activity during the Stakeholders Workshop

Activity adapted from “SINCERE First Multi-Actor Group Meeting Support material” by Irina Prokofieva, Bart Muys, Constanza Parra and Nathalie Pipart, Georg Winkel and Sarah Adams based on: Chevalier J.M., Buckles D. J. (2013) *Handbook for participatory action research, planning and evaluation*, SAS2 Dialogue, Ottawa.

1. Purpose:

- Participatory assessment of the perceived purpose and role of the Case Study and its management and potential mismatches between the interests and values of the stakeholders
- Mapping the perceived challenges and opportunities as indicated by stakeholders concerning their interests in the Case Study

2. Participatory Scenario:

Aim: participatory scenarios will be used to construct a possible scenario regarding the broad future of the Case Study area. If the stakeholders are a larger group, e.g. 25, this could also be done in two groups – two different scenarios.

2.1. A proposal on how to do a scenario exercise:

Two different exercises are to be done in parallel, by splitting the group into 2 sub-groups (if more than 25 participants, then in total 4 sub-groups):

- *Group 1: "Ideal scenario"*

Purpose: Identify an ideal scenario regarding the future of the Case Study area and its management in the next 5 to 10 years. Think about the (1) interplay of administrative bodies at local/regional/national levels; (2) policies/legislation at the international/national/regional level; (3) stakeholders' expectations and interests and relations between them; (4) institutional capacities and resources; (5) Decision-making processes and (6) outcomes for the ecosystem. Use your practical knowledge of the area and past experiences and accomplishments.

- *Group 2: "Sabotage"*

Purpose: Identify potential challenges, doubts, fears, past failures, risks and other barriers to the future of the Case Study and its management during the next 5-10 years. Think about the (1) interplay of administrative bodies at local/regional/national levels; (2) policies/legislation at the international/national/regional level; (3) stakeholders' expectations and interests and relations between them; (4) institutional capacities and resources; (5) Decision-making processes and (6) outcomes for the ecosystem.

Settings and instructions for participants:

- Clearly define the focus: area, which period, etc for group A and group B
- Ask each group to select a spokesperson and a note-taker

Organization of the exercise:

FIRST ROUND

Group 1: "Ideal scenario"

The group prepares an ideal scenario regarding the future of the Case Study area and its management in the next 5 to 10 years while taking into consideration the Case Study's purpose and goal. The group thinks about the (1) interplay of administrative bodies at local/regional/national levels; (2) policies/legislation at the international/national/regional level; (3) stakeholders' expectations and interests and relations between them; (4) institutional capacities and resources; (5) Decision-making processes and (6) outcomes for the ecosystem. The group uses practical knowledge of the area and past experiences and accomplishments.

Projection of the situation and changes → describe the situation and report each positive change on a card.

- Factors of change: discuss the factors that will allow these positive changes.

Group 2: "Sabotage"

Each participant of this group thinks of one or two things/consequences that could happen or one or two things that they or others could do to make sure that the Case Study with its purpose and its management fail completely. The group thinks about the (1) interplay of administrative bodies at local/regional/national levels; (2) policies/legislation at the international/national/regional level; (3) stakeholders' expectations and interests and relations between them; (4) institutional capacities and resources; (5) Decision-making processes and (6) outcomes for the ecosystem. The group uses practical knowledge of the area and past experiences and



accomplishments. Each participant records each sabotage idea on a separate card. Then everyone shares them and the group organises them into categories.

SECOND ROUND (OPTIONAL)

Two or more members of each group/ half the group (depending on the number of participants) visit the other group. Each group explain their results to the “outsiders”. They discuss them.

Then all members come back to their groups and get extra time to discuss and/or make modifications to their scenario based on the insights they got from the opposite scenario.

THIRD ROUND

Plenary session: each group presents their scenario to all participants, and discussion on the challenges/sabotage ideas identified in the exercise, including possibilities or strategies for adaptation or mitigation.

DOCUMENTATION OF THE GROUP ACTIVITY OUTCOMES

The workshop organisers are asked to fill the below table based on notes prepared by each group and their own observations/additions (if required).

Group activity during the Stakeholders Workshop Date: Place: Case Study: Organiser of the workshop (contact person):	
Group 1: “Ideal scenario” Participants:	<i>Ideal scenario regarding the future of the Case Study and its management in the next 5 to 10 years while taking into consideration the Case Study's purpose and goal.</i> <i>The group thinks about:</i> (1) <i>interplay of administrative bodies at local/regional/national levels</i> (2) <i>policies/legislation at the international/national/regional level</i> (3) <i>stakeholders’ expectations and interests and relations between them</i> (4) <i>institutional capacities and resources</i> (5) <i>decision-making processes</i> (6) <i>outcomes for the ecosystem</i> <i>Use practical knowledge of the area and past experiences and accomplishments.</i> <i>Describe the ideal situation. Does it require changes? If so report each positive change on a card. Factors of change: Discuss and note down the factors that will allow these positive changes and/or the ideal scenario to happen.</i> <u>Note taker: Summarize the ideal scenario, positive changes and factors of positive change below.</u>

Group 2: “Sabotage” Participants:	<i>Each participant thinks of one or two things/consequences that could happen or one or two things that they or others could do to make sure that the Case Study with its purpose and its management <u>fail completely</u>.</i> <i>The group thinks about:</i> <i>(1) interplay of administrative bodies at local/regional/national levels</i> <i>(2) policies/legislation at the international/national/regional level</i> <i>(3) stakeholders’ expectations and interests and relations between them</i> <i>(4) institutional capacities and resources</i> <i>(5) decision-making processes</i> <i>(6) outcomes for the ecosystem</i> <i>Use practical knowledge of the area and past experiences and accomplishments.</i> <i>Each participant records each sabotage idea on a separate card. Then everyone shares them and the group organises them into categories.</i> <u>Note taker: Summarize the sabotage ideas and their categories below.</u>
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Project Partners



LUNDS UNIVERSITET



MARTIN-LUTHER-UNIVERSITÄT
HALLE-WITTENBERG



wildE is a project researching climate-smart rewilding as a solution to the twin threats of climate change and biodiversity loss.

wildE will test climate-smart rewilding at eight carefully selected sites across Europe. Nature will be allowed to take care of itself, naturally repairing damaged ecosystems and restoring landscapes.

wildE will develop, assess and enhance each approach taken with a broad range of stakeholders to ensure they are economically viable and support both nature and people.



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