

Norway: River and Wetland Restoration receives increased attention

Anders Iversen anders.iversen@miljodir.no
Norwegian Environment Agency.

River and wetland restoration is receiving increased attention in Norway. In 2015 the Government decided to formalize a National Project Group on restoration, organized under the National Committee of Agencies for implementation of the Water Framework Directive. Participants in the group include four national Agencies, as well as selected representatives from local Municipalities, and regional Authorities. The tasks of the project group are:

- Promote increased restoration activity in Norway.
- Secure sufficient coordination (planning, financing and execution) of restoration activities across agencies.
- Facilitate exchange of knowledge, experiences and good examples on restoration, when possible in synergy with European research activities and networks on restoration like the ECRR.

During 2016 the National Project Group has established closer relations with ongoing restoration research at the Norwegian Institute for Water Research (NIVA) and the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research (NINA), and initiated the development of a work plan and annual plan for the Project Group itself.

National seminars and conferences in 2016

The National Project Group has assumed the responsibility for organizing the annual Norwegian National Seminars on River and Wetland Restoration. The annual seminars had been a voluntary initiative since 2010. This year, the seminar was held in the city of Trondheim on August 30th and 31st, and gathered more than 90 participants with a special interest in restoration, including water managers at all levels, agencies, municipalities, researchers and consultants. The first day included international keynote speakers from Örebro municipality in Sweden and the UK Environment Agency. Several Norwegian experiences on restoration were presented, including urban and natural rivers as well as wetlands. The Norwegian Institute for Nature Research (NINA) presented their work on collection of experiences to improve ecological restoration in Norway. The second day of the seminar



was devoted to three field visits: a restored urban creek, a restored riparian shoreline, and finally a natural river that had been relocated as part of work to stabilize a valley to avoid landslides during flooding. All presentations are available at the following link: <http://vannforeningen.no/foredrag/2016-30-31-8-restaurering-av-vassdrag-og-vatmarker/>

The other significant event was the National Water Environment Conference in November, a wider conference with 300 participants, covering all aspects of water management. During this conference, a half day parallel session on restoration of rivers and wetlands was arranged, aiming at reaching and inspiring a wider audience than the august seminar. The session included short presentations from Norway and Sweden on restoration of habitats for different species of river mussels, restoration of wetlands to improve habitat for birds, removal of fish migration barriers, and restoration of riparian vegetation. All presentations are available at the follow link (scroll to parallel session D): <http://www.vannportalen.no/kalender/gjennomforte-moter/nasjonale-vannkonferanser/nasjonal-vannmiljokonferanse-2016/parallele-sesjoner/>

The work ahead

The Norwegian Government has approved a national Action Plan for Biodiversity, including adoption of the Aichi target of restoring 15 % of degraded nature. A national initiative for restoration of wetlands has been established. The aim is threefold: to reduce CO2 emissions and store carbon, improve natural water retention, and to restore the ecological status. The national budget for this was about 1,5 million EURO in 2016, and is expected to increase to approximately 3,0 million EURO in 2017. Around 30 pilot projects are under way, with more than half of them already in the execution phase and the rest undergoing planning, and an action plan for 2017-2019 is being developed.

The implementation of the Water Framework Directive has been a driver for river restoration in Norway. River Basin Management Plans and Programmes of Measures for all of Norway's 11 River Basin Districts were completed by the end of 2015, and approved by the Government by summer 2016.

The present implementation phase includes a scheme where municipalities and other stakeholders can submit applications for government co-funding of measures, including restoration. The national budget for this was about 1,0 million EURO in 2016, and is expected to increase to approximately 4,0 million EURO in 2017.

There is an increasing understanding of the win-win potential of ecological restoration combined with climate adaptation through natural water retention measures to reduce flood and storm water risks, and also the possibilities of carbon storage in wetlands. In urban river restoration, the importance of blue-green areas for quality of life in the cities is also being increasingly valued.



Contacts at Norwegian Environment Agency:

- Sara Brækhus Zambon (sara.braekhus.zambon@miljodir.no) National Project Group on River and Wetland restoration.
- Vibeke Husby (vibeke.husby@miljodir.no) Wetland Restoration Initiative.
- Anders Iversen (anders.iversen@miljodir.no) International restoration contact.

All pictures Norwegian River Restoration Seminar 2016.

© Anders Iversen Norwegian Environment Agency.